A ROMANCE IN TRANSIT

FRANCIS LYNDE

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Author: Francis Lynde

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A ROMANCE IN TRANSIT

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

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To the small person who unconsciously
provided the *motif* herein wrought upon,
this transitory tale is affectionately attributed
by THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS

A ROMANCE IN TRANSIT

I

P. P. C. ARIADNE

Train Number Three, the "Flying Kestrel," vestibuled, had crossed the yellow Rubicon of the West and was mounting toward the Occident up the gentle acclivities of the Great Plain. The morning was perfect, as early autumn mornings are wont to be in the trans-Missouri region; the train was on time; and the through passengers in the Pullman sleeping-car "Ariadne" had settled themselves, each according to his gifts, to enjoy or endure the day-long run.

There was a sun-browned ranchman in lower eleven, homeward bound from the Chicago stockyards; a pair of school-teachers, finishing their vacation journey, in ten; a Mormon elder, smug in ready-made black and narrow-brimmed hat, *vis-à-vis* in lower five with two hundred pounds of good-natured, comfort-loving Catholic priesthood in lower six. Two removes from the elder, a Denver banker lounged corner-wise in his section, oblivious to everything save the figures in the financial column of the morning paper; and diagonally across from the banker were the inevitable newly married ones, advertising themselves as such with all the unconscious *naïveté* of their kind.

Burton and his wife had lower three. They were homing from the passenger agents' meeting in Chicago; and having gone breakfastless at the Missouri River terminal by reason of a belated train, were waiting for the porter to serve them with eggs and coffee from the buffet. The narrow table was between them, and Burton, who was an exact man with an eye to symmetrical detail, raised the spring clips and carefully smoothed the wrinkles out of the table-cloth as he talked. A private car had been attached to the train at the Missouri River, and its freightage was of moment to the couple in section three.

"Are you sure it's the President?" asked the wife, leaning back to give the cloth-laying a fair field. "I thought the Naught-fifty was General Manager Cadogan's car."

"So it is; but President Vennor always borrows it for his annual inspection trip. And I'm quite sure, because I saw Miss Vennor on the platform when the car was coupled on."

"Then we'll get home just in time to go on dress-parade," said the little lady, flippantly. "Colorado and Utah Division, fall in! 'Shun, company! Eyes right! The President is upon you!" and she went through a minimized manual of arms with the table-knife.

The general agent frowned and stroked his beard. "Your anarchistic leanings will get us into trouble some time, Emily. Mr. Vennor is not a man to be trifled with, and you mustn't forget that he is the President of the Colorado and Utah Railway Company, whose bread you eat."

"Whose bread I should like to eat, if that slow-poke in the buffet would ever bring it," retorted the wife. "And it is you who forget. You are a man, and Mr. Vennor is a man; these are the primal facts, and the business relation is merely incidental. He doesn't think any more of you for standing in awe of him."

"I don't stand in awe of him," Burton began; but the opportune arrival of the buffet porter with the breakfast saved him the trouble of elaborating his defence.

Half way through the frugal meal the swing-door of the farther vestibule gave back, and a young man came down the aisle with the sure step of an accustomed traveller. He stopped to chat a moment with the school-teachers, and the ranchman in section eleven, looking him over with an appreciative eye, pronounced him a "man's man," and the terse epithet fitted. He was a vigorous young fellow, clean-limbed and well put together, and good-looking enough to tolerate mirrors in their proper places. While he chatted with the two young women, he pushed his hat back with a quick gesture which was an index to his character. Open-hearted frankness looked out of the brown eyes, and healthy optimism gave an upward tilt to the curling mustache. A young man with a record clean enough to permit him to look an accusative world in the face without abashment, one would say.

When he reached the breakfasting pair in three, he stopped again and held out a hand to each.

"Well, well; you two!" he said. "I didn't see you when I went forward. Where did you get on?"

"At the river," replied Mrs. Burton, making room for him in the seat beside her. "Won't you sit down and break bread with us? literally, you know; there isn't anything else to break unless you'll wait for the shell of an egg that is not yet cooked."

"No, thank you; I had my breakfast a good two hours ago. Where have you been? and where are you going?"

"We have been at the passenger meeting in Chicago, and we are on the way home," said the general agent.

"Yes, running a race with the President," cut in Mrs. Burton. "John is dreadfully afraid we sha'n't get to Salt Lake in time to be keel-hauled with the rest of the force."

The young man sat back on the arm of the opposite seat with the light of inquiry in his eyes. "What President?" he asked.

"Vennor, of our company. Didn't you know he was in the Naught-fifty?" said Burton.

"No. They coupled it on just as we were leaving the river, and I thought—I took it for granted that our General Manager was aboard. It's Mr. Cadogan's car."

"I know; but President Vennor always borrows it for his annual trip."

"Are you sure? Have you seen him?"

"Quite sure. I saw Miss Vennor on the platform with some other young people whom I don't know. It's Mr. Vennor's party."

The young man pushed his hat back, and the look of frankness became introspective. "Do you know the Vennors? personally, I mean."

The little lady made answer:

"Yes. We met them at Manitou last summer. Do you know them?"

The young man seemed unaccountably embarrassed. "I—I've met Miss Gertrude—that was last summer, too," he stammered. "Did you—did you like her, Mrs. Burton?"

"Very much, indeed; she is as sweet and lovable as her father is odious. *Do* have a cup of coffee, won't you?"

"No, thank you. Then you didn't admire the President?"

"Indeed I didn't; no one could. He is one of the cool, contemptuous kind of people; always looking you over as if he had half a mind to buy you. He was

barely civil to me, and he was positively rude to John."

"Oh, no; not quite that, Emily," amended the husband. "I'm only one of a good many employees to him."

"Draws the money-line sharp and clear, does he?" said the young man, who appeared to be more deeply interested than a merely casual topic would account for.

The little lady nodded vigorously. "That's it, exactly. You can fairly hear the double eagles clink when he speaks."

The general agent deprecated disloyalty, and was fain to change the subject.

"What are you doing so far away from your territory, Fred?" he asked.

"I'm in charge of the party of old people and invalids in the Tadmor. They'd a mind to be 'personally conducted,' and they threaten to take me all the way across to the Coast."

"Good!" exclaimed the small person. "Then you can stop over and visit us in Salt Lake."

The passenger agent shook his head. "I sha'n't get that far. I must break away at Denver, by all means."

"Would nothing tempt you to go on?"

"I'm afraid not; that is—I—er—" the young man's embarrassment suddenly returned, and he stopped helplessly.

Mrs. Burton's curiosity was instantly on the alert. "Then there *is* something? Do tell me what it is," she pleaded.

"It's nothing; in fact, it's much less than nothing. I hesitated because I—because your way of putting it is very—that is, it covers a great deal of ground," he stammered.

"Don't make him quibble any more than he has to," said Burton, with mock severity. "You see it's quite impossible for him to tell the truth."

The young man laughed good-naturedly. "That's the fact. I've been in the passenger service so long that I can't always be sure of recognizing the verities when I meet them. But to get back to the original sheep; I mustn't go on—not

beyond Denver. It would have been better for all concerned if I had cut it short at the river."

"For all concerned? for yourself and the invalids, you mean?" queried the curious one.

"Yes, and perhaps for some others. But speaking of the invalids, I'll have to be getting back to them; they'll think I've deserted them. I'll be in again later in the day."

Mrs. Burton waited until the swing-door of the vestibule had winged itself to rest behind him. Then she arched her eyebrows at her husband and said, "I wonder if Fred isn't the least little bit *épris* with Gertrude Vennor?"

To which the general agent replied, with proper masculine contumely, "I believe you would infer a whole railroad from a single cross-tie. Of course he isn't. Brockway is a good fellow, and a rising young man, but he knows his place."

None the less it was the arrow of the woman's intuition, and not that of the man's reason, that pierced the truth. In the vestibule the passenger agent suddenly changed his mind about rejoining his party in the Tadmor, turning aside into the deserted smoking-room of the Ariadne to burn a reflective cigar, and to piece out reminiscence with present fact.

Notwithstanding his expressed reluctance, he had intended going on to the Pacific Coast with the party in the Tadmor; had, in effect, more than half promised so to do. It was the time of year when he could best be spared from his district; and the members of the party had made a point of it. But the knowledge that Miss Gertrude Vennor was a passenger on the train opened up a new field wherein prudence and reawakened passion fought for the mastery, to the utter disregarding of the mere business point of view.

They had met in Colorado the previous summer—the passenger agent and the President's daughter—and Brockway had lost his heart to the sweet-faced young woman from the farther East before he had so much as learned her name. He was convoying a train-load of school-teachers across the continent; and then, as now, she was a member of a party in her father's private car. Their meeting was at Silver Plume, where she had become separated from her father's party, and had boarded the excursion train, mistaking it for the regular which was to follow Brockway's special as second section. The obvious thing for Brockway to have done was to put her off at Georgetown, where the following section would have

picked her up in a few minutes. But he did no such unselfish thing. Before the excursion train had doubled the final curve of the Loop he was ready to purchase her continued presence at a price.

This he accomplished by omitting to mention the obvious expedient. Leaving a message with the Georgetown operator, notifying the President that his daughter was on the excursion train, Brockway went on his way rejoicing; and, by a judicious conspiracy with his own conductor and engineer, managed to keep the special well ahead of the regular all the way to Denver.

That was the beginning of it, and fate, kindly or unkindly, had added yet other meetings; at Manitou, at Leadville, and again at Salt Lake City, where the President's daughter had voluntarily joined Brockway's sight-seeing party on the strength of an acquaintance with two of the Boston school-mistresses. The temporary chaperons were kind, and the friendship had burgeoned into something quite like intimacy before the "Mormon day" was overpast. But there it had ended. Since that day he had neither seen her nor heard from her; and when he had come to look the matter squarely in the face in the light of sober afterthought, he was minded to put his infatuation under foot, and to try honestly to be glad that their lives had gone apart. For he had learned that Mr. Francis Vennor was a multi-millionnaire, and that his daughter was an heiress in her own right; and no poor gentleman was ever more fiercely jealous of his poverty rights than was this shrewd young soldier in the unnumbered army of the dispossessed.

But the intervention of half a continent of space is one thing, and that of a mere car-length is another. Now that he had to walk but the length of the Tadmor to be with her again, the eager passion which he had fondly believed to be safely dead and buried rose up in its might and threatened to put poverty-pride, and all other calmly considered springs of action to the sword; did presently run them through, for when Brockway left the smoking-room of the Ariadne and crossed the jarring platforms to the door of the Tadmor, he was flogging his wits to devise some pretext which would excuse an invasion of the private car.

II

THE "PERSONALLY CONDUCTED"

In view of the certain proximity of Miss Gertrude Vennor, Brockway wanted nothing so much as a quiet opportunity to think his mind clear in the matter of his love-affair, but time and place were both denied him. Lying in wait for him at the very door of the Tadmor was a thin old gentleman, with hock-bottle shoulders and penthoused eyes. His voice was high-pitched and rasping; and his speech was petulance grown old and unreasoning.

"Mr. ah—Brockway, I protest! Do you consider it fair to us, your patrons, to absent yourself for the ah—better part of the morning? Here I've been waiting for you more than an hour, sir, and——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jordan; I'm sorry," Brockway cut in. "What can I do for you?"

"You can attend to your ah—business a little closer, for one thing, Mr. ah—Brockway," quavered the aggrieved one, taking a yard-long coupon ticket from his breast-pocket; "and for another, you can give me the sixty days going limit on this ticket that I ah—stipulated for when I bought it, sir."

Brockway glanced at the ticket and called attention to the conditions in the contract. "The going limit of thirty days is plainly stated here, Mr. Jordan. Didn't you read the contract before signing it?"

"Don't make any difference, sir; I ah—stipulated for sixty days, and I require you to make the stipulation ah—good, sir."

"But, my dear sir, I can't. No representative of any one of the lines interested is authorized to change these conditions."

"Very well, sir; v-e-r-y well." The irascible one folded the ticket with tremulous fingers and sought to replace it in his pocket-book. "I shall know what road to ah—patronize next time, and it won't be yours, Mr. ah—Brockway; you may depend upon that, sir."

The passenger agent's forte was placability. "Don't worry about your ticket, Mr.

Jordan," he said. "We'll take good care of you, and if you should happen to be more than thirty days in reaching Los Angeles——"

"Thirty days!" gasped the objector. "Great ah—heavens, sir, you told us you could put us there in ah—four days and a half!"

"So I did, and so we shall, barring the stop-overs the party may wish to make; but in that case I don't see why you should require a sixty-day limit," said Brockway, with an affable smile.

By this time quite a little group had gathered around them, and anxious queries began to beat thick and fast upon Brockway's ears.

"What's that about our tickets?"

"Thirty days, did you say?"

"Can't have stop-overs?"

Brockway got upon his feet. "One moment, if you please," he protested. "There is nothing wrong—nothing different. Mr. Jordan and I were merely discussing the question of an extra limit on his own ticket; that was all."

"Oh."

"Ah."

"Where do we get dinner?"

"What time do we reach Denver?"

"Is there a dining-car on this train?"

Brockway answered the inquiries in sequence, and when the norm of quiet was restored, a soft-spoken little gentleman in a grass-cloth duster and a velvet skull-cap drew him away to the smoking-compartment.

"Let's go and smoke," he said; and Brockway went willingly, inasmuch as the little gentleman with the womanish face and the ready cigar-case was the only person in the party who seemed to be capable of travelling without a guardian.

"Worry the life out of you, don't they, my boy," said the comforter, when his cigar was alight.

"Oh, no; I'm well used to it."

"I presume you are, in a way. Still, some of the complaints are so ridiculous. I suppose you've heard the latest?"

"Nothing later than Mr. Jordan's demand for sixty days in which to complete a week's journey."

"Oh, it isn't that; that's an individual grievance. The other involves the entire party. Of course, you are aware that the Tadmor is no longer the rear car in the train?"

"Oh, Lord! are they going to fight about that?"

"Unquestionably. Didn't you promise some of them that this particular chariot should be at the tail-end of the trans-continental procession?"

"No. It was merely an answer to a question. I said that extra cars were usually put on behind. Are they going to demand it as a right?"

"Yes; I believe the deputation is waiting for you now."

"Heavens—what a lot of cranks!" said Brockway, despairingly. "The thing can't be done, but I may as well go and fight it out."

The deputation was in section six, and one of the committee rose and gave him a seat.

"There is a little matter we should like to have adjusted," began the courteous one; but Brockway interrupted.

"Mr. Somers was just telling me about it. I hope you are not going to insist——"

There were two elderly ladies on the committee, and they protested as one person.

"Now, Mr. Brockway! You know we made it a positive condition—so we could go out on the platform and see the scenery."

"But, my dear madam, let me explain——"

"There is nothing to explain; it was an explicit promise, and we insist on its fulfilment."

"Just one word," Brockway pleaded. "The car behind us is our General Manager's private car, lent to President Vennor, of the Colorado and Utah. If we should put it ahead of this, Mr. Vennor's party would be continually disturbed by the passengers and train-men going back and forth. Don't you see——"

The fourth member of the deputation put in his word at this.

"How long has it been since the railway companies began to put the convenience of their guests before the rights of their patrons, Mr. Brockway? Answer me that, if you please."

"I should like to know!" declared one of the ladies. "*We* have paid for our accommodations."

The courteous one summed up the matter in set phrase.

"It's no use, Mr. Brockway, as you see. If you don't carry out your part of the agreement, I'm afraid we shall have to telegraph to your superiors."

For a moment Brockway was tempted to answer four fools according to their folly. Then he bethought him that he had but now been seeking a pretext which would open the door of the private car. Here was a makeshift; a poor one, to be sure, but better than none. Wherefore, instead of quarrelling with the deputation, he rose with placatory phrases in his mouth.

"Very well; I'll see what can be done. But you must give me a little time; the scenery—" pointing to the monotonous landscape circling slowly with the onward sweep of the train—"is not exactly of the rear-platform variety yet."

After which he retreated to the rear vestibule of the Tadmor and stood looking out through the glass panel in the door at the hamper-laden front platform of the Naught-fifty, trying to muster courage to take the chilling plunge. For he knew that the year agone episode was not altogether pleasing to the father of Miss Gertrude Vennor.

III

THE PRIVATE CAR

"Yes, sah; mighty sorry, sah; but we cayn't cook you-all's dinner, no-how, sah. Wateh-pipe's done bu'sted in de range."

President Vennor turned and regarded the big-bodied cook of the Naught-fifty with the eye-sweep of appraisal which Mrs. Burton had found so annoying.

"No dinner, you say? That's bad. Why did you burst the pipe?"

"I—I didn't bu'sted it, sah; hit des bu'sted hitse'f—'deed it did, sah!"

"Well, can't you serve us a cold lunch?"

"Might do dat—yes, sah; ef dat'll do."

"What is that, papa; no luncheon to-day?" asked a young woman, coming down the compartment to stand beside the President's chair.

There was a family resemblance, but in the daughter the magic of femineity had softened the severer characteristics until they became winsome and good to look upon. The cool gray eyes of the father were Gertrude's inheritance, also; but in the eyes of the daughter the calculating stare became the steady gaze of clean-hearted guilelessness; and in her even-tinted complexion there was only a suggestion of the sallow olive of the father's clean-shaven face. For face and figure, Gertrude owed much to birth and breeding, and it was small wonder that Frederick Brockway had lost his heart to her in time-honored and romantic fashion.

The President answered his daughter's query without taking his eyes from the big-bodied cook.

"No; there is something the matter with the range. Ask the others if they would prefer a cold luncheon in the car to the *table d'hôte* at the dinner station."

Gertrude went to the other end of the compartment and stated the case to Mrs. Dunham, the chaperon of the party; to Priscilla and Hannah Beaswicke, two

young women of the Annex; to Chester Fleetwell, A.B., Harvard, by the skin of his teeth, but the ablest oarsman of his class by a very safe majority; and to Mr. Harold Quatremain, the President's secretary.

The dinner station carried it unanimously, and Gertrude announced the vote.

"We're all agreed upon the *table d'hôte*," she said; and the Falstaffian negro shook himself free and backed into the vestibule. "What is its name? and when do we arrive?"

"I'll have to inquire," Mr. Vennor replied. "I'll go forward and have the conductor wire ahead for a separate table."

But Gertrude said: "Please don't; let's go with the crowd for once. I'm so tired of being always specialized."

The President's smile was suggestive of the metallic smirk on the face of a George-the-Fourth penny. "Just as you please," he rejoined; "but I'll go and find out when and where."

Now it chanced that at this precise moment Brockway had laid his hand on the Tadmor's door-knob preparatory to taking the plunge; and when he opened the door he found himself face to face with the President. Whereupon he fell back and lost the power of speech, while the incomer appraised him with his eyes and tried to remember where he had seen him before. Recognition brought with it a small frown of annoyance.

"Your name is Brockway, I believe," the President said.

"Ye-yes," Brockway stammered, being by no means so sure of it at the moment.

"H-m; and, if I remember correctly, you are an employee of this line?"

"I am." The passenger agent was beginning a little to recover his scattered store of self-possession.

"Very good. Possibly you can tell me what I want to know. What is the dinner station, and when do we reach it?"

"Moreno—twelve-ten. Shall I wire ahead for a private table?" Brockway asked, eager to preface his unwelcome purpose with some small token of service.

"By no means; we are no better than the patrons of your company. What is good

enough for them ought to suffice for us."

"Of course, if you don't wish it," Brockway began; and then the plunge: "I am in charge of the excursionists in this car, and they want it placed behind yours. If you will kindly consent to humor their whim——" He stopped in deference to the frown of displeasure which was gradually overspreading the President's brow.

"And so make our private car a thoroughfare for everybody," said he, indignantly; then, with a sudden turn which confused Brockway until he saw its drift, "But you are quite right; the patrons of your company should always be considered first. We are only guests. By all means, make the change at the first opportunity."

"Please don't misunderstand me," Brockway said, courageously. "I didn't propose it. If you object, just say so, and I'll see them all hanged first."

The President shook his head reprovingly, and Brockway fancied he could feel the cold gray eyes pinning him against the partition.

"Certainly not; I am afraid you don't sufficiently consider your duty to your employers. I not only authorize the change—I desire it. I shall request it if you do not."

Brockway winced under the patronizing tone, but he was determined not to let pride stand in the way of better things. So he said, "Thank you for helping me out. I'll have the change made at the dinner station, and we'll try not to annoy you any more than we can help."

That ended it, and he was no nearer the penetralia of car Naught-fifty than before. Mr. Vennor turned to go, but at the door he bethought him of the crippled range.

"A water-pipe has burst in our kitchen range," said he. "Can we get it repaired this side of Denver?"

Brockway considered it for a moment. Back of his passenger department service there was an apprenticeship in mechanics, and he was weighing the scanty furnishings of the engineer's tool-box against the probable askings of the undertaking. It was a chance to show his good-will, and he concluded to risk it.

"Hardly. We don't stop long enough at the division station. Is it a very bad

break?"

"Indeed, I know nothing about it. The cook tells me he can't use the range."

"May I go in and look at it?" Brockway asked.

Now President Vennor, upon recognizing Gertrude's acquaintance of the previous summer, had determined to prevent a renewal of the intimacy at whatever cost; but he abhorred *tables d'hôte* and railway eating-stations, and was willing to make some concessions to avoid them. So he gave the coveted permission, and a minute later they were in the kitchen of the private car, inspecting the disabled range.

"It isn't as bad as it might be," Brockway announced, finally. "I think I can stop the leak with what tools I can find in the engineer's box."

"You?"

"Yes; I'm a machinist by trade, you know. I earned my living at it awhile, before I went into the passenger department." Brockway found a certain measure of satisfaction in running counter to the presumed anti-craftsman prejudice of the man of inherited wealth.

"I'm sure it is very good of you to offer, but I couldn't think of troubling you," the President said, sparring to gain time in which to perfect a little plan which had just suggested itself.

"Oh, it's no trouble; I shall be glad enough to help you out."

"Very well, then—if you wish to try. I will make it worth your while."

Brockway straightened up and met the appraising eyes unflinchingly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Vennor, but you've mistaken your man this time," he said, steadily. "I'll gladly do it as a kindness—not otherwise."

The President smiled. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Brockway," he apologized, with the faintest possible emphasis on the prefix; "we shall be most grateful if you will come to our rescue upon your own terms. I presume you won't have time before noon?"

"N—no," said Brockway, glancing at his watch and generously burying his pique with the provocation; "but I'll attack it as soon as we leave Moreno. It won't take

long."

Mr. Vennor bowed, and saw his newly pledged servitor safely out upon the hamper-laden platform. He cherished a little theory of his own respecting the discouraging of youthful and sentimental intimacies, and it was based upon conditions which Brockway's proposed undertaking might easily fulfil. Gertrude had been distinctly pleased with the young man the preceding summer. Other things had happened since, and, fortunately, Fleetwell was along to look after his own interests. None the less, it might be well for them to meet under conditions which would make it impossible for the passenger agent to pose as Gertrude's social equal. Accordingly, the President sought out the porter and gave him his instructions.

"William, that young man will come in this afternoon to repair the range. When he is well at work, I want you to come and tell me."

IV

THE DINNER STATION

The railway company's hotel at Moreno is a pretentious Queen Anne cockle-shell, confronted by a broad platform flowing in an unrippled tide of planking between the veranda and the track, with tributary wooden streams paralleling the rails.

Brockway knew this platform by length and by breadth; and when the "Flying Kestrel" ranged alongside he meant to project himself into the procession of dinner-seekers what time Miss Vennor should be passing the Tadmor. But *l'homme propose, et la femme*——

"Oh, Mr. Brockway; *will* you help me find my satchel? the one with the monogram, you know. I can't find it anywhere." Thus one of the unescorted ladies whose major weakness was a hopeless inability to keep in touch with her numerous belongings.

The train was already at a stand, but Brockway smothered his impatience and joined the search for the missing hand-bag, contenting himself with a glimpse of the President's daughter as she passed the windows of the Tadmor. Fleeting as it was, the glimpse fired his heart anew. The year had brought her added largesse of beauty and winsomeness. The wind was blowing free and riotous, caressing the soft brown hair under the dainty travelling hat, and twisting the modest gray gown into clinging draperies as she breasted it. Brockway gazed and worshipped afresh, and prudence and poverty-pride vanished when he observed that she was leaning upon the arm of an athletic young man, whose attitude was sufficiently lover-like to make the passenger agent abjure wisdom and curse common sense.

"That's what I get for playing the finical idiot!" he groaned. "A year ago I might have had it all my own way if I hadn't been a pride-ridden fool. Confound the money, anyway; it's enough to make a man wish it were all at the bottom of the sea!"

With which anarchistic reflection he went out to arrange for transferring the Tadmor, and, incidentally, to get his own dinner. When the first was done there was scant time for the second, and he was at the lunch counter when the

President's party went back to the Naught-fifty.

"Why, they've taken on another car," said Gertrude, noticing the change.

"No," her father rejoined, shortly; "we have a passenger agent on board, and he has seen fit to put his excursionists' car in the rear."

At the word, Gertrude's thoughts went back to a certain afternoon filled with a swift rush down a precipitous canyon, with a brawling stream at the track-side, and a simple-hearted young man, knowing naught of the artificialities and much of the things that are, at her elbow.

The train of reflection paused when they reached the sitting-room of the private car, but it went on again when the President's daughter had curled herself into the depths of a great wicker sleepy-hollow to watch the unending procession of stubble-fields slipping past the car window. How artlessly devoted he had been, this earnest young private in the great business army; so different from—well, from Chester Fleetwell, for example. Chester's were the manners of a later day; a day in which the purely social distinctions of sex are much ignored. That, too, was pleasant, in its way. And yet there was something very charming in the elder fashion.

And Mr. Brockway knew his rôle and played it well—if, indeed, it were a rôle, which she very much doubted. Old school manners are not to be put on and off like a garment, nor is sincerity to be aped as a fad. Just here reflection became speculative. What had become of Mr. Brockway since their "Mormon day"? Had he gone on with his school-mistresses and ended by marrying one of them? There was something repellent in the thought of his marrying any one, but when reason demanded a reason, Gertrude's father had joined her.

"I hope we shall be able to have dinner in the car," the President said, drawing up a chair. "I stumbled upon a young mechanic when I went forward to inquire about the eating-station, and he agreed to repair the range this afternoon."

"How fortunate!"

"Yes," the President rejoined; and then he began to debate with himself as to the strict truth of the affirmative, and the conversation languished.

Meanwhile, Brockway had hastened out to the engine at the cry of "All aboard!" The 828 was sobbing for the start when he climbed to the foot-board, and the engineer, who knew him, grinned knavishly.

"Better get you some overclothes if you're goin' to ride up here," he suggested.

"I'm not going to stay. Lend me a pair of overalls, and a jumper, and a pair of pipe-tongs, and a hammer, and a few other things, will you?"

"Sure thing," said the man at the throttle. "What's up? One o' your tourists broke a side-rod?"

Brockway laughed and dropped easily into the technical figure of speech.

"No; crown-sheet's down in the Naught-fifty's cook-stove, and I'm going to jack it up."

"Good man," commented the engineer, who rejoiced in Brockway's happy lack of departmental pride. "Help yourself to anything you can find."

Brockway found a grimy suit of overclothes and took off his coat.

"Goin' to put 'em on here and go through the train in uniform?" laughed the engineer.

"Why not?" Brockway demanded. "I'm not ashamed of the blue denim yet. Wore it too long."

He donned the craftsman's uniform. The garments were a trifle short at the extremities, but they more than made up for the lack equatorially.

"How's that for a lightning change?" he shouted, trying to make himself heard above the din and clangor of the engine. "Just hang on to my coat and hat till I get back, and I'll swap with you again." And gathering up the handful of tools, he climbed back over the coal and disappeared through the door of the mail car.

V

AT THE MEETING-POINT

Brockway made his way unrecognized through the train, and found the Falstaffian cook awaiting him in the kitchen of the Naught-fifty. Five minutes later, he was hard at work on the disabled stove, quite reckless of soot and grime, and intent only upon making a workmanlike job of the repairs. The narrow compartment was none too well ventilated, and he was soon working in an atmosphere rivalling that of the hot-room in a Turkish bath. Wherefore he wrought arduously, and in due time the leaky joint was made whole.

After turning the water on and satisfying himself of the fact, Brockway crawled out from behind the range and got upon his feet with a sigh of relief. Just then the portway into the waiter's pantry filled with faces like the arch of a proscenium-box in a theatre. Brockway wheeled quickly at the sound of voices and saw the President, one young woman with eye-glasses and another without, a clean-faced young man with uncut hair, and—Miss Vennor.

"Ha!" said the President, with the King George Fourth smile and his coldest stare; "we caught you fairly in the midst of it, didn't we, Mr. Brockway? Do you still assert that we shall dine at our own table this evening?"

The effect of Mr. Vennor's dramatic little surprise was varied and not altogether as he had prefigured. As for the person most deeply concerned, no one was ever less ashamed of a craftsman's insignia than was Brockway; but when he saw that the President had permitted him to do a service for the sole purpose of making him appear ridiculous, his heart was hot in just proportion to the magnitude of the affront.

As for Gertrude, she could have wept with pity and indignation. This was the "young mechanic" her father had found and used, only to make him a laughing-stock! The light of a sudden purpose flashed in the steady gray eyes, and she spoke quickly, before Brockway could reply to her father's gibe.

"Why, Mr. Brockway! where did you come from? It really seems that you are fated to be our good angel. Have you actually got it repaired?" The winsome face disappeared from the portway, and before Brockway could open his lips she

was standing beside him. "Show me what was the matter with it," she said.

He obeyed, with proper verbal circumstance, gaining a little self-possession with every added phrase. Gertrude led him on, laughing and chatting and dragging the others into the rescue until Brockway quite forgot that he was supposed to be a laughing-stock for gods and men.

"I'm very glad to meet you, I'm sure," he said, bowing gravely to the Misses Beaswicke, when Gertrude had actually gone the length of introducing him; "Mr. Fleetwell, I've heard of you—and that's probably more than you can say of me. Mr. Vennor, I think you may safely count upon having your dinner in the Naught-fifty."

"Yes, thanks to you," said Gertrude, quickly. "Have you—will your other engagements let you join us?"

Brockway was of four different minds in as many seconds. Here was a chance to defeat Mr. Vennor at his own game; and love added its word. But he could not consent to break unwelcome bread, and was about to excuse himself when the President, in answer to an imperative signal flying in Gertrude's eyes, seconded the invitation.

"Yes, come in and join us, Mr. Brockway; we shall be glad to have you, I'm sure." The stony stare which accompanied the words was anything but hospitable, but the President felt that he had done his whole duty and something over and above.

Brockway hesitated a moment, glanced at Gertrude, and accepted. Then he began to gather up the tools. Gertrude caught up her skirts and stepped into the vestibule to give him room.

"You'll not disappoint us, will you?" she said, by way of leave-taking. "You may come as early as you please. I want you to meet Cousin Jeannette."

The portway proscenium-box was empty by this time, and Brockway dropped his tools and spoke his mind.

"Miss Vennor, I know, and you know, that I ought not to come at all. It was awfully good of you to ask me, but——"

"But what?" she said, encouragingly.

"I think you must understand what I want to say and can't," he went on. "You saw that I was like to be overtaken by a fit of very foolish self-consciousness, and you were kind enough to come to my rescue. I appreciate it, but I don't want to take undue advantage of it."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," she laughed. "We shall look for you between six and seven. And you'll come, because I'm going to run away now, before you have a chance to retract. Good-by—till this evening."

VI

REGARDLESS ORDERS

Ten hours' westing from the Missouri River takes a moderately fast train well into the great grazing region whose name is Length and Breadth, and whose horizon is like that of the sea. Since leaving Antelope Springs, however, the "Flying Kestrel" had been lagging a little. For this cause, the supper station was still more than an hour away when Brockway deserted his ancients and invalids and crossed the platforms to the rear door of the private car.

The admission that he dreaded the ordeal is not to be set down to his discredit. His life had been an arduous struggle, for an education and the necessities first, and for advancement afterward. In such a conflict, utility speedily becomes the watchword, and if the passenger agent were less of a workaday drudge than his fellows, he was modestly unaware of the fact.

In the course of the afternoon all the reasons why he should manage to get himself left behind at some convenient station were given a hearing, but love finally triumphed, and half-past six o'clock found him at the door of the Naught-fifty. Fortunately for his introduction, the occupants of the sitting-room were well scattered; and Gertrude came forward at once to welcome him.

"Thank you for coming," she said, putting her hand in his with the cordiality of an old friend; "I was afraid you might forget us, after all. Let me introduce you to my cousin, Mrs. Dunham; Cousin Jeannette, this is Mr. Brockway."

Brockway bent low in the direction of an elderly lady with a motherly face; bowed to the Misses Beaswicke and to Fleetwell, and acknowledged the President's nod.

"I'm only too happy to be permitted to come," he said to Gertrude, drawing up a chair to make a group of three with the chaperon. "The social side of a business man's life is so nearly a minus quantity that your thoughtfulness takes rank as an act of Christian charity."

Gertrude laughed softly. "Tell me how a business man finds time to acquire the art of turning compliments," she said; but Mrs. Dunham came to his rescue.

"I suppose your occupation keeps you away from home a great deal, doesn't it?" she asked.

"It certainly would if I had a home," Brockway replied.

"Do you have to travel all the time?"

"Rather more than nine-tenths of it, I should say."

"How dreadfully tiresome it must become! Of course, when one is seeing things for the first time it is very interesting; but I should imagine the car-window point of view would become hackneyed in a very little while."

"It does; and it is pathetically unsatisfying if one care for anything more than a glimpse of things. I have gone up and down in my district for four years, and yet I know nothing of the country or the people outside of a narrow ribbon here and there with a railway line in the centre."

"That is a good thought," Gertrude said. "I have often boasted of having seen the West, but I believe I have only threaded it back and forth a few times."

"That is all any of us do," Brockway asserted. "Our knowledge of the people outside of the railway towns is very limited. I once made a horseback trip through the back counties of East Tennessee, and it was a revelation to me. I never understood until then the truth of the assertion that people who live within sight of a railway all have the 'railway diathesis'."

"Meaning that they lose in originality what they gain in sophistication?" said Gertrude.

"Just that. They become a part of the moving world; and as the railway civilizing process is much the same the country over, they lose their identity as sectional types."

Mrs. Dunham leaned back in her chair and began to make mental notes with queries after them. Mr. Vennor had given her to understand that they were to have a *rara avis*, served underdone, for dinner; and, in the kindness of her heart, she had determined to see that the "young artisan," as her cousin had called him, was not led on to his own undoing. Now, however, she began to suspect that some one had made a mistake. This young man seemed to be abundantly able to fight his own battles.

"I presume you are very familiar with this part of the country—along your own line, Mr. Brockway," she said, when the waiter came in to lay the plates.

"In the way that I have just indicated, yes. I know so much of its face as you can see from this window. But my knowledge doesn't go much beyond the visible horizon."

"Neither does mine, but I can imagine," Gertrude said.

"Ah, yes; but imagination isn't knowledge."

"No; it's often better."

"Pleasanter, you mean; I grant you that."

"No, I meant more accurate."

"For instance?"

Gertrude smiled. "You are quite merciless, aren't you? But if I must defend myself I should say that imagination paints a composite picture, out of drawing as to details, perhaps, but typically true."

Brockway objected. "Being unimaginative, I can't quite accept that."

"Can't you? That is what Priscilla Beaswicke would call the disadvantage of being Occidentalized."

"I suppose I am that," Brockway admitted cheerfully. "I can always breathe freer out here between these wide horizons; and the majesty of this Great Flatness appeals to me even more than that of the mountains."

They followed his gesture. The sun was dipping to the western edge of the bare plain, and the air was filled with ambient gold. The tawny earth, naked and limitless, melted so remotely into the dusty glow of the sky as to leave no line of demarcation. The lack of shadows and the absence of landmarks confused the senses until the flying train seemed to stand with ungripping wheels in the midst of a slowly revolving disk of yellow flatness, through which the telegraph-poles and mile-posts darted with sentient and uncanny swiftness.

"I can feel its sublimity," Gertrude said, softly, answering his thought; "but its solemn unchangeableness depresses me. I love nature's moods and tenses, and it seems flippant to mention such things in the presence of so much fixity."

Brockway smiled. "The prairie has its moods, too. A little later in the year we should be running between lines of fire, and those big balls of tumbleweed would be racing ahead of the wind like small meteors. Later still, when the snows come, it has its savage mood, when anything with blood in its veins may not go abroad and live."

"I suppose you have been out here in a blizzard, haven't you?" said the chaperon; but when he would have replied there was a general stir, and the waiter announced:

"Dinner is served."

VII

A DINNER ON WHEELS

When the President's party gathered about the table, Mrs. Dunham placed Brockway at her right, with Gertrude beside him. Mr. Vennor disapproved of the arrangement, but he hoped that Priscilla Beaswicke, who was Brockway's *vis-à-vis*, might be depended upon to divert the passenger agent's attention. Miss Beaswicke confirmed the hope with her second spoonful of soup by asking Brockway what he thought of Tourguénief.

Now, to the passenger agent, the great Russian novelist was as yet no more than a name, and he said so frankly and took no shame therefore. Whereupon Mr. Vennor:

"Oh, come, Priscilla; you mustn't begin on Mr. Brockway like that. I fancy he has had scant time to dabble in your little intellectual fads."

Gertrude looked up quickly, and the keen sense of justice began to assert itself. Having escaped the pillory in his character of artisan, the passenger agent was to be held up to ridicule in his proper person. Not if she could help it, Gertrude promised herself; and she turned suddenly upon the collegian.

"What do you think of Tourguénief, Cousin Chester?" she asked, amiably.

"A good bit less than nothing," answered the athlete, with his eyes in his plate. "What is there about him that we ought to know and don't?"

"Tell us, Priscilla," said Gertrude, passing the query along.

But the elder Miss Beaswicke refused to enlighten anyone. "Go and get his book and read it, as I did," she said.

"I sha'n't for one," Fleetwell declared. "I can't read the original, and I won't read a translation."

"Have you read him in the original, Priscilla?" Gertrude inquired, determined to push the subject so far afield that it could never get back.

"Oh, hush!" said the elder Miss Beaswicke. "What is the matter with you two. I refuse positively to be quarrelled with."

That ended the Russian divagation, and it had the effect of making the table-talk impersonal. This was precisely what Mr. Vennor desired. What he meant to do was to set a conversational pace which would show Gertrude that Brockway was hopelessly out of his element in her own social sphere.

The plan succeeded admirably. So far as the social aspect of the meal was concerned, the passenger agent might as well have been dining at the table of the Olympians. Art, literature, Daudet's latest book, and Henriette Ronner's latest group of cats, the decorative designs in the Boston Public Library, and the renaissance of Buddhism in the nineteenth century—before these topics Brockway went hopelessly dumb. And not once during the hour was Mrs. Dunham or Gertrude permitted to help him, though they both tried with charitable and praiseworthy perseverance, as thus:

Mrs. Dunham, in a desperate effort to ignore the Public Library: "I'm afraid all this doesn't interest you very much, Mr. Brockway. It's so fatally easy——"

Fleetwell, whose opinion touching a portion of the design has been contravened by Mr. Vennor: "I say, Cousin Jeannette, isn't the Sargent decoration for the staircase hall—" *et sequentia*, until Brockway sinks back into oblivion to come to the surface ten minutes later at a summons from the other side.

Gertrude, purposely losing the thread of Priscilla Beaswicke's remarks on the claims of theosophy to an unprejudiced hearing: "What makes you so quiet, Mr. Brockway? Tell me about your other adventures with the school-teachers—after you left Salt Lake City, you know."

Brockway, catching at the friendly straw with hope once more reviving: "Then you haven't forgotten—excuse me; Miss Beaswicke is speaking to you." And the door shuts in his face and leaves him again in outer darkness.

In the nature of things mundane, even the most leisurely dinner cannot last forever. Brockway's ordeal came to an end with the black coffee, and when he was free he would have vanished quickly if Gertrude had not detained him.

"You are not going to leave us at once, are you?" she protested.

"I—I think I'd better go back to my 'ancients and invalids,' if you'll excuse me."

Gertrude was conscience-stricken, and her hospitable angel upbraided her for having given her guest an unthankful meal. Wherefore she sought to make amends.

"Don't go just yet unless you are obliged to," she pleaded. "Sit down and tell me about the schoolma'ams. How far did you go with them?"

"I had to make the whole blessed circuit," he said, tarrying willingly enough.

"Do you often have such deliciously irresponsible people to convoy?"

"Not often; but the regular people usually make up for it in—well, in cantankerousness; that's about the only word that will fit it." Brockway was thinking of the exacting majority in the Tadmor.

"And yet it doesn't make you misanthropic? I should think it would. What place is this we are coming to?"

"Carvalho—the supper station."

Gertrude saw her father coming toward them; she guessed his purpose and resented it. If she chose to make kindly amends to the passenger agent for his sorry dinner, she would not be prevented.

"We stop here a little while, don't we?" she asked of Brockway.

"Yes; twenty minutes or more. Would you like to go out for a breath of fresh air?" She had risen and caught up her wrap and hat.

"I should; it is just what I was going to propose. Cousin Jeannette, I'm going to walk on the platform with Mr. Brockway. Come," she said; and they escaped before Mr. Vennor could overtake them.

Once outside, they paced up and down under the windows of the train, chatting reminiscently of four bright days a year agone, and shunning the intervening period as two people will whose lives have met and touched and gone apart again. At the second turn, they met Mrs. Dunham and Fleetwell; and at the third, the President, sandwiched between Hannah and Priscilla Beaswicke. Whereupon Brockway, scenting espionage, drew Gertrude away toward the engine.

The great, black bulk of the heavy ten-wheeler loomed portentous, and the smoky flare of the engineer's torch, as he thrust it into the machinery to guide the snout of his oil-can, threw the overhanging mass of iron and steel into sombre

relief.

Brockway shaded his eyes under his hand and peered up at the number beneath the cab window. "The new 926," he said; "we'll get back some of our lost time behind her."

"Do you know them all by name?" Gertrude queried.

"Oh, no; not all."

"I suppose you've ridden on them many times?"

Brockway laughed. "I should say I had—on both sides, as the enginemen say."

"What does that mean?"

"It's slang for firing and driving; I've done a little of both, you know."

"I didn't know it. Isn't it terribly dangerous? When anything happens, the men on the engine are almost always killed, aren't they?"

"When they are it's because they haven't time to save themselves. It's all nonsense—newspaper nonsense, mostly—about the engineer sticking to his post like the boy on the burning deck. A man can do whatever there is to be done toward stopping his train while you could count ten, and no amount of heroism could accomplish any more."

"I have often thought I should like to ride on an engine," Gertrude said.

"I wish I had known it earlier in the day; your wish might have been gratified very easily."

"Might it? I suppose they never let any one ride on the night engines, do they?"

Brockway caught his breath. "Do you mean—would you trust me to take you on the engine to-night?" he asked, wondering if he had heard aright.

"Why not?" she said, with sweet gravity.

The engineer had oiled his way around to their side, and Brockway spoke to him.

"Good-evening, Mac," he said; and the man turned and held up his torch.

"Hello, Fred," he began; and then, seeing Gertrude: "Excuse *me*, I didn't see the lady."

At a sign from Gertrude, Brockway introduced the engineer. "Miss Vennor, this is Mr. Maclure—one of our oldest runners."

"I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Maclure," said Gertrude, sweetly; and the man of machinery scraped his feet and salaamed.

"Mac, Miss Vennor thinks she would like to take a night spin on the 926. May we ride a little way with you?"

"Well, I should say!" assented Maclure. "Just pile in and make yourselves at home; and excuse *me*—I hain't quite got through oilin' 'round yet."

"Thank you," said Brockway; then to Gertrude: "We must find your father or Mrs. Dunham quick; we haven't more than a minute or two."

They ran back and fortunately came upon Mrs. Dunham and the collegian.

"Cousin Jeannette, I'm going to ride on the engine with Mr. Brockway," Gertrude explained, breathlessly. "Don't say I sha'n't, for I will. It's the chance of a lifetime. Good-by; and don't sit up for me."

"I'll take good care of her," Brockway put in; and before the astonished lady could expostulate or approve, they were scudding forward to the 926.

VIII

THE CAB OF THE TEN-WHEELER

Engineer Maclure was leaning out of the cab window, watching for the conductor's signal, when Brockway and Gertrude came up.

"Didn't know but you'd backed out," he said, jocosely, when they had climbed aboard.

"Oh, no, indeed; we had to get word to my father," said Gertrude.

The engineer waved them across the cab. "Make yourselves at home; the 926 belongs to you as long as you want to own her. Just you pre-empt Johnnie's box over there, Fred, and make the young lady comfortable."

Brockway stuck a propitiatory cigar into the pocket of the fireman's jumper, and proceeded to carry out his instructions. Before the tardy signal came, Gertrude was perched upon the high seat, with her skirts gathered up out of harm's way, and Brockway had fashioned a pad out of a bunch of waste and tied it upon the boiler-head brace at her feet.

"It's hot," he explained. "When she begins to roll you can put your foot against that and steady yourself. Are you quite comfortable?"

"Quite; and you?" She looked over her shoulder to ask the question, and the strong red glow from the open door of the fire-box glorified the sweet face.

"Comfortable? No, that is hardly the word for it"—he tried the window-fastening, that he might have an excuse for bending over her—"I'm happy; happy to my finger-tips. Do you know why?"

He sought to look up into her face, but at that moment the red glow of the fire-light went out suddenly with the crash of the closing door, and the clangor of the bell made her reply inaudible. None the less, by the dim, half light of the gauge-lamp he saw her eyelashes droop and her lips say No.

For a passing instant the social barriers went down and became as though they never were. Standing beside her and blessing the clamor that isolated them, he

said:

"Because I am here with you; because, no matter what happens to either of us in the future, no one can ever rob me of this."

He half expected a rebuke, and waited a moment with becoming humility. When it did not come, he swung himself into the seat behind her and held his peace until she spoke again. That was five full minutes afterward. For that length of time Gertrude was crushed under an avalanche of new sensations. The last switch-light in the Carvalho yards had flashed to the rear, and the 926 was quickening her speed with sharp little forward lunges under Maclure's skilful goading. The dizzying procession of grayish-white telegraph-poles hurling itself past the cab windows; the thousand clangorous voices of the great machine; the intermittent glare from the fire-box door, alternating with the fiery shower of sparks pouring from the smoke-stack—it was a bit of pandemonium detached and dashing through space, and she sat cowed and stunned by the rush and the uproar. But presently the warm wine of excitement began to quicken her heart-beats.

"Isn't it glorious!" she exclaimed, trying to look back at him.

It is quite possible for two persons to converse in the cab of a flying locomotive, but the factor of distance must be eliminated. Wherefore he bent over her till his mustache brushed the pink ear.

"I am glad you like it. Are you still quite comfortable?"

"Yes, indeed; thank you. How fast are we going now?"

"About twenty-five miles an hour; but we'll double that when Maclure gets her warmed up."

"Double it! Why, we seem to be fairly flying now!"

"Wait," said Brockway.

Maclure was sitting sphynx-like on his box, coming to life now and then to reduce the angle of the reversing-lever, or to increase that of the throttle. The fireman labored steadily, swaying back and forth between the coal-chute and the fire-box door, his close-fitting cap on the back of his head, and Brockway's cigar, —unlighted, in deference to Gertrude,—between his teeth.

"What dreadfully hard work it must be to shovel coal that way all night," Gertrude said, following the rhythmic swing of the fireman's sinewy figure with her eyes.

"He's getting his fire into shape, now," Brockway explained. "He'll have it easier after a bit."

"Why doesn't he smoke his cigar?"

Brockway smiled. "Because, down under the grime and coal-dust and other disguises, there is a drop or two of gentle blood, I fancy."

"You mean it's because I'm here? Please tell him to light his cigar, if he wants to."

Brockway obeyed, and the fireman unbent and bobbed his head in Gertrude's direction. "Thank ye, ma'am," he shouted, with a good-natured grin on his boyish face; "but I'm thinkin' a dhry smoke's good enough for the lady's car"—and he bent to his work again, while the endless procession of telegraph-poles hurtled past with ever-increasing swiftness, and the sharp blasts of the exhaust lost their intermittence, and became blent in a continuous roar.

Presently, the laboring engine began to heave and roll like a storm-tossed vessel, and Gertrude was fain to make use of the foot-rest. Being but a novice, she made unskilful work of it; and when her foot slipped for the third time, Brockway took his courage in both hands.

"Just lean back and brace yourself against my shoulder," he said; "I'm afraid you'll get a fall."

She did it, and he held himself in watchful readiness to catch her if she should lose her balance.

"Is that better?"

She nodded. "Much better, thank you. Have we doubled it yet?"

Brockway took out his watch and timed the revolutions of the flying drive-wheels. "Not quite, but we're bettering the schedule by several miles. Do you still enjoy it?"

"Yes, much; but it's very dreadful, isn't it? I don't see how he dares!"

"Who? Maclure?"

"Yes; or anyone else. To me it seems braver than anything I ever read of—to drive a great thing like this with so many precious lives behind it. The responsibility must be terrible."

"It would be if a fellow thought of it all the time; but one doesn't, you know. Now I'll venture a guess that Mac is just speculating as to how much of the 'Kestrel's' lost time he can get back between this and the end of his run."

But the shrewd old pioneer with the Scottish name was thinking of no such prosaic thing. On the contrary, he was wondering who Miss Vennor was; if she would be a worthy helpmate for the passenger agent; and if so, how he could help matters along.

The switch-lights of Arriba were twinkling in the distance, and his hand was on the whistle-lever, when the engineer reached a conclusion. The next instant Gertrude shrieked and would have tumbled ignominiously into the fireman's scoop if Brockway had not caught her.

"How silly of me!" she said, shame-facedly. "One would think I had never heard a locomotive whistle before. But it was so totally unexpected."

"I should have warned you, but I didn't think. This is Arriba; do you want to go back?"

Gertrude was enjoying herself keenly, after a certain barbaric and unfettered fashion hitherto undreamed of, and she was tempted to drink a little deeper from the cup of freedom before going back to the proprieties. Moreover, there was doubtless a goodly measure of reproof awaiting her, and when she remembered this, she determined to get the full value of the castigation.

"I'll go on, if you'll let me," she said.

"Let you!" Brockway had been trembling for fear his little bubble of joy was about to burst, and would have multiplied words. But before he could say more, the 926 thundered past the station and came to a stand.

Maclure released the air-brake, and clambering down from his box, dragged the passenger agent from his seat and so out to the gangway.

"Say, Fred, is she goin' back?" he whispered.

"No, not just yet."

"Bully for her; she's got sand, she has. Reckon you could run a spell and talk to her at the same time?"

Brockway's nerves tingled at the bare suggestion. "Try me and see," he said.

"It's a go," said Maclure. "Get her over there on my side, and I'll smoke me a pipe out o' Johnnie's window. Swear to bob I won't look around once!"

IX

FIFTY MILES AN HOUR

"Let me promote you, Miss Vennor," Brockway said, helping Gertrude to the foot-board; "Mr. Maclure says you may have his seat for awhile."

Gertrude acquiesced unquestioningly. For some cause as yet unclassified, acquiescence seemed to be quite the proper thing when she was with Brockway, though docility with others was not her most remarkable characteristic. When she was safely bestowed, Maclure rang the bell and gave Brockway his instructions.

"Next stop's Red Butte—twenty-seven miles—thirty-eight minutes o' card-time—no allowance for slowin' down at Corral Siding. And if you can twist 'em any quicker, do it. Turn her loose."

The engineer betook himself to the fireman's box, and Brockway's resolution was taken on the spur of the moment.

"Do just as I tell you, Miss Vennor, and I'll give you a brand-new experience," he said, quickly. "Take hold of this lever and pull—both hands—pull hard!"

Gertrude did it simply because she was told to, and it was not until the engine lunged forward that she understood what it was she was doing. "Oh, Mr. Brockway—I can't!" she cried; "it won't mind me!"

"Yes, it will; I'll show you how. Push it back a little; you mustn't tear your fire. There; let her make a few turns at that."

Gertrude clung to the throttle as if she were afraid it was alive and would escape, but her eyes sparkled and the flush of excitement mounted swiftly to cheek and brow.

"Now give her a little more—just a notch or two—that's enough. You needn't hold it; it won't run away," Brockway said, laughing at her.

"I shall go daft if I don't hold something! Oh, *please*, Mr. Brockway! I know I shall smash everything into little bits!"

"No, you won't; I sha'n't let you. A little more steam, if you please; that's right. Now take hold of this lever with both hands, brace yourself and pull steadily."

The reversing-lever of a big ten-wheeler is no child's plaything, and he stood ready to help her if she could not manage it. But Miss Vennor did manage it, though the first notch or two had to be fought for; and Maclure, who had quite forgotten his promise not to look on, applauded enthusiastically.

"Good!" said Brockway, approvingly; "you are doing famously. Now a little more throttle; that's enough."

The 926 forged ahead obediently, and Gertrude began to enter into the spirit of the thing.

"This is simply Titanic!" she exclaimed. "What shall I do next?"

"Cut her back a little more," Brockway commanded; "two notches. Now a little more steam—more yet; that will do."

The great engine lunged forward like a goaded animal, and Gertrude sat up very straight and clung to the reversing-lever when the cab began to lurch and sway. But she obeyed Brockway's directions promptly and implicitly.

"Don't be afraid of her," he said. "You have a clear track and a heavy rail."

"I'm not afraid," she asserted; "I'm miles beyond that, now. If anything should happen, we'd all be dead before we found it out, so I can be perfectly reckless."

Mile after mile of the level plain swept backward under the drumming wheels, and Brockway's heart made music within him because it had some little fragment of its desire. In order to see the track through the front window of the cab, he had to lean his elbow on the cushion beside her, and it brought them very near—nearer, he thought, than they would ever be again.

Gertrude was much too full of the magnitude of things to care to talk, but she was finally moved to ask another question.

"Are we really running along on the rails just like any well-behaved train? It seems to me we must have left the track quite a while ago."

Brockway laughed. "You would know it, if we had. Do you see those two little yellow lights away out ahead?"

"Yes; what are they?"

"They are the switch-lights at Corral Siding. Take hold of this lever and blow the whistle yourself; then it won't startle you so much."

Gertrude did that, also, although it was more trying to her nerves than all that had gone before. Then Brockway showed her how to reduce speed.

"Push the throttle in as far as it will go; that's right. Now the reversing-lever—both hands, and brace yourself—that's it. Now take hold of this handle and twist it that way—slowly—more yet—" the air whistled shrilly through the vent, and the song of the brake-shoes on the wheels of the train rose above the discordant clangor—"that will do—turn it back," he added, when the speed had slackened sufficiently; and he leaned forward with his hand on the brake-lever and scanned the approaching side-track with practised eyes.

"All clear!" he announced, springing back quickly. "Pull up this lever again, and give her steam."

Gertrude obeyed like an automaton, though she blenched a little when the small station building at the Siding roared past, and in a few seconds the 926 was again bettering the schedule.

"How fast are we going now?" she asked, when the engine was once more pitching and rolling like a laboring ship.

Brockway consulted his watch. "A little over fifty miles an hour, I should say. You will be quite safe in calling it that, anyway, when you tell your friends that you have run a fast express train."

"They'll never believe it," she said; "but I wouldn't have missed it for the world. What must I do now?—watch the track?"

Brockway said "Yes," though, with all his interest in other things, he had not omitted that very important part of an engineer's duty from the moment of leaving Arriba. After a roaring silence of some minutes, during which Brockway gave himself once more to the divided business of scanning the rails and burning sweet incense on the altar of his love, she spoke again.

"What is that we are coming to, away out there?" she asked, trying vainly to steady herself for a clearer view.

"The lights of Red Butte," he answered, relaxing his vigilance for the moment at the thought that his little side-trip into the land of joy would so shortly come to an end.

"No, I don't mean those!" she exclaimed, excitedly; "but this side of the lights. Don't you see?—on the track!"

Brockway allowed himself but a single swift glance. Half-way between the flying train and the station the line crossed a shallow sand creek on a low trestle. On both sides of the swale, crowding upon the track and filling the bed of the creek, was a mass of moving forms, against which the lines of glistening rails ended abruptly.

At such a crisis, the engineer in a man, if any there be, asserts itself without reference to the volitional nerve-centres. In the turning of a leaf, Brockway had thrown himself upon the throttle, dropped the reversing-lever, set the air-brake, and opened the sand-box; while Maclure, seeing that his substitute was equal to the emergency, woke the echoes with the whistle. A hundred yards from the struggling mass of frightened cattle, Brockway saw that the air-brake was not holding.

"Don't move!" he cried; and Gertrude cowered in her corner as the heavy reversing-lever came over with a crash, and the great engine heaved and buckled in the effort to check its own momentum.

It was all over before she could cry out or otherwise advertise her very natural terror. The moving mass had melted away before the measured approach of the train; the trestle had rumbled under the wheels; and the 926 was steaming swiftly up to the station under Brockway's guidance.

"Have you had more than enough?" he asked, when he had brought the train to a stand opposite the platform at Red Butte.

"Yes—no, not that, either," she added, quickly. "I'm glad to have had a taste of the real danger as well. But I think I'd better go back; it's getting late, isn't it?"

"Yes. Mac, we resign. Sorry I had to put your old tea-kettle in the back-gear; but the air wasn't holding, and we didn't want any chipped beef for supper. Good-night, and many thanks. Don't pull out till I give you the signal."

They hurried down the platform arm-in-arm, and Gertrude was the first to speak.

"Didn't you think we were all going to be killed?"

"No; but I did think I should never forgive myself if anything happened to you."

"It wouldn't have been your fault. And I've had a glorious bit of distraction; I shall remember it as long as I live."

"Yes; you have actually driven a train fifty miles an hour," laughed Brockway, handing her up the steps of car Naught-fifty.

"I have; and now I shall go in and be scolded eighty miles an hour to pay for it. But I sha'n't mind that. Good-night, and thank you ever so much. We shall see you in the morning?"

"Yes." Brockway said it confidently, and gave a tug at the bell-cord, to let Maclure know they were safely aboard; but when the door of the private car had yawned and swallowed Miss Vennor, he remembered the President's probable frame of mind, and thought it doubtful.

X

A CONFIDENCE EN ROUTE

When Brockway pulled the bell-cord, he meant to drop off and wait till the Tadmor came along—a manœuvre which would enable him to rejoin his party without intruding on the President's privacy. Then that reflection about Mr. Vennor's probable frame of mind, and the thought that the late excursion into the fair country of joy would doubtless never be repeated, came to delay him, and he let the train get under way before he remembered what it was that he had intended doing. Whereupon, he scoffed at his own infatuation, and went into the Ariadne to chat with the Burtons until another halt should give him a chance to get back to the Tadmor.

The route to the body of the car led past the smoking-room, and the passenger agent, having missed his after-dinner cigar, was minded to turn aside. But the place was crowded, and he hung hesitant upon the threshold.

"Come in," said Burton, who was one of the smokers.

"No, I believe not; there are too many of you. I'll go and talk to Mrs. Burton."

"Do; she's spoiling to quiz you."

"To quiz me? What about?"

"You wouldn't expect me to tell, if I knew. Go on and find out."

Brockway went forward with languid curiosity.

"I thought you had quite deserted us," said the little lady. "Sit down and give an account of yourself. Where have you been all afternoon?"

"With my ancients and invalids," Brockway replied.

Mrs. Burton shook a warning finger at him. "Don't begin by telling me fibs. Miss Vennor is neither old nor infirm."

Brockway reddened and made a shameless attempt to change the subject.

"How did you like the supper at Carvalho?" he asked.

The general agent's wife laughed as one who refuses to be diverted. "Neither better nor worse than you did. We had a buffet luncheon—baked beans and that exquisite tomato-catchup, you know—served in our section, and we saw one act of a charming little comedy playing itself on the platform at the supper station. Be nice and tell me all about it. Did the cold-blooded gentleman with the overseeing eyes succeed in overtaking you?"

Brockway saw it was no use, and laughed good-naturedly. "You are a born detective, Mrs. Burton; I wouldn't be in Burton's shoes for a farm in the Golden Belt," he retorted. "How much did you really see, and how much did you take for granted?"

"I saw a young man, who didn't take the trouble to keep his emotions out of his face, marching up and down the platform with Miss Vennor on his arm. Then I saw an elderly gentleman pacing back and forth between two feminine chatterboxes, and trying to outgeneral the two happy people. Naturally, I want to know more. Did you really go without your supper to take a constitutional with Miss Gertrude? And did the unhappy father contrive to spoil your *tête-à-tête*?"

There was triumph in Brockway's grin.

"No, he didn't—not that time; I out-witted him. And I didn't go without my supper, either. I had the honor of dining with the President's party in the Naught-fifty."

"You did! Then I'm sure she must have invited you; *he'd* never do it. How did it happen?"

Brockway told the story of the disabled cooking-stove, and Mrs. Burton laughed till the tears came. "How perfectly ridiculous!" she exclaimed, between gasps. "And she took your part and invited you to dinner, did she? Then what happened?"

"I was properly humiliated and sat upon," said Brockway, in wrathful recollection. "They talked about everything under the sun that I'd never heard of, and I had to sit through it all like a confounded oyster!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Burton, sweetly; "you know a good many things that they never dreamed of. But how did you manage to get Gertrude away from them all?"

"I didn't; she managed it for me. When we got up from the table the train was just slowing into Carvalho. I was going to run away, as befitted me, but she proposed a breath of fresh air on the platform."

"Then you had a chance to show her that you weren't born dumb, and I hope you improved it. But how did you dodge Mr. Vennor?"

"We missed a turn and went forward to look at the engine. Then Ger—Miss Vennor thought she would like to take a ride in the cab, and——"

"And, of course, you arranged it. You knew that was just the thing of all others that would reinstate you. It was perfectly Machiavellian!"

Brockway opened his eyes very wide. "Knew what?" he said, bluntly. "I only knew it was the thing she wanted to do, and that was enough. Well, we skipped back and notified Mrs. Dunham—she's the chaperon, you know—and then we chased ahead again and got on the engine."

"Where I'll promise you she enjoyed more new sensations in a minute than you had all through their chilly dinner," put in Mrs. Burton, who had ridden on many locomotives.

"She did, indeed," Brockway rejoined, exultantly, living over again the pleasure of the brief hour in the retelling. "At Arriba, the engineer turned the 926 over to me, and I put Miss Vennor up on the box and let her run between Arriba and Red Butte."

"Well—of all things! Do you know, Fred, I've had a silly idea all afternoon that I'd like to help you, but dear me! you don't need my help. Of course, after that, it was all plain sailing for you."

Brockway shook his head. "You're taking entirely too much for granted," he protested. "It was only a pleasant bit of 'distraction,' as she called it, for her, and there was no word—that is I—oh, confound it all! I couldn't presume on a bit of good comradeship like that!"

"You—couldn't—presume! Why, you silly, *silly* boy, it was the chance of a lifetime! So daringly original—so utterly unhackneyed! And you couldn't presume—I haven't a bit of patience with you."

"I'm sorry for that; I need a little sympathy."

"You don't deserve it; but perhaps you'd get it if you could show cause."

"Can't you see? Don't you understand that nothing can ever come of it?" Brockway demanded, relapsing fathoms deep into the abyss of hopelessness.

"Nothing ever will come of it if you go on squandering your chances as you have to-day. What is the matter with you? Are you afraid of the elderly gentleman with the calculating eye?"

"Not exactly afraid of him; but he's a millionnaire, and Miss Vennor has a fortune in her own right. And I——"

"Don't finish it. I understand your objection; you are poor and proud—and that's as it should be; but tell me—you are in love with Miss Vennor, aren't you? When did it begin?"

"A year ago."

"You didn't permit yourself to fall in love with her until you knew all about her circumstances and prospects, of course?"

"You know better than that. It was—it was what you'd call love at first sight," he confessed, rather shame-facedly; and then he told her how it began.

"Very good," said Mrs. Burton, approvingly. "Then you did actually manage to fall in love with Gertrude herself, and not with her money. But now, because you've found out she has money, you are going to spoil your chance of happiness, and possibly hers. Is that it?"

Brockway tried to explain. "It's awfully good of you to try to put it in that light, but no one would ever believe that I wasn't mercenary—that I wasn't a shameless cad of a fortune-hunter. I couldn't stand that, you know."

"No, of course not; not even for her sake. Besides, she doubtless looks upon you as a fortune-hunter, and——"

"What? Indeed she doesn't anything of the kind."

"Well, then, if you are sure she doesn't misjudge you, what do you care for the opinion of the world at large?"

"Much; when you show me a man who doesn't care for public opinion, I'll show you one who ought to be in jail."

"Fudge! Please don't try to hide behind platitudes. But about Gertrude, and your little affair, which is no affair; what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing; there is nothing at all to be done," Brockway replied with gloomy emphasis.

"I suppose nothing would ever induce you to forgive her for being rich?"

"I can never quite forgive myself for being poor, since it's going to cost me so much."

"You are too equivocal for any use. Answer my question," snapped the small inquisitor.

"How can I?" Brockway inquired, with masculine density. "Forgiveness implies an injury, and——"

"Oh, *oh*—how stupid you can be when you try! You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I'm not sure that I do," said Brockway, whose wit was easily confounded by a sharp tongue.

"Then I'll put it in words of one syllable. Do you mean to ask Miss Vennor to be your wife?"

"I couldn't, and keep my self-respect."

"Not if you knew she wanted you to?" persisted the small tormentor.

"Oh, I say—that couldn't be, you know," he protested. "I'm nothing more than a pleasant acquaintance to her, at the very most."

"But if you knew she did?"

"How could I know it?"

"We are not discussing ways and means; answer the question."

Thereat the man, tempted beyond what he could bear, abdicated in favor of the lover. "If I could be certain of that, Mrs. Burton—if I could be sure she loves me, nothing on earth should stand in the way of our happiness. Is that what you wanted me to say?"

The little lady clapped her hands enthusiastically. "I thought I could find the joint in your armor, after awhile. Now you may go; I want to be by myself and think. Good-night."

Brockway took the summary dismissal good-naturedly, and, as the train was just then slowing into a station, he ran out to drop off and catch the upcoming hand-rail of the Tadmor.

XI

AN ARRIVAL IN TRANSIT

When Gertrude bade Brockway good-night, she changed places for the moment with a naughty child on its way to face the consequences of a misbehavior, entering the private car with a childish consciousness of wrong-doing fighting for place with a rather militant determination to meet reproof with womanly indifference. Much to her relief, she found her father alone, and there was no distinguishable note of displeasure in his greeting.

"Well, Gertrude, did you enjoy your little diversion? Sit down and tell me about it. How does the cab compare with the sitting-room of a private car?"

The greeting was misleading, but she saw fit to regard it as merely the handshaking which precedes a battle royal.

"I enjoyed it much," she answered, quietly. "It was very exciting; and very interesting, too."

"Ah; I presume so. And your escort took good care of you—made you quite comfortable, I suppose."

"Yes."

Mr. Vennor leaned back in his chair and regarded her gravely through the swirls of blue smoke curling upward from his cigar. "Didn't it strike you as being rather —ah—a girlish thing for you to do? in the night, you know, and with a comparative stranger?"

Gertrude thought the battle was about to open, and began to throw up hasty fortifications. "Mr. Brockway is not a stranger; you may remember that we became quite well acquainted——"

"Pardon me," the President interrupted; "that is precisely the point at which I wished to arrive—your present estimate of this young man. I have nothing to say about your little diversion on the engine. You are old enough to settle these small questions of the proprieties for yourself. But touching this young mechanic, it might be as well for us to understand each other. Have you fully considered the

probable consequences of your most singular infatuation?"

It was a ruthless question, and the hot blood of resentment set its signals flying in Gertrude's cheeks. Up to that evening, she had thought of the passenger agent only as an agreeable young man of a somewhat unfamiliar type, of whom she would like to know more; but Brockway's moment of abandonment in the cab of the 926 had planted a seed which threatened to germinate quickly in the warmth of the present discussion.

"I'm not quite sure that I understand you," she said, picking and choosing among the phrases for the least incendiary. "Would you mind telling me in so many words, just what you mean?"

"Not in the least. A year ago you met this young man in a most casual way, and —to put it rather brutally—fell in love with him. I haven't the slightest idea that he cares anything for you in your proper person, or that he would have thrust himself upon us to-day if he had known that your private fortune hangs upon the event of your marriage under certain conditions which you evidently purpose to ignore. If, after the object-lesson you had at the dinner-table this evening, you still prefer this young fortune-hunter to your cousin Chester, I presume we shall all have to submit; but you ought at least to tell us what we are to expect."

If he had spared the epithets, she could have laughed at the baseless fabric of supposition, but the contemptuous sentence passed upon Brockway put her quickly upon his defence, and, incidentally, did more to further that young man's cause than any other happening of that eventful day.

"I suppose you have a right to say and think what you please about me," she said, trying vainly to be dispassionate; "but you might spare Mr. Brockway. He didn't invite himself to dinner; and it was I who proposed the walk on the platform and the ride on the engine."

"Humph! you are nothing if not loyal. Nevertheless, I wish you might look the facts squarely in the face."

Gertrude knew there were no facts, of the kind he meant, but his persistence brought forth fruit after its kind, and she stubbornly resolved to neither affirm nor deny. Wherefore she said, a little stiffly:

"I'm quite willing to listen to anything you wish to say."

"Then I should like to ask if you have counted the cost. Assuming that this

young man's intentions are unmercenary—and I doubt that very much—it isn't possible that there can be anything in common between you. The social world in which you move, and that to which he belongs, are as widely separated as the poles. I do not say yours is the higher plane, or his the lower—though I may have my own opinion as to that—but I do say they are vastly different; and the woman who knowingly marries out of her class has much to answer for. Admitting that you will do no worse than this, how can you hope to find anything congenial in a man who has absolutely nothing to say for himself at an ordinary family dinner-table?"

"I'm not at all sure that Mr. Brockway hadn't anything to say for himself, though he couldn't be expected to know or care much about the things we talked of. And it occurred to me at the time that it wasn't quite kind in us to talk intellectual shop from the soup to the dessert, as we did."

The President smiled, but the cold eyes belied the outward manifestation of kindliness. "You may thank me for that, if you choose," he went on, in the same calm argumentative tone. "I wanted to point a moral, and if I didn't succeed, it wasn't the fault of the subject. But that is only the social side; a question of taste. Unfortunately, there is a more serious matter to be considered. You know the terms of your granduncle's will; that your Cousin Fleetwell's half of the estate became his unconditionally on his coming of age, and that your portion is only a trust until your marriage with your cousin?"

"I ought to know; it's been talked of enough."

"And you know that if the marriage fail by your act, you will lose this legacy?"

"Yes."

"And that it will go to certain charitable institutions, and so be lost, not only to you, but to the family?"

"I know all about it."

"You know it, and yet you would deliberately throw yourself away on a fortune-hunting mechanic—a man whom you have known only since yesterday? It's incredible!"

"It is you who have said it—not I," she retorted; "but I'm not willing to admit that it would be all loss and no gain. There would at least be a brand-new set of sensations, and I'm very sure they wouldn't all be painful."

It was rebellion, pure and simple, and for once in his life Francis Vennor gave place to wrath—plebeian wrath, vociferous and undignified.

"Shame on you!" he cried; "you are a disgrace to the name—it's the blood of that cursed socialist on your mother's side. Sit still and listen to me—" Gertrude, knowing her own temper, was about to run away—"If you marry that infernal upstart, you'll do it at your own expense, do you hear? You sha'n't finger a penny of my money as long as I can keep you out of it. Do you understand?"

"I should be very dull if I didn't understand," she replied, preparing to make good her retreat. "If you are quite through, perhaps you will let me say that you are tilting at a windmill of your own building. So far as I know, Mr. Brockway hasn't the slightest intention of asking me to marry him; and until you took the trouble to demonstrate the possibility, I don't think it ever occurred to me. But after what you've said, I don't think I can ever consent to be married to Cousin Chester—it would be too mercenary, you know;" and with this parting shot she vanished.

In the privacy of her own stateroom she sat at the window to think it all out. It was all very undutiful, doubtless, and she was sorry for her part in the quarrel almost before the words were cold. She could scarcely forgive herself for having allowed her father to carry his assumption to such lengths, but the temptation had proved irresistible. It was such a delicious little farce, and if it might only have stopped short of the angry conclusion—but it had not, and therein lay the sting of it. Whereupon, feeling the sting afresh, she set her face flintwise against the prearranged marriage.

"I sha'n't do it," she said aloud, pressing her hot cheek against the cool glass of the window. "I don't love Chester, and I never shall—not in the way I should. And if I marry him, I shall be just what papa called Mr. Brockway—only he isn't that, or anything of the kind. Poor Mr. Brockway! If he knew what we have been talking about——"

From that point reflection went adrift in pleasanter channels. How good-natured and forgiving Mr. Brockway had been! He must have known that he was purposely ignored at the dinner-table, where he was an invited guest, and yet he had not resented it; and what better proof of gentle breeding than this could he have given? Then, in that crucial moment of danger, how surely his presence of mind and trained energies had forestalled the catastrophe. That was grand—heroic. It was well worth its cost in terror to look on and see him strive with and

conquer the great straining monster of iron and steel. After that, one couldn't well listen calmly to such things as her father had said of him.

And, admitting the truth of what had been said about his intellectual shortcomings, was a certain glib familiarity with the modern catch-words of book-talk and art criticism a fair test of intellectuality? Gertrude, with her cheek still touching the cool window-pane, thought not. One might read the reviews and talk superficially of more books than the most painstaking student could ever know, even by sight. In like manner, one might walk through the picture galleries and come away freighted with great names wherewith to awe the untravelled lover of art. It was quite evident that Mr. Brockway had done neither of these things, and yet he was thoughtful and keenly observant; and if he were ignorant of art, he knew and understood nature, which is the mother of all art.

From reinstating the passenger agent in his rights and privileges as a man, she came presently upon the little incident in the cab of the 926. How much or how little did he mean when he said he was happy to his finger-tips? On the lips of the men of her world, such sayings went for naught; they were but the tennis-balls of persiflage, served deftly, and with the intent that they should rebound harmless. But she felt sure that such a definition went wide of Mr. Brockway's meaning; of compliments as such, he seemed to know less than nothing. And then he had said that whatever came between them—no, that was not it—whatever happened to either of them.... Ah, well, many things might happen—would doubtless happen; but she would not forget, either.

The familiar sighing of the air-brake began again, and the low thunder of the patient wheels became the diapason beneath the shrill song of the brake-shoes. Then the red eye of a switch-lamp glanced in at Gertrude's window, and the train swung slowly up to the platform at another prairie hamlet. Just before it stopped, she caught a swift glimpse of a man standing with outstretched arms, as if in mute appeal. It was Brockway. He was merely standing in readiness to grasp the hand-rail of the Tadmor when it should reach him; but Gertrude knew it not, and if she had, it would have made no difference. It was the one fortuitous touch needed to open that inner chamber of her heart, closed, hitherto, even to her own consciousness. And when the door was opened she looked within and saw what no woman sees but once in her life, and having once seen, will die unwed in very truth if any man but one call her wife.

Once more the drumming wheels began the overture; the lighted bay-window of the station slipped backward into the night, and the bloodshot eye of another

switch-lamp peered in at the window and was gone; but Gertrude neither saw nor heard. The things of time and place were around and about her, but not within. A new song was in her heart, its words inarticulate as yet, but its harmonies singing with the music of the spheres. A little later, when the "Flying Kestrel" was again in mid-flitting, and the separate noises of the train had sunk into the soothing under-roar, she crept into her berth wet-eyed and thankful, and presently went to sleep too happy to harbor anxious thought for the morrow of uncertainties.

XII

THE ANCIENTS AND INVALIDS

Brockway was up betimes the following morning, though not of his own free will. Two hours before the "Flying Kestrel" was due in Denver, the porter of the Tadmor awakened him at the command of the irascible gentleman with the hock-bottle shoulders and diaphanous nose. While the passenger agent was sluicing his face in the wash-room some one prodded him from behind, and a thin, high-pitched voice wedged itself into the thunderous silence.

"Mr. ah—Brockway; I understand that you are purposing to take the party to ah—Feather Plume or ah—Silver Feather, or some such place to-day, and I ah—protest! I have no desire to leave Denver until my ticket is made to conform to my stipulations, sir."

Brockway had soap in his eyes, and the porter had carefully hidden the towels; for which cause his reply was brief and to the point.

"Please wait till I get washed and dressed before you begin on me, won't you?"

"Wait? Do you say ah—wait? I have been doing nothing but wait, sir, ever since my ah—stipulations were ignored. It's an outrage, sir, I——"

Brockway had found a towel and was using it vigorously as a counter-irritant.

"For Heaven's sake, go away and let me alone until I can get my clothes on!" he exclaimed. "I promised you yesterday you should have the thirty days that you don't need."

The aggrieved one had his ticket out, but he put it away again in tremulous indignation. "Go away? Did I ah—understand you to tell me to go away, sir? I ah-h-h——" but words failed him, and he shuffled out of the wash-room, cannoning against the little gentleman in the grass-cloth duster and velvet skull-cap in the angle of the vestibule.

"Good-morning, Mr. Brockway," said the comforter, cheerily. "Been having a tilt with Mr. Ticket-limits to begin the day with?"

"Oh, as a matter of course," Brockway replied, flinging the damp towel into a corner, and brushing his hair as one who transmutes wrath into vigorous action.

"Find him a bit trying, don't you? What particular form does his mania take this morning?"

"It's the same old thing. I promised him, yesterday, I'd get the extension on his ticket, and now he says he won't leave Denver till it's done. He 'ah-protests' that I sha'n't go to Silver Plume with the party; wants me to stay in Denver and put in the day telegraphing."

"Of course, you'll do it; you do anything anybody asks you to."

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to—to keep the peace. And if I don't go and 'personally conduct' the others, there'll be the biggest kind of a row. Isn't it enough to wear the patience of a good-natured angel to frazzles?"

"It is, just that. Have a cigar?"

"No, thank you. I don't smoke before breakfast."

"Neither do I, normally; but like most other people, I leave all my good habits at home when I travel. But about Jordan and the thirty-odd; how are you going to dodge the row?"

"The best way I can. There is a good friend of mine on the train—Mr. John Burton, the general agent of the C. & U., in Salt Lake—and perhaps I can get him to go up the canyon for me."

"Think he will do it?"

"I guess so; to oblige me. He'd lose only a day; and he'd make thirty-odd friends for the C. & U., don't you see."

"I must confess that I don't see, from a purely business point of view," was the rejoinder. "We are all ticketed out and back, and we can't change our route if we want to."

Brockway laughed. "The business of passenger soliciting is far-reaching. Some of you—perhaps most of you—will go again next year; and if the general agent of the C. & U. is particularly kind and obliging, you may remember his line."

"Dear me—why, of course! You say your friend is on the train?"

"Yes."

"Very well; you go and see him, and I'll help you out by breaking the news to the thirty-odd."

Brockway struggled into his coat and shook hands with the friendly one. "Mr. Somers, you're my good angel. You've undertaken a thankless task, though."

The womanish face under the band of the skull-cap broke into a smile which was not altogether angelic. "I shall get my pay as I go along; our friend with the bad case of ticket dementia will be carrying the entire responsibility for your absence before I get through."

"Good! pile it on thick," said Brockway, chuckling. "Make 'em understand that I'd give all my old shoes to go—that I'm so angry with Jordan for spoiling my day's pleasure that I can't see straight."

"I'll do it," the little man agreed. "Take a cigar to smoke after breakfast"—and the gray duster and velvet skull-cap disappeared forthwith around the angle in the vestibule.

Not until he was ready to seek Burton did the passenger agent recollect that the Naught-fifty was between the Tadmor and the Ariadne, and that it would be the part of prudence to go around rather than through the President's car. When he did remember it he stepped out into the vestibule of the Tadmor to get a breath of fresh air while he waited for the train to come to a station. Mrs. Dunham was on the Naught-fifty's rear platform, and she nodded, smiled, and beckoned him to come across.

"I'm glad to know that somebody else besides a curious old woman cares enough for this grand scenery to get up early in the morning," she said, pleasantly.

"You mustn't make me ashamed," Brockway rejoined. "I'm afraid I should have been sound asleep this minute if I hadn't been routed out by one of my people."

Mrs. Dunham smiled. "Gertrude was telling me about some of your troubles. Do they get you up early in the morning to ask you foolish questions?"

"They do, indeed"—and Brockway, glad enough to find a sympathetic listener, told the story of the pertinacious human gadfly masquerading under the name of Jordan.

"Dear, dear! How unreasonable! Will you have to give up the Silver Plume trip and stay in Denver with him?"

"I suppose so. I'm going forward presently to try to get Mr. Burton and his wife to take my place with the party for the day."

"Not Mr. John Burton, of the Colorado & Utah?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"Only through Gertrude; she met them when she was out here last year, and she likes Mrs. Burton very much indeed."

"I'm glad of that," said Brockway, with great *naïveté*; "they are very good friends of mine."

In the pause that succeeded he was reminded that his way and Gertrude's would shortly diverge again, and in the face of that thought he could not well help asking questions.

"I suppose you are going straight on to Utah," he said, not daring to hope for a negative reply.

"Not to-day. I believe it is Mr. Vennor's plan to go on to-morrow morning."

When he realized what this meant for him, Brockway forgave his evil genius in the Tadmor. Then he gasped to think how near he had come to missing his last chance of seeing Gertrude. But he must know more of the movements of the President's party.

"Will you go to a hotel?" he inquired.

"I think not. I heard Mr. Vennor order dinner in the car, so I presume we shall make it our headquarters during the day."

Brockway reflected that the private car would doubtless be side-tracked on the spur near the telegraph office in the Union Depot, and wrote it down that prearrangement itself could do no more. When the train drew up at Bovalley a little later, he excused himself and ran quickly forward to board the Ariadne. Come what might, Burton must be over-persuaded; the thirty-odd must be given no chance to defeat the Heaven-born opportunity made possible by the pertinacity of the gadfly.

So marched the intention, but the fates willed delay. Bovalley is but a flag-station, and the passenger agent had barely time to swing up to the rear platform of the regular sleeper when the train moved on. Then he found that he had circumvented one obstacle only to be hampered by another. The rear door of the Ariadne was locked, and the electric bell was out of repair. Wherefore it was forty minutes later, and Denver was in sight, when the rear brakeman opened the door and admitted him.

XIII

BETWEEN STATIONS

When Mrs. Dunham returned to the central compartment of the Naught-fifty, the waiter was laying the table for breakfast, and the President was looking on with the steadfast gaze which disconcerts.

"Good-morning, Cousin Jeannette. Up early to see the scenery, are you?" The genial greeting had no hint in it of inward disquietude, past or present.

"Yes, and I wish I had been earlier. I have been out on the platform watching the mountains grow."

"Grand, isn't it? You might have had a better view if our car had been left in its proper place in the rear; but our friend the passenger agent took good care to secure that for his own party."

Mrs. Dunham was inclined to be charitable. "I fancy he couldn't help it. From what he tells me, his people must be very exacting."

"Have you seen him this morning?" the President inquired, with some small show of curiosity.

"Yes; out on the platform. He has been telling me some of his exasperating experiences."

The President smiled indulgently. "I suspect our young friend has fallen into a habit of magnifying his difficulties," he said. "It's very easy to do, you know, when one's business makes a fine art of exaggeration."

"Why, he doesn't impress me that way, at all," said the good lady, who knew nothing of her cousin's very excellent reasons for disliking Brockway. "He seems to be a very pleasant young man, and quite intelligent."

Mr. Vennor shrugged his shoulders. "I don't question his intelligence—though it wasn't very remarkable at the dinner-table last night. Did you happen to find out whether he is going all the way across with his party?"

"He didn't say. His people are going up to Silver Plume to-day, but he can't go with them. He has to stay in Denver with one of the exacting ones whose ticket is out of repair."

"Ha! that's a very sharp little trick," said the President; but inasmuch as he did not elucidate, the chaperon misunderstood.

"To get him into trouble with the others? I fancy that is only incidental. Mr. Brockway is going to try to get Mr. Burton—our Mr. Burton, of Salt Lake City, you know—who is on the train, to take charge of the party on the Silver Plume trip."

Mr. Vennor said, "Oh," and then the young people began to appear, and the waiter announced breakfast. During the meal the President was too deeply engrossed in the working out of a small counterplot to hear or heed much of the desultory table-talk. It was quite evident that the passenger agent had learned of the proposed stop-over in Denver, and was preparing to take advantage of it. His confidence with Mrs. Dunham was only a roundabout way of notifying Gertrude.

Mr. Vennor considered many little schemes of the frustrating sort, and finally choosing one which seemed to meet all the requirements, put it in train immediately after breakfast.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-day?" he asked of Fleetwell, when they had drawn apart and lighted their cigars.

"Don't know," replied the collegian, between whiffs; "whatever the others want to do."

"I was just thinking," the President continued, carelessly. "The Beaswicke girls want to call on some friends of theirs, and that eliminates them. I expect to be busy all day; and Cousin Jeannette says she doesn't care to go about. Suppose you and Gertrude take a run up into the mountains on one of the narrow-gauges. It'll fill in the day, and you can be back in time for dinner this evening."

"I don't mind, if Gertrude wants to go; but I don't believe she does," said Fleetwell, with so little enthusiasm that the President looked at him sharply.

"Think not?"

"I'm almost sure she doesn't," the collegian replied, placidly.

Mr. Francis Vennor was a conservative man, slow to admit even the contradiction of facts. While waiting for Gertrude the previous evening, he had convinced himself that his daughter was about to sacrifice herself. To an impartial onlooker—and he prided himself on being no less—the evidence was logically conclusive; and, notwithstanding Gertrude's tardy denial, he still believed that his major premise was correct, or, at most, only errant in time.

Having thus set his judgment a bad example, it easily broke bounds again in the same direction. How should Fleetwell know that Gertrude would not care to spend the day in his company? Probably because they had found time before breakfast for another of their foolish disagreements. In that case, it would be the part of wisdom to separate them for the day; and a plan by which this might be accomplished, and the passenger agent checkmated at the same time, suggested itself at the instant.

"We'll let it go at that, then," he said, answering Fleetwell's assumption. "You can manage to wear out the day in town. Perhaps the Beaswicke girls will let you go calling with them."

"Think so? I'll go and ask them," Fleetwell said, with more animation than he had yet exhibited; and he threw away his cigar and went about it.

The President rose and crossed over to Mrs. Dunham's chair.

"Where is Gertrude?" he inquired.

"She complained of a headache and went to her room. Shall I call her?"

"Oh, no; but if you haven't already done so, I wish you wouldn't mention what Brockway told you, this morning—about his spending the day in Denver, I mean."

"Certainly not, if you wish it," the chaperon agreed; but the expression of her face was so plainly interrogative that the President was constrained to go on.

"There is nothing to be anxious about yet," he hastened to say; "but you know the old adage about the ounce of prevention. Gertrude is very self-willed, and they were together rather more than I could wish, last summer."

"I think you are altogether mistaken, Cousin Francis," said the good lady, in whom there was no drop of match-making blood. "She has talked very freely with me about him, and a young girl doesn't do that if there is any sentiment in

the air."

"I hope you are right. But it will do no harm to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. I fancy Chester didn't quite approve of the little diversion last evening—on the engine, you know."

"Pooh! I don't believe he gave it a second thought."

"Possibly not; but he had a very good right to object. It was a reckless bit of impropriety."

"You sat up for Gertrude last night; did you say as much to her?" the chaperon asked, shrewdly.

"Not quite that," said the President, who was unwilling to go into particulars.

"Because, if you did, it was injudicious, that's all. Gertrude is your own daughter, and she is enough like you to resent anything of that kind in a way to make you regretful. That accounts for the headache this morning."

Gertrude's father smiled rather grimly. "I shall presently find a remedy for the headache, and you'll see that it will work like a charm. But its efficacy will depend upon your discretion. Not a word about the passenger agent, if you please."

Mrs. Dunham promised, rather reluctantly, and Mr. Vennor put on his hat and left the compartment. He had business in the Ariadne; and a little later, Mrs. Burton, who was buttoning her shoe, looked up to find the calculating eyes of the President making a calm and leisurely valuation of her.

XIV

WITH DENVER IN SIGHT

There was the usual early morning confusion in the aisle of the Ariadne when Brockway picked his way forward to section three over a litter of opened hand-bags, lately polished shoes, and unshod feet. He found the Burton section empty, with the porter putting the finishing touches to his morning's work of scene-shifting.

"Yes, sah; de gemman's in de washroom, an' de lady——"

"Is right here," said a voice at Brockway's elbow. "Good-morning, Mr. Frederick; how do you find yourself—or aren't you lost?"

The forty-minute lock-out had left scant time for preliminaries, and Brockway left off the preamble.

"I'm not lost, but I'm going to be if you and John don't help me out. Will you do it?"

"Sight unseen." The little lady was eying her shoes wistfully and hoping that Brockway would be brief.

"I thought I could count on you. What is your programme for to-day?"

"For John, business, I suppose; for myself, a carriage, a handy card-case, and any number of 'how do you dos' and 'good-byes.' Why?"

"I want you both to give me the day, out and out. Listen, and don't say no till you've heard me through."

"Go on, but don't let it lap over into Denver; we're 'most there."

Brockway stated his case briefly. "It's probably the last chance I'll ever have to see her," he concluded.

"Why should you want to see her when there is nothing to be done, as you say?"

"I don't know that—but I do, and you must help me. Will you?"

"Help you carry on a brazen flirtation with that poor, innocent girl? Never! But if John says he'll go, I suppose I can't help myself"—resignedly.

"Thank you; I knew you wouldn't be cruel. And if John should happen to balk a little——"

"Why, I'll talk him over, of course; is that what you want?"

"That's it exactly. Thank you some more."

"Don't mention it. Is that all?"

"Y—yes, all but one little trifle of detail. Have you told John about my—my lunacy?"

"No."

"Then don't; it's bad enough to be an idiot and know it myself."

"I sha'n't—perhaps. Is *that* all?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then for mercy's sake do go and talk to John, and let me put on my shoes," said Mrs. Burton, impatiently. "I can't go to breakfast in my slippers."

Brockway vanished obediently, and presently found Burton struggling into his outer garments in the smoking-room.

"Hello, Fred; how are the invalids this morning? Get you out bright and early?"

"One of them did—that old fellow with the bad case of ticket-limits. I'm in trouble up to my neck, and you've got to help me out."

"Say the word and I'll do it if it costs me something," said Burton, who was nothing if not helpful to his friends.

"It's going to cost you something—a whole day, in fact. I promised to 'personally conduct' the crowd up to Silver Plume to-day, and the arrangements are all made. Now this old fellow says he isn't going; says I've got to stay in Denver with him and telegraph another thirty days to his ticket, or the heavens will fall. I'm going to do it, and I want you to take my place with the party."

"Same old maker of hard-and-fast promises, aren't you, Fred," said the general

agent, smiling. "I suppose I can do it, if you can square it with Emily."

"I've done that already; she's awfully good about it—says she'll go along and help you out. What's this place? Overton? By Jove! I'll have to be getting back to my car; we're only fifteen miles out. Thank you much, old man—see you later"—and the passenger agent pushed through the group in the wash-room and dropped off to once more make the circuit of car Naught-fifty.

XV

YARD-LIMITS

It was while Brockway was making his second circuit of the private car that Mrs. Burton looked up and encountered the calculating gaze of the President.

"Ah—good-morning, Mrs. Burton; you remember me, I see. On your way back to Utah, are you?"

"Yes—" the "sir" was on the tip of her tongue, but she managed to suppress it. "We have been to Chicago, to the passenger meeting."

"So I inferred. Do you enjoy Chicago, Mrs. Burton?"

She felt that five minutes of this would unhinge her reason, but she made shift to answer, intelligently: "Yes, in a way; but I've never been about much. Mr. Burton is always so busy when we are there."

"Precisely; always busy; that is the whole history of civilized man in two words, isn't it? But where is your good husband?"

"He is in the wash-room," she began; but at that moment Burton appeared.

"Ha!" said the President; "good-morning, Mr. Burton. You didn't expect to find me here chatting with your wife, did you?"

"Well, no, not exactly—that is—" Burton's one weakness lay in undue deference to his superior officers, and he stumbled helplessly. But his wife came promptly to the rescue.

"It's such a distinction, Mr. Vennor, that we don't know how to properly acknowledge it," she retorted, laughing, "Will you excuse me if I finish buttoning my shoe?"

"Certainly, certainly"—the President's tone was genially paternal; "I merely wanted to have a word with Mr. Burton;" and he rose and drew the general agent across to the opposite section.

"Sit down, sit down, Burton; don't stand on ceremony with me," he said,

patronizingly. "I came to ask a favor of you, and positively you embarrass me."

Burton sat down mechanically.

"I learned a few minutes ago through young Brockway that you were on the train," the President continued, lowering his voice, "and I understand that he wishes you to take charge of his party for the day on the trip up Clear Creek Canyon. Has he spoken to you about it?"

"Yes; he was here just now." Burton answered as he had sat down—mechanically.

"And you consented to do it, I presume?"

"Why, yes; he asked it as a personal favor, and I thought I might make a few new friends for our line. But if you don't approve——"

"Don't misunderstand me," interrupted the President, with well-feigned magnanimity; "as I said, I came to ask a favor. You met my daughter, Gertrude, when we were out last summer, I believe?"

"Yes, at Manitou." The general agent was far beyond soundings on the sea of mystery by this time.

"Well, you must know she took a great fancy to your wife, and when I heard of this arrangement, I determined to ask you to take her along with you for the day. May I count upon it?"

"Why, certainly; we shall be delighted," Burton rejoined. "Let me tell——"

But the President stopped him. He had taken time to reflect that a little secrecy might be judicious at this point; and he was shrewd enough to distrust women in any affair bordering upon the romantic. So he said:

"Suppose we make it a little surprise for both of them. Keep it to yourself, and when your train is ready to leave, I'll bring Gertrude over to you. How will that do?"

Burton was in a fair way to lose his head at being asked to share a secret with his President, and he promised readily.

"Not a word. Mrs. Burton will be delighted. I'll be on the lookout for you."

So it was arranged; and with a gracious word of leave-taking for the wife, Mr.

Vennor went back to his car, rubbing his hands and smiling inscrutably. He found his daughter curled up in the great wicker chair in an otherwise unoccupied corner of the central compartment.

"Under the weather this morning, Gertrude?" he asked, wisely setting aside the constraint which might naturally be supposed to be an unpleasant consequence of their latest interview.

"Yes, a little," she replied, absently.

"I presume you haven't made any plans for the day," he went on; "I fancy you don't care to go visiting with the Beaswicke girls."

"No, indeed; I can do that at home."

"How would you like to go up to Silver Plume with Mr. Brockway's party?"

She knew well enough that her father's cold eyes had surprised the sudden flash of gladness in hers, but she was not minded to reopen the quarrel.

"Oh, that would be delightful," she said, annulling the significance of the words with the indifference of her tone; "quite as delightful as it is impossible."

"But it isn't impossible," said the President, blandly; "on the contrary, I have taken the liberty of arranging it—subject to your approval, of course. I chanced upon two old friends of ours who are going with the party, and they will take care of you and bring you back this evening."

"Friends of ours?" she queried; "who are they?"

"Ah, I promised not to tell you beforehand. Will you go?"

"Certainly, if you have arranged it," she rejoined, still speaking indifferently because she was unwilling to show him how glad she was. For she was frankly glad. The glamour of last night's revelation was over the recollection of those other days spent with Brockway, and she was impatiently eager to put her impressions quickly to the test of repetition—to suffer loss, if need be, but by all means to make sure. And because of this eagerness, she quite overlooked the incongruity of such a proposal coming from her father—an oversight which Mr. Vennor had shrewdly anticipated and reckoned upon.

It was 7.30, and the train was clattering through the Denver yards, measuring the final mile of the long westward run. Gertrude rose to go and get ready.

"You needn't hurry," said her father; "the narrow-gauge train doesn't leave for half an hour. I'll come for you when it is time to go."

He watched her go down the compartment and enter her stateroom without stopping to speak to any of the others. Then he held up his finger for the secretary.

"Harry, when the train stops, I want you should get off and see where Brockway goes. You know him, and you might make an excuse to talk with him. When you have found out, come and tell me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Quatremain; and when he had kicked his pride into a proper attitude of submission, he went about the errand.

XVI

THE MADDING CROWD

Twice a day, in the time whereof these things are written, the platform of the Denver Union Depot gave the incoming migrant his first true glimpse of the untrammelled West. A broad sea of planking, open to the heavens—and likewise to the world at large—was the morning and evening arena of a moving spectacle the like of which is not to be witnessed in any well-ordered railway station of the self-contained East.

Trains headed north, east, south, and west, backed across the platform and drawn apart in the midst to leave a passageway for the crowds; other trains going and coming, with shouting yard-men for outriders to clear the tracks; huge shifting pyramids of baggage piled high on tilting trucks, dividing with the moving trains the attention of the dodging multitude; the hurrying throngs imbued for the moment with the strenuous travail-spirit of the New West; these were the persons and the properties. And the shrieking safety-valves, the clanging bells, the tinnient gong of the breakfast-room, the rumbling trucks, and the under-roar of matter in motion, were the pieces in the orchestra.

It is all very different now, I am told. They have iron railings with wicket-gates and sentinels in uniform who ask to see your ticket, and a squad of policemen to keep order, and rain-sheds over the platforms (it used not to rain in the Denver I knew), and all the other appurtenances and belongings of a well-conducted railway terminus. But the elder order of disorder obtained on the autumn morning when the "Flying Kestrel" came to rest opposite the gap in the bisected trains filling the other tracks. Brockway was the first man out of the Tadmor, but the gadfly was a close second.

"No, sir; I don't intend to lose sight of you, Mr. ah—Brockway," he quavered; and he hung at the passenger agent's elbow while the latter was marshalling the party for the descent on the breakfast-room, a process which vocalized itself thus:

Brockway, handing the ladies in the debarking procession down the steps of the car: "Breakfast is ready in the dining-room. Special tables reserved for this party.

Wait, and we'll all go in together. Leave your hand-baggage with the porter, unless it's something you will need during the day. Take your time; you have thirty minutes before the train leaves for Clear Creek Canyon and the Loop."

Chorus of the Personally Conducted:

"How long did you say we'd have?"

"What are they going to do with our car while we're gone?"

"Say, Mr. Passenger Agent, are you sure the baggage will be safe if we leave it with the porter?"

"What time have you now?"

"How far is it over to those mountains?"

"Oh, Mr. Brockway; won't this be a good chance to see if my trunk was put on the train with the others?"

"Say; what time did you say that Clear Creek Canyon train leaves?"

Brockway, answering the last question because the inquirer happens to be nearest at hand: "Eight o'clock."

The Querist, with his watch (which he has omitted to set back to mountain time) in his hand: "Eight o'clock? Then it's gone—it's half-past eight now! Look here."

Brockway, who is vainly endeavoring to persuade an elderly maiden lady to leave her canary in charge of the porter during the day: "That is central time you have, Mr. Tucker; mountain time is one hour slower. Careful, Mr. Perkins; let me take your grip. You won't need it to-day."

The Elderly Maiden Lady: "Now, Mr. Brockway, are you *sure* it'll be perfectly safe to leave Dicky with the porter?"

Mr. Somers, sotto voce in Brockway's ear: "Hang Dicky! Let's go to breakfast."

The Gadfly: "Mr. ah—Brockway, you will oblige me by sitting at my table. I don't ah—purpose to lose sight of you, sir."

Brockway, to the porter: "All out, John?"

The Porter, with the cavernous smile of his kind: "All out, sah."

Brockway, sandwiching himself between two of the unescorted ladies: "All aboard for the dining-room!"

So much Harry Quatremain, standing aloof, saw and heard, and was minded to go back to President Vennor and make his report accordingly. But the yard crew, already busily dismembering the "Flying Kestrel," whipped the Tadmor and the private car out into the yard, and the secretary was left standing in the unquiet crowd.

Having nothing better to do, he sauntered across to the depot, not intending to spy further upon the passenger agent, but rather cudgelling his brain to devise some pretext upon which he could safely lie to the President and so appease his self-respect. The pretext did not suggest itself; and after looking into the dining-room, where he saw Brockway and his thirty-odd in one corner, and the Burtons, whom he knew by sight, in another, he strolled out to the end of the building where the yard-crew was switching the Naught-fifty to its place on the short spur. The President was standing on the front platform; and Quatremain, having no plausible falsehood ready, reported the simple fact.

"Very good," said his employer. "Now go back and keep your eye on him; and, at precisely five minutes of eight, come and tell me where he is and what he is doing."

Quatremain turned on his heel and swore a clerkly oath, well smothered, to the effect that he would do nothing of the sort. It was not the first time the President had used him as a private detective, but, happily, use had not yet dulled his reluctance. None the less, he went back to the door of the dining-room and waited, and while he tarried curiosity came to keep wrath company. What was afoot that the President should be so anxious about the movements of the passenger agent? The secretary could not guess, but he determined to find out.

Three minutes before Quatremain's time-limit expired, Brockway, followed closely by a slope-shouldered old gentleman with close-set eyes, came out with Burton. He nodded to the secretary and kept on talking to the general agent. Quatremain could scarcely help overhearing.

"You can introduce yourself," he was saying; "there isn't time for any formalities. You'll find them docile enough—they haven't any kick coming with you, you know—and I'll be here to take them off your hands when you get back. No, I'll not go over to the train, unless you want me to; I'm going to the telegraph office with Mr. Jordan here, and then up-town to see our general agent about his

ticket. Good-by, old man; and thank you again."

Quatremain looked at his watch. It was 7.55, to the minute, and he walked leisurely around to the private car.

"Well?" said the President, and the steady gaze of the cold eye slew the falsehood which the secretary was about to utter.

"He's in the telegraph office with one of his people," Quatremain replied, angry enough to curse himself for being so weak as to tell the truth.

"Very good. Go into my stateroom and get the mail ready. I'll come in and dictate to you presently."

The secretary obeyed as one who may not do otherwise, and left the stateroom door ajar. A moment later, he heard a tap at the door of Gertrude's room, and then the President and his daughter left the car together. Quatremain slammed down the cover of his desk, snatched his hat, and followed them. He had paid the servile price, and he would at least gratify his curiosity.

He caught sight of them in the crowd streaming out toward the Colorado Central train, and scored the first point when he observed that the President made a detour to avoid passing the open door of the telegraph office. Then he kept them in view till he saw Miss Vennor give her hand to Burton at the steps of one of the narrow-gauge cars.

At that moment, Mrs. Burton, who was comfortably established in the midst of a carful of the Tadmorians, chanced to look out of the window. She saw the President and his daughter come swiftly across the platform, saw her husband step out to meet them and shake hands with Gertrude, remarked the quick flash of glad surprise on the young girl's face, and the nervous anxiety with which the President consulted his watch, and was immediately as well apprised of the inwardness of the little plot as if she had devised it herself.

"Oh! *oh!*" she said to herself, with indignant emphasis; "that venerable old tyrant is turning her over to us to get her out of Fred's way! *And he hasn't told her that Fred isn't going!*"

Now, to the Emily Burton type of woman-kind, the marring of a plot is only less precious than the making of one. The little lady had never been known to think deeply, but a grain of swift wit is sometimes worth an infinity of tardy logic. Whatever intervened, the conclusion was clear and definite; Brockway's chance

must be rescued at all hazards—and there were only two minutes in which to do it.

She scanned the throng on the platform eagerly, hoping to catch sight of him, but the faces were all strange save one. That was the face of the President's private secretary; and, without a moment's hesitation, she beckoned him.

Quatremain saw the signal, and made his way to her window, taking care to keep as many human screens as possible between himself and the group at the car steps.

"Mrs. Burton, I believe," he said, lifting his hat.

"Yes"—hurriedly. "Do you know Mr. Brockway?"

Quatremain bowed.

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Yes; he's over in the telegraph office."

"Will you take him a message from me, quickly?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Then tell him I say he is going to be lost if he doesn't catch this train; he'll understand. And *please* hurry—there isn't a second to spare!"

Quatremain nodded, and vanished in the crowd. He understood nothing of what was toward, but he suspected that what he was about to do would somehow interfere with the President's plans, and that was sufficient to make him run when he was well out of sight. He found Brockway in the telegraph office, writing a message, with the slope-shouldered gentleman at his elbow, and delivered Mrs. Burton's message *verbatim* and shorn of any introduction whatsoever.

The effect on the passenger agent was surprising, if not explanatory. "Says I'm going to be—Not if I know it! I say, Tom"—flinging the pad of blanks at the operator, to call his attention—"wire anything—everything—this gentleman wants you to; I'm off!"

"But, Mr. ah—Brockway, I—I protest!" buzzed the gadfly, clutching at the passenger agent; but he was not quick enough, and when the protest was

formulated, there was no one but the operator to listen to it.

The engine-bell was ringing and the train had begun to move when Brockway dashed out of the office, and the appreciative bystanders made way for him and cheered him as he sped away across the platform. It was neck-and-neck, and nothing to choose; but he was making it easily, when he collided squarely in mid career with the tall figure of the President. For a single passionate instant Mr. Francis Vennor forgot his traditions, and struck out savagely at the passenger agent. The blow caught Brockway full in the chest and made him gasp and stagger; but he gathered himself quickly, swerved aside, and ran on, catching the rear hand-rail of the last car as the train swept out of the station.

XVII

ON THE NARROW-GAUGE

For a certain breath-cutting minute after he had made good his grasp on the hand-rails of the rear car, Brockway was too angry to congratulate himself. A blow, even though it be given by a senior, and that senior the father of the young woman with whom one chances to be in love, is not to be borne patiently save by a philosopher or a craven, and Brockway was far enough from being either the one or the other.

But, fortunately for his own peace of mind, the young man reckoned a quick temper among his compensations. By the time he had recovered his breath, some subtle essence of the clean, crisp morning air had gotten into his veins, and the insult dwindled in the perspective until it became less incendiary. Nay, more; before the engineer whistled for Argo, Brockway was beginning to find excuses for the exasperated father. He assumed that Gertrude was on the train with the Burtons—Mrs. Burton's message could mean no less—and Mr. Francis Vennor had doubtless been at some pains to arrange the little plan of separation. And to find it falling to pieces at the last moment was certainly very exasperating. Brockway admitted it cheerfully, and when he had laughed aloud at the President's discomfiture until the sore spot under his right collar-bone ached again, he thought he was fit to venture among the Tadmorians. Accordingly, he made his way forward through the two observation-cars to the coach set apart for the thirty-odd.

His appearance was the signal for a salvo of exclamatory inquiry from the members of the party, but Brockway had his eyes on the occupants of a double seat in the middle of the coach, and he assured himself that explanations to the thirty-odd might well wait. A moment later he was shaking hands with Mrs. Burton and Miss Vennor.

"Dear me!" said the proxy chaperon, with shameless disingenuousness; "I was really beginning to be afraid you were left. Where have you been all the time?"

"Out on the rear platform, taking in the scenery," Brockway replied, calmly, sitting down beside Gertrude. "Didn't you see me when I got on?"

Mrs. Burton had seen the little incident on the station platform out of the tail of her eye as the train was getting under way, so she was barely within truthful limits when she said "No." But she looked very hard at Brockway and succeeded in making him understand that Gertrude was not to know anything about the plot or its marring. The young man telegraphed acquiescence, though his leaning was rather toward straight forwardness.

"Did you rest well after your spin on the engine last night?" he asked of Gertrude.

"Quite well, thank you. Have you ever ridden on an engine, Mrs. Burton?"

"Many times," replied the marplot; and then she made small-talk desperately, while she tried to think of some way of warning her husband not to be surprised at the sudden change in Brockway's itinerary for the day. Nothing better suggesting, she struck hands with temerity when Burton appeared at the forward door with the conductor, and ordered Brockway to take Gertrude back to the observation-car.

"It's a shame that Miss Vennor should be missing the scenery," she said. "Go along with her and make yourself useful. We will take care of your ancients."

The small plotter breathed freer when they were gone. She knew she had a little duel to fight with her conservative husband, and she preferred to fight it without seconds. Her premonition became a reality as soon as he reached her.

"How is this?" he began; "did you know Fred had changed his plans?"

She shook her head. "He didn't take me into his confidence."

"Well, what did he say for himself?"

"About changing his mind? Nothing."

"He didn't? that's pretty cool! What does he mean by running us off up here on a wild-goose chase?"

"How should I know, when he didn't tell me?"

"Well, I'll just go and find out," Burton declared, with growing displeasure.

But his wife detained him. "Sit down and think about it for a few minutes, first," she said, coolly. "You are angry now, and you mustn't forget that he's with Miss

Vennor."

"By Jove! that is the very thing I'm not forgetting. I believe you were more than half-right in your guess, yesterday; but we mustn't let them make fools of themselves—anyway, not while we are responsible."

"I don't quite *savez* the responsibility," retorted the little lady, flippantly. "But what do you imagine?"

"I don't imagine—I know. He found out, somehow, that she was going with us, and just dropped things and ran for it."

"Do you think he did that?"

"Of course he did. And if we're not careful the odium of the whole thing will fall on us."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I suppose we ought to go back from Golden and take Miss Vennor along with us."

"Wouldn't that be assuming a great deal? You would hardly want to tell the President that you had brought his daughter back because you were afraid she might do something rash."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Burton, who was rather out of his element in trying to pick his way among the social ploughshares.

"But that is what you will have to tell him, if we go back," she insisted, with delicious effrontery.

Burton thought about it for a moment, and ended by accepting the fact merely because it was thrust upon him. "I couldn't very well do that, you know," he objected, and she nearly laughed in his face because he had fallen so readily into her small trap; "but if we don't break it off, what shall we do?"

"Do? why, nothing at all! Mr. Vennor asks us to take his daughter with us on a little pleasure-trip, and he doesn't tell us to bring her back instanter if we happen to find Fred on the train."

Burton was silenced, but he was very far from being convinced, and he gave up the return project reluctantly, promising himself that he should have a very

uncomfortable day of it.

In the meantime, the two young people in the observation-car were making hard work of it. A good many undiscussable happenings had intervened between their parting and their meeting, and these interfered sadly with the march of a casual conversation. As usually befalls, it was the young woman who first rose superior to the embarrassments.

"I'm glad of this day," she said, frankly, when they had exhausted the scenery, the matchless morning, the crisp air, and half a dozen other commonplaces. "I enjoyed our trip down from Silver Plume a year ago so much, and it seemed the height of improbability to imagine that we'd ever repeat it. Did you think we ever should?"

"No, indeed," replied Brockway, truthfully; "but I have wished many times that we might. Once in awhile, when I was a boy, I used to get a day that was all my own—a day in which I could go where I pleased and do as I liked. Those days are all marked with white stones now, and I often envy the boy who had them."

"I think I can understand that."

"Can you? I didn't know little girls ever had such days."

"I've had a few, but I think they were never given me. They were usually stolen, and so were doubly precious."

Brockway laughed. "Suppose we call this a stolen day, and try to make it as much like the others as we can. Shall we?"

"It's a bargain," she said, impulsively.

"From this minute, I am any irresponsible age you please; and you—you are to do nothing whatever that you meant to do. Will you agree to that?"

"Gladly," Brockway assented, the more readily since his plans for the day had been so recently demolished and rebuilt. "We'll go where we please, and do as we like; and for this one day nobody shall say 'Don't!'"

She laughed with him, and then became suddenly grave. "It's no use; we can't do it," she said, with mock pathos; "the 'ancients and invalids' won't let us."

"Yes, they will," Brockway asserted, cheerfully; "Burton will take care of them—that's what he's here for. Moreover, I shall take it upon myself to abolish the

perversities, animate or inanimate."

"Please do. And if Mrs. Burton scold me——"

"She'd better not," said Brockway, with much severity. "If she does, I'll tell tales out of school and give her something else to think about."

"Could you?"

"You would better believe it; she is trembling in her shoes this blessed minute for fear I may. But you would have to stand by me."

"I? Well, I've promised, you know. What place is this?"

The train had entered the great gateway in Table Mountain, and was clattering past the Golden smelting works.

"It is Golden—you remember, don't you?" And then Brockway bethought him of something. "Will you excuse me a minute, while I get off and speak to the agent?"

"Certainly," said Gertrude; and when the train skirted the high platform, Brockway sprang off and ran quickly to the telegraph office. The operator was just coming out with a freshly written message in his hand.

"Hello, Fred," he said; "didn't know you were on. Do you happen to know a Miss Gertrude Vennor? She's with John Burton's party."

"Yes," said Brockway, tingling to get hold of the message before Burton should come along.

"All right; give her this, will you? I can't leave that blessed wire a minute."

Brockway thrust the telegram into his pocket, dodged around the throng of station loungers, and won back to the rear platform of the observation-car without seeing or being seen of the general agent. Then he drew the crumpled paper from his pocket and read it shamelessly.

"To Miss Gertrude Vennor,
"Care John Burton,
"On Colorado Central Train 51.

"Come back from Golden on first train. Have changed our plans, and shall

leave Denver at 1.30 P.M.

"FRANCIS VENNOR."

XVIII

FLAGGED DOWN

Brockway read the President's telegram twice, folded it very small, and tucked it into his waistcoat pocket.

"That's just about what I expected he'd do, and it's a straight bluff," he muttered. "All the same, she's not going back. And I've got to block it without getting Burton into trouble."

There was no time for anything but the simplest expedient. He jumped off again and ran back to the telegraph office.

"Say, Jim, that message to Miss Vennor is bulled. Ask Denver to repeat it to Beaver Brook, will you?" he said, interrupting the operator as he was repeating the train order.

The man of dots and dashes finished the order. "Can't do it, Fred; get me into hot water up to my neck. Think of something else."

"Will you help me if I do?"

"Sure; any way that won't cost me my job."

The conductor and engineer had signed the order, but Brockway begged for a respite. "Just a minute, Halsey, while I write a message," he said, snatching a pad of blanks and writing hastily, while the conductor waited.

> "To Francis Vennor,
> "Private Car 050, Denver.
>
> "Can't you reconsider and leave Denver to-morrow morning, as previously arranged? Am quite sure Miss Vennor prefers to go on. Answer at Beaver Brook.
>
> "Frederick Brockway."

He tossed the pad to the operator.

"There you are, Jim; don't break your neck to make a 'rush' of it; and when you hear the answer coming do what you can to make it limp a little—anything to change the sense a bit."

"I'll do it," quoth the operator; and then the conductor gave the signal, and Brockway boarded the train and rejoined Gertrude.

"Did you think I had deserted you?" he asked.

"Oh, no; and Mr. Burton's been in to keep me company. He came to ask if I didn't want to go back to Denver."

"Did he?" said Brockway, wondering if Burton had also had a message. "And you told him no?"

"Of course I did. Haven't we made a compact?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"You said you were going to be irresponsible, you know, and I didn't know just where it might crop out."

"Not in that direction, you may be sure. You said we were to do as we pleased, and I don't please to go back to Denver. But Mr. Burton seemed to be quite anxious about it, for some reason. I wonder why?"

"So do I," rejoined Brockway, innocently.

Gertrude stole a glance at him, and he tried to look inscrutable, and failed. Then they both laughed.

"You are keeping something back; tell me all about it," Gertrude commanded.

"I am afraid you will be very angry if I do."

"I shall be quite furious if you don't. My! how close that rock was!"

The train was storming up the canyon, dodging back and forth from wall to wall, roaring over diminutive bridges, and vying with the foaming torrent at the track-side in its twistings and turnings. The noise was deafening, but it was bearable, since it served to isolate them.

"Does the compact mean that we are to have no secrets from each other?" he asked, not daring to anticipate the answer; but Gertrude parried the direct question.

"What do two people who are trying to be very young and foolish and irresponsible know about secrets?" she demanded. "You are beating about the bush, and I won't have it. Tell me!"

For reply, he took the telegram from his pocket, opened it, smoothed it carefully on his knee, and handed it to her. She read it at a glance, and a faint flush came and went in her cheek, but whether of vexation or not he could not determine.

"You are very daring," she said, passing the square of paper back to him, and her voice was so low that he barely caught the words.

"You told me I wasn't to do anything that I meant to do: I certainly did not premeditate intercepting your telegrams—or answering them," he added.

"Then you have answered it? How?"

He turned the paper over and wrote his reply on the back, word for word.

"You dared to say that to my father!" she exclaimed. "How could you?"

"Under some circumstances, I think I could dare anything. But you are angry, as I said you'd be."

"Of course I am—very. I demand to be taken back to Denver this minute."

"Do you mean that?"

"Didn't I say it?"

Brockway tried in vain to read a contradiction in her face, but the steady eyes were veiled, and it is the eyes that speak when the lips are silent.

"I'm sorry," he began; "it meant a great deal to me, but I know it was inexcusable. I'll go and tell Burton, and you can go back from the Forks, where the trains meet."

Now Gertrude had builded upon the supposition that she was safe beyond the reach of recall, and she made haste to retract.

"Yes, do!" she said, tragically; "make me go down on my knees and beg you not

to—I'll do it, if you insist. How was I to know that you were only trying to humiliate me?"

The swift little recantation gave Brockway a glimpse into her personality which was exceedingly precious while it lasted. A man may fall in love with a sweet face on slight provocation and without preliminaries, but he knows little of the height and depth of passion until association has taught him. But love of the instantaneous variety has this to commend it, that its demands are modest and based upon things visible. Wherefore, certain small excellences of character in the subject, brought to light by a better acquaintance, come in the nature of so many ecstatic little surprises.

That is the man's point of view. The woman takes the excellences for granted, and if they are lacking, one of two things may happen: a great smashing of ideals, or an attack of heavenly blindness. Gertrude was of the tribe of those who go blind; and deep down in her heart she rejoiced in Brockway's audacity. Hence it was only for form's sake that she said, "How was I to know that you were only trying to humiliate me?"

"I humiliate you!" he repeated, quite aghast at the bare suggestion. "Not knowingly, you may be very sure. But about the telegram; you are not angry with me because I was desperate enough to answer it without having first shown it to you?"

"I said I was, and so I must be. But I don't see how you could have done otherwise—not after you had promised not to let anything interfere. Do you think Mr. Burton had a telegram, too?"

"I was just wondering," Brockway rejoined, reflectively. "I think we are safe in assuming that he hadn't."

"I don't care; I'm not going back," said Gertrude, with fine determination. "Papa gave me this day, early in the morning, and I'm going to keep it. What do you think of an irresponsible young person who says such an unfilial thing as that?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you what I think."

"Try me and see."

"That is one of the things I don't dare—not yet."

"You'd better not abate any of your daring; you'll need it all when we get back,"

laughed Gertrude, speaking far better than she knew.

"To take the consequences of my impudence?"

"Yes. You don't know my father; he is steel and ice when he is angry."

Remembering the object-lesson on the station platform in Denver, Brockway ventured to dissent from this, though he was politic enough not to do so openly.

"You think he will be very angry, then?"

"Indeed I don't—I know it."

"I'm sorry; but I'm afraid he will be angrier yet, before long."

"Why?"

"You read my message: I asked him to answer at Beaver Brook. He'll be pretty sure to send you a peremptory order to turn back from Forks Creek, won't he?"

"Why, of course he will; and I'll have to go back, after all—I sha'n't dare disobey. Oh, why didn't you make it impossible, while you were doing it?"

"I had to do what I could; and you, and Burton, and the operator, had to be saved blameless. But I'll venture a prediction. As well as you know your father, you may prepare yourself to be surprised at what he will say. I am no mind-reader, but I'm going to prophesy that he doesn't recall you."

"But why? I don't understand——"

"We are due at Beaver Brook in five minutes; wait, and you will see."

So they waited while the pygmy locomotive snorted and labored, and the yellow torrent roared and fled backward, and the gray cliffs on either hand flung back the clamorous echoes, and the cool damp air of the canyon, flushed now and then with a jet of spray, blew in at the car windows.

For the first time since her father had suggested the trip with the Burtons, Gertrude began to understand that it could scarcely have been his intention to give her an uninterrupted day in the company of the passenger agent. But in that case, why had he proposed the trip, knowing that Brockway's party would be on the train? The answer to this query did not tarry. She had caught the surprised exclamations of the Tadmorians when Brockway made his appearance, and they pointed to the supposition that his presence on the train was unexpected. And he

had been evidently embarrassed; and Mrs. Burton was curiously distrait and unmistakably anxious to get them out of the way before her husband should return.

These things were but straws, but they all pointed to one conclusion. Her father knew, or thought he knew, that the passenger agent was to stay behind in Denver, and he had deliberately sent her away for the day to preclude the possibility of another meeting. And when he had discovered that the little plan had miscarried, he had quite as deliberately ordered her return.

Speaking broadly, the President's daughter was not undutiful; but she was sufficiently like her father to be quickly resentful of coercive measures. Wherefore, when she had cleared up the small mystery to her own satisfaction, she hardened her heart and promised herself that nothing short of a repetition of the peremptory order should make her return on the forenoon train. And the shriek of the engine, whistling for Beaver Brook, punctuated the resolve.

XIX

THE FOOLISH WIRES

When President Vennor returned to his stateroom in the private car after the choleric little incident on the platform, he found his secretary waiting with open note-book and a sheaf of well-sharpened pencils. Quatremain's hands were a trifle unsteady when he began to write at the President's dictation, but his employer did not observe it. As a matter of fact, Mr. Francis Vennor was deep in the undercurrent of his private thoughts—thoughts which were quite separate and apart from the unbroken flow of words trickling out through Quatremain's pencil-point upon the pages of the note-book. Mere business was very much a matter of habit with the President, and the dictating of a few letters to be signed "Francis Vennor, President," did not interfere with a coincident search for some means of retrieving the morning's disaster.

It was a disaster, and no less. He began by calling it a mistake, but mistakes which involve the possible loss of fortunes, small or great, are not to be lightly spoken of. By the time he reached the end of the fifth letter, he had run the gamut of expedients and concluded to try the effect of a little wholesome parental authority.

"Go out and get me a Colorado Central time-card," he said to Quatremain; and when the secretary returned with a copy of the official time-table, Mr. Vennor traced out the schedule of the morning trains, east and west. Number Fifty-one was not yet due at Golden, and a telegram to that station would doubtless reach Gertrude.

"Take a message to Miss Gertrude, Harry," he began; but while he was trying to formulate it in words which should be peremptory without being incendiary, he thought better of it and went out to send it himself. There was a querulous old gentleman in the telegraph office who was making life burdensome for the operator, and it was with no little difficulty that the President secured enough of the young man's time and attention to serve his purpose.

"You are quite sure you can reach Golden before the train gets there, are you?" he said, writing the number of his telegraph frank in the corner of the blank.

"Oh, yes," replied the operator, with an upward glance at the clock; "there's plenty of time. I'll send it right away."

"But I ah—protest!" declared the querulous gentleman, and he failed not to do so most emphatically after the President left the office.

The operator turned a deaf ear, and sent the message to Miss Vennor; and when, in due course of time, Brockway's answer came, he sent it out to the private car. The President was still dictating and was in the midst of a letter when the yellow envelope was handed him, but he stopped short and opened the telegram. The reading of Brockway's insolent question imposed a severe test upon Mr. Vennor's powers of self-control, and the outcome was not wholly a victory on the side of stoicism.

"Curse his impudence!" he broke out, wrathfully; "I'll make this cost him something before he's through with it!" and he sprang to his feet and hurried out with the inflammatory message in his hand.

It is a trite saying that anger is an evil counsellor, and whoso hearkens thereto will have many things to repent of. No one knew the value of this aphorism better than Francis Vennor, but for once in a way he allowed himself to disregard it. He knew well enough that a delicately worded hint to Burton would bring the general agent and his wife and Gertrude back to Denver on the next train, but wrath would not be satisfied with such a placable expedient. On the contrary, he resolved to communicate directly with Gertrude herself, and to rebuke her openly, as her undutiful conduct deserved.

In the telegraph office the operator was still having trouble with the querulous gentleman, but the President went to the desk to write his message, shutting his ears to the shrill voice of the gadfly.

"But, sir, I must ah—protest. I distinctly heard Mr. ah—Brockway tell you to send anything I desired, and I demand that you send this; it was part of the ah—stipulation, sir!"

"This" was a message of five hundred-odd words to the local railway agent in the small town where Mr. Jordan had purchased his ticket, setting forth his grievance at length; and the operator naturally demurred. While he was trying to persuade the pertinacious gentleman to cut the jeremiad down to a reasonable length, the President finished his telegram to his daughter. It was curt and incisive.

"To Miss Gertrude Vennor,
"On Train 51.

"If you do not return this forenoon we shall not wait for you.

"Francis Vennor."

The operator took it, and the President glanced at his watch.

"Can you catch that train at Beaver Brook?" he inquired.

"Yes, just about."

"Do it, then, at once. Excuse me—" to the gadfly—"this is very important, and you have all day for your business."

The brusque interruption started the fountain of protests afresh, but the operator turned away and sat down to his instrument. Beaver Brook answered its call promptly, and the message to Miss Vennor clicked swiftly through the sounder.

For a quarter of an hour or more, Brockway's friend in the Golden office had been neglecting his work and listening intently to the irrelevant chattering of his sounder. He heard Denver call Beaver Brook, and when the station in the canyon answered, he promptly grounded the wire and caught up his pen. The effect of this manœuvre was to short-circuit that particular wire at Golden, cutting off all stations beyond; but this the Denver operator could not know. As a result, the President's telegram got no farther than Golden, and Brockway's friend took it down as it was sent. At the final word he opened the wire again in time to hear Beaver Brook swear at the prolonged "break," and ask Denver what was wanted.

Thereupon followed a smart quarrel in telegraphic shorthand, in which Denver accused Beaver Brook of going to sleep over his instrument, and Beaver Brook intimated that Denver was intoxicated. All of which gave the obstructionist at Golden a clear minute in which to determine what to do.

"If I only knew what Fred wants to have happen," he mused, "I might be able to fix it up right for him. As I don't, I'll just have to make hash of it—no, I won't, either; I'll just trim it down a bit and make it talk backward—that's the idea! and three words dropped will do it, by jing! Wonder if I can get the switchboard down fine enough to cut them out? Here she comes again."

The quarrel was concluded and Denver began to repeat the message. Brockway's

friend bent over his table with his soul in his ears and his finger-tips. Denver was impatient, and the preliminaries chattered through the sounder as one long word. At the final letter in the address, the Golden man's switch-key flicked to the right and then back again; and at the tenth word in the message the movement was repeated.

"O. K.," said Beaver Brook.

"Repeat," clicked Denver.

"No time; train's here," came back from the station in the canyon; and Brockway's friend sat back and chuckled softly.

XX

CHIEFLY SCENIC

When the train drew up to the platform at Beaver Brook, Brockway asked Gertrude if he should go and see if there were a message for her.

"No," she said, perversely; "let it find me, if it can."

It came, a minute later, by the hand of Conductor Halsey. She read it with a little frown of perplexity gathering between the straight brows.

"Do we live or die?" Brockway asked, crucially anxious to know what his friend had been able to do for him.

"Why, I don't understand it at all; it's simply Greek, after the other one. Papa says: 'Do not return on forenoon train. We shall wait for you.'"

"Good; I am a true prophet, and our white day is assured."

"Y—yes, but I don't begin to understand how he came to change his mind so quickly."

"Perhaps it was the moral force of my impudence," ventured Brockway.

"Don't make any such mistake as that," she said, quickly. "Papa will not forgive or forget that, and I am sorry you did it."

"You are a bundle of inconsistencies, as you promised to be," Brockway retorted. "But I'm not sorry, and I don't pretend to be. If I had smothered my little inspiration and given you your telegram at Golden, you wouldn't be enjoying this magnificent scenery now."

"No; and it is grand beyond words, isn't it? If it wasn't for the name of it, I could rave over it like a veritable 'Cooky.' Can't we go out on the platform?"

"Yes; but you'll get your eyes full of cinders."

"I don't care. Let's go, anyway."

They did it and, for a wonder, found the rear platform of the second observation-car unoccupied. Gertrude wanted to sit on the step, but Brockway objected, on the score of danger from the jutting rocks; so they stood together, bracing themselves and clinging to the hand-rails.

"Show me the 'Old Man of the Mountain' when we come to it," she said; "of course, there *is* an 'Old Man of the Mountain'?"

"There is, indeed, but we passed him long ago—at least, the one that is always pointed out to the 'Cookies' as you call them. But if you will watch the outlines of the cliffs you can find one of your own in any half-mile of the canyon."

"I don't want one if they are as cheap as that. I suppose you have made them at a pinch, haven't you? when you had forgotten to point out the real one?"

"I'm afraid I have; just as I have been obliged to invent statistics. But that is the fault of the man with a note-book; he will have them, you know."

"Why don't you tell him the truth?"

"Because he is too numerous in my calling; and again, because I don't often know enough of the truth to satisfy him."

"But it is wrong to invent things," she protested, dropping her irresponsible rôle to fight for the love of truth which was her Puritan birthright.

"I agree with you; but ciceronic lying is almost a disease. It's a paragrapher's proverb that railwaymen can't tell the truth, though I think a good many of us try to confine ourselves to the scenic lie. That seems to be almost necessary."

Gertrude did not reply. The bounding, swaying rear platform of a moving train which is reeling off miles and mountain heights of a stupendous natural panorama is not exactly the place for a dispassionate discussion of ethical principles. It hurt her to believe that her companion did not love truth in the abstract, and she meant to have it out with him later; but for the moment she put duty aside and opened the door to enthusiasm.

"Just think!" she exclaimed; "yesterday the horizon was so far away that it was actually invisible; and now you can almost reach out and touch it. Please don't let me miss anything that I ought to see."

"Did anyone show you 'The Mule' when you were up here last year?"

"No."

"It is just around the second curve ahead. Look well up the mountain-side for a big bowlder facing the canyon; it's a picture, not a figure."

She followed his directions, grasping the hand-rails and leaning far out to get a wider view. Brockway wanted to put his arm around her and hold her, but not daring to, stood by to catch her if she should lose her balance. Presently the great bowlder circled into view, and she got a very satisfactory sight of the pictured mule on its face before a sudden swerve of the train swept it out of range.

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "How did anyone ever get up there to paint it?"

"It is only a 'water-painting,' as the people up here call it; a natural discoloration on the face of the rock," he answered. "Isn't it life-like, though?"

"Indeed, it is; it is almost incredible." Then, suddenly: "That isn't a scenic fib, is it?"

"No. If you'll agree not to flog me with my own whip, I'll promise to tell you the truth and nothing but the truth, all day."

"Isn't that a very large promise?"

Brockway had a fleeting glimpse into the book of prophecy and saw that it might easily become so. None the less, he would not go back.

"Large or small, I'll keep it to the letter. But now I want to show you something else. Stand right here beside me and watch the outlines of those cliffs on the right; just the outline against the sky, I mean. Follow it steadily and tell me what you see when I give the word."

The train darted around a sharp curve and sped away up one of the few tangents in its tortuous path. "Now!" said Brockway, as the timbers of a culvert roared under the trucks of the observation-car.

"It's the Sphynx!" she said, with a little tremor of awe in her voice; "solemn, and majestic, and grander than anything I ever imagined! And I never even heard of it before. Do people know about it?"

"Not many; and those who do are hardened by familiarity. I have seen it a great many times, but it always gets near to me, just as it did to you."

"I shall never forget it. Please don't show me any more wonders just now. I shall rave like the most foolish 'Cooky' of them all if you do."

"I can't," said Brockway; "I don't know any more." A shrill whistle from the engine cut the sentence short, and Gertrude asked if they were coming to a station.

"Yes, it's Forks Creek, famous for its pies. Everybody eats pie at the Forks. Will you climb down from the heights of the sublime and go and eat pie with me?"

"Anything you say," she rejoined, laughing; and a few minutes later, John Burton the canny was scandalized to see the President's daughter walking up and down the narrow platform with the passenger agent, eating her half of an apple turnover which Brockway had bought and shared with her.

XXI

ON THE HEIGHTS

John Burton was scandalized, and he said as much to his wife when the train was once more on its way up the canyon.

"Emily, there's going to be a fracas when we get back to-night. It's my opinion that the President sent his daughter with us to get her out of Fred's reach."

"Then it serves him right," said Mrs. Burton, complacently. "She is not a child; she's old enough to know her own mind."

"That may be, but it doesn't let us out. I wish you'd go back and sit with them awhile."

"And get myself disliked? No, thank you. I may not shine as a star in the chaperonic firmament, but I'm a human being. Think of it; put yourself in Fred's place, if you haven't hopelessly outlived the possibility, and see how you'd like to be duennaed at such a time."

"It isn't a question of likes and—" but at that moment the truants appeared to speak for themselves.

"It's chilly out there in the open car, and we came in to talk and get warm," said Gertrude. "Did you get any pie, Mrs. Burton?"

"No; Mr. Burton wasn't as thoughtful as Fr—as Mr. Brockway."

"Mr. Brockway was twice thoughtful," laughed Gertrude, as the passenger agent drew a pie from under his coat and proceeded to cut it into quarters with his pocket-knife.

Burton said, "Oh, pshaw!" with deprecatory emphasis, but he accepted his allotment and ate it with the others. Afterward, when the talk took flight into the region of badinage, he went away and devoted himself dutifully to the Tadmorians.

When he was gone, the trio made merry with true holiday zest. For Gertrude, the

little plunge into the stream of unconventionality was refreshing and keenly exhilarating, and she bore her part joyously, forgetting the day of reckoning, and seeking only to make the most of the few hours of outlawry.

Brockway, too, drank of the cup of levity, but in his inmost parts he stood amazed with sheer joy in the presence of the real Gertrude—of the woman he loved divested of the mask of conventionality. He had loved her well for what he thought she was, and had been content to set her upon a pedestal to be worshipped from afar as the apotheosis of adorable womanhood. But the light of this later revelation individualized her; ideals and abstractions vanished before her living, breathing personality, and Brockway was made to know that she could never again be to him the mere archetype of lovable woman-kind. She was infinitely more. She was the one woman in all the world whose life might be the complement of his; the other half of the broken talisman; the major and truer portion of a mystic circle of which his being was the other segment.

All of which was doubtless very romantic and unmodern in a sensible young man of Brockway's practical and workaday upbringing; but there are more curious seeds lying dormant in the soil of human nature than the analyst has ever yet classified; and ideality and romanticism are but skin-masked in many a man whose outward presentment is merely the *abc* of modern realism.

So Brockway beheld and rhapsodized in secret, and laughed and chatted openly, and sank deeper and deeper in the pit of perplexity as the train burrowed its way into the heart of the mountains. For, keeping even pace with the gallop of love, pride rode militant. Life without Gertrude would be but a barren waste, said one; and, better a desert and solitude therein than an Eden envenomed by the serpent of inequality, retorted the other. Which proves that class distinctions are buttressed from below no less securely than they are suspended from above; and that feudalism in the subject has become extinct in one form only to flourish quite vigorously in another.

But these were under-thoughts. In his proper person, the passenger agent was doing his best to keep his promise to Gertrude; to make the day a little oasis of care-free enjoyment in the humdrum desert of commonplace.

At Georgetown, Burton proposed the transfer of the entire party to one of the observation-cars for the better viewing of the Loop, and the thing was done forthwith. But at the last moment Gertrude decided to remain in the coach, and Brockway stayed with her, as a matter of course.

"I've seen it twice, and I don't care to hang over the edge of it," she said. "Besides, it's very comfortable in here; don't you think so?"

"I'm not finding any fault," Brockway rejoined. "I wish we might have the coach to ourselves for the rest of the day."

"Do you? I thought you had been enjoying yourself all along."

"So I have, in a way; but I hate and abhor a crowd—I've had to be the nucleus of too many of them, I suppose."

"What do you call a crowd?" she inquired, laughing at the outburst of vindictiveness.

"Three people—sometimes. Half the pleasure of this forenoon has been slain by the knowledge that we'll have to fight for our dinners with the mob at that wretched little *table d'hôte* at Graymont."

"Can't we escape it?"

"Not without going hungry."

"I think Mr. and Mrs. Burton are going to escape it."

"What makes you think that?"

"This," said Gertrude, pointing to a well-filled lunch-basket under the seat.

"Praised be Allah!" Brockway exclaimed, fervently. "You can trust Burton to look out for the small personal comforts. And he never so much as hinted at this when I was grumbling about the dinner awhile ago. I've a mind to punish him."

"How?"

"By confiscating the basket. We could run away by ourselves and have a quiet little picnic dinner while they wrestle with the mob."

But Gertrude demurred. "That would be too callously villanous," she objected. "Can't we divide with them?"

"And go away by ourselves with the spoils?"

"Yes, if you like."

"I do like. I know a place, and the way to get there. Are you good for a climb?"

Brockway possessed himself of the basket, spread a newspaper on the opposite seat, and began to make a very fair and equitable division of the eatables.

"I'm good for anything," she said; then she pulled off her gloves and helped him divide the luncheon.

When the train stopped at Graymont, Burton went forward to get the luncheon. The coach was empty when he reached it, and the looted basket bore witness to the designs of the two young people. The general agent wagged his head dubiously, and when he had seen the last of the Tadmorians securely wedged into his place at the crowded table in the hotel dining-room, he failed not to lay the burden of gloomy prophecy once more upon the shoulders of the small person who, as he more than half suspected, was responsible for Brockway's presence.

By that time the subjects of the prophecy were well out of sight and hearing in the narrow ravine in which the great canyon has its beginnings. They walked the ties to the end of the track, and beyond that point picked their way over the rough ground until they came to a trail leading up the northern acclivity. Here Brockway took Gertrude's arm and together they began the ascent.

"Don't forget what I told you", he cautioned; "you are not to look back until I give the word."

"Should I turn into a pillar of salt if I did?" she asked.

"Possibly."

"Then I'll not do it; it would be rather awkward for both of us."

A hundred feet or more above the level of the railway track they came to a small plateau, and in the midst of it, Brockway stopped suddenly and spun her around with her face to the southward. No uninspired pen may set down in unmalleable phrase a description of what she saw; nor can any tide-gauge of language, spoken or written, measure the great wave of emotion which swept over her, choking the flood-gates of expression. From the moment the ascending train enters the canyon at Golden until it pauses opposite the hotel at Graymont, the scenery is rugged and inspiring, but it belittles itself by its very nearness. But from the plateau where they were standing, the vista expands as if by magic. The mighty mountain at whose foot the train pauses becomes but a foothill, and just beyond it, in indescribable grandeur and majesty, rises the huge, snow-clad bulk

of Gray's Peak, stupendous, awe-inspiring, dazzling the eye with its unspotted mantle of shimmering white, and slaying the sense of proportion with its immeasurable vastness.

Gertrude caught her breath, and Brockway stood uncovered beside her, silent and watchful. When her eyes began to fill with tears, he broke the spell.

"Forgive me," he said, quickly; "it was almost cruel not to prepare you, but I wanted to see if it would appeal to you as it does to me."

"It is unspeakable," she said, softly. "Shall we stop here?"

"No." He took her arm again and together they climbed higher on the mountain-side; silently, as befitted time and place, but each with a heartful of thoughts too large for speech.

XXII

ON THE SPUR-TRACK

At the precise moment when Gertrude and Brockway, pausing in their breath-cutting scramble up the bowlder-strewn mountain-side, were casting about for a suitable place in which to eat their luncheon, President Vennor and his guests were rising from the table after a rather early midday meal in car Naught-fifty. When the ladies had gone to their staterooms, the President sent Quatremain upon a wholly unnecessary errand to the post-office, and drew up a chair to smoke a cigar with Fleetwell.

It was not for nothing that he banished the secretary. The forenoon train from Clear Creek Canyon had arrived without bringing Gertrude; and the wires, which he had waited upon with increasing disquietude, still remained churlishly silent. A crisis in Gertrude's affair seemed imminent, and, as a last resort, Mr. Vennor had resolved to admonish Fleetwell, to the end that the collegian's wooing might be judiciously accelerated.

"I am afraid you have been lukewarm with Gertrude once too often, Chester, my boy," he began, with studied bluntness. "You ought by all means to have gone up in the mountains with her to-day."

Fleetwell tried to look properly aggrieved, and succeeded fairly well. "That's rather hard on me, isn't it? when I didn't so much as know she was going?"

"That is precisely the point I wished to arrive at," the President asserted, blandly. "You should have known. You can scarcely expect her to thrust her confidence upon you."

In his way, Fleetwell could be quite as plain-spoken as his hard-eyed cousin, and he answered the President's implication without pretending to misunderstand it.

"You mean that I've been shirking; that I haven't been properly reading my lines in the little comedy planned by my grandfather; is that it?"

"Well, not exactly shirking, perhaps, but the most observant person would never suspect that you and Gertrude were anything more than civilly tolerant cousins. I

know her better than you do, my boy, and I can assure you that she's not to be so lightly won. Ours is a fairly practical family. I think I may say, but there is a streak of romance in it which comes to the surface now and then in the women, and Gertrude has her full share of it. Moreover, she doesn't care a pin for the provisions of the will."

"Confound the will!" said the collegian. "I don't see why the old gentleman had to fall back on a medieval dodge that always defeats itself."

"Nor I; the matter would have been very much simplified if he had not. But, unfortunately, we have to do with the fact."

"It strikes me that we've had to do with it all along. I used to think Gertrude was rather fond of me, but since this money affair has come up, I'm not so sure of it."

"Have you ever asked her?" inquired the President, with an apparent lack of interest which was no index to his anxiety.

"Why—no; not in so many words, I believe. But how the deuce is a fellow to make love to a girl when his grandfather has done it for him?"

"That, my dear Chester, is a question you ought to be able to answer for yourself. You can hardly expect Gertrude to beg you to save her little patrimony for her."

It was an unfortunate way of putting it, and Mr. Vennor regretted his unwisdom when Fleetwell carried the thought to its legitimate conclusion.

"There it is again, you see. That cursed legacy tangles the thing every time you make a rush at it. I can understand just how she feels about it. If she refuses me it will cost her something; if she doesn't there will be plenty of the clan who will say that she had an eye to the money."

"What difference will that make, so long as you know better?"

The question was so deliberate and matter-of-fact that Fleetwell forgot himself and let frankness run away with him.

"That's just it; how the deuce is a fellow going to know——" but at this point the cold eyes checked him, and he suddenly remembered that he was speaking to Gertrude's father. Whereupon he stultified himself and made a promise.

"Perhaps you are right, after all," he added. "Anyway, I'll have it out with her to-night, after she comes back."

"'Have it out with her' doesn't sound very lover-like," suggested the President, mildly. "I can assure you beforehand that you will have to take a different tone with her, whether you are sincere or not; otherwise you will waste your breath and enrich half a dozen charities we know of."

"Oh, I'll do it right," said Fleetwell, nonchalantly; "but I'd give my share of the money twice over if it didn't have to be done at all—that is, if the money matter could be taken out of it entirely, I mean."

They smoked on in reflective silence for five full minutes before the President saw fit to resume the conversation. Then he said, slowly and in his levellest tone:

"You are going to speak to her to-night; very good—you have my best wishes, as you know. But if anything should happen; if you should agree to disagree; it is you who must take the initiative. If you don't mean to marry her, you must tell her so plainly, and before you have given her a chance to refuse you. Do you understand?"

Fleetwell sprang to his feet as if he had received a blow. He was a young giant in physique, and he looked uncomfortably belligerent as he towered above the President's chair.

"By Jove, I do understand you, Cousin Francis, and I'm ashamed to admit it!" he burst out, wrathfully. "The men on my side of the family have all been gentlemen, so far as I know, and I'll not be the first to break the record. I shall do what my grandfather expected me to do—what Gertrude has a right to expect me to do—and in good faith; you may be very sure of that!" And having thus spoken his mind, he went out, leaving Mr. Francis Vennor to his own reflections, which were not altogether gladsome.

XXIII

THE LAND OF HEART'S DELIGHT

"Here is the place I was looking for," said Brockway, handing Gertrude to a seat on a great fallen fir which had once been a sentinel on the farthest outpost of the timber-line. "It's three years since I was here, but I remember this log and the little stream of snow-water. Isn't it clear and pure?"

"Everything ought to be that, up here in the face of that great shining mountain," she said; and then they spread their luncheon on the tree-trunk between them, and pitied the crowded Tadmorians in the little hotel below.

"I feel as if I could look down benignantly on the whole world," Gertrude declared, searching for the paper of salt and finding it not. "The things of yesterday seem immeasurably far away; and as for to-morrow, I could almost persuade myself there isn't going to be any."

"I wish there wasn't going to be any," said Brockway; but the manner in which he attacked the cold chicken slew the pessimism in the remark.

"Do you? I could almost say Amen to that," she rejoined, soberly.

"You? I should have thought you would be the last person in the world to want to stop Time's train."

She laughed softly. "That is very human, isn't it? I was thinking precisely the same thing of you. Tell me why you would like to abolish the to-morrows—or is it only the very next one that ever will be that you want to escape?"

"It's all of them, I think: but you mustn't ask me to tell you why."

"Why mustn't I?"

"Because I can't do it and keep my promise to tell you the truth."

"That is frank, at least," she retorted. "I hope you are not a conscience-stricken train-robber, or a murderer, or anything of that kind."

"Hardly," Brockway replied, helping himself to another sandwich; "but you

would be quite horrified if I should tell you what I have really done."

"Do you think so? You might try me and see," she said, half pleading and half jesting.

Brockway thought about it for a moment.

"I'll do it—on one condition."

"You ought to be ashamed to propose conditions to me. What is it?"

"That you will tell me quite as truthfully why you agreed with me about the abolition of the to-morrows."

It was Gertrude's turn to consider, but she ended by accepting the proviso.

"After you," she said, with a constrained little laugh. "But who would ever think of exchanging confidences at this altitude over a stolen luncheon!"

"Not many, perhaps; but it's quite in keeping with our compact; we were not to do ordinary things, you know. And I'm sure this confession I am going to make is unpremeditated."

"Is it so very dreadful?"

"It is, I assure you, though I can make it in five words. I am hopelessly in love—don't laugh, please; there isn't the slightest element of levity in it for me."

Nevertheless, she did laugh, albeit there was pain at the catching of her breath.

"Forgive me," she said, quickly. "I don't mean to be silly if I can help it. Tell me about it, and why it is hopeless."

"It's the old story of Jack and his master," Brockway continued. "I have had the audacity to fall in love with the daughter of one of my betters."

"One of your betters? I'm afraid I can't quite understand that. Don't we live in a golden age when Jack is as good as his master, if he choose to make himself so?"

"By no manner of means," asserted this modern disciple of feudalism; "the line is drawn just as sharply now as it was when Jack was a bond thrall and his master was a swashbuckling baron."

"Who draws it? the thrall or the baron?"

The question opened up a new view of the matter, and Brockway took time to think about it.

"I'm not sure as to that," he said, doubtfully. "I've always taken it for granted it was the baron; but perhaps it's both of them."

"You may be very sure there are two sides to that shield, as to all others," she asserted. "But tell me more about your own trouble. Is it altogether impossible? Does the—the young woman think as you do?"

"It is; and I don't know what she thinks. I've never asked her, you know."

"You haven't? And still you sit here on this log and eat cold chicken and tell me calmly that it's hopeless! I said awhile ago that you were very daring, but I'll retract in deference to that."

"It's not exactly a lack of courage," Brockway objected, moved to defend himself when he would much rather have done something else. "There is another obstacle, and it is insurmountable. She is rich—rich in her own right, I'm told; and I am a poor man."

"How poor?"

"Pitifully so, from her point of view. So poor that if I gave her a five-room cottage and one servant, I could do no more."

"Many a woman has been happy with less."

"Doubtless, but they were not born in the purple."

"Some of them were, if by that you mean born with money to throw away. I suppose you might say that of me."

Brockway suddenly found the Denver eating-house cake very dry, but he could not take his eyes from her long enough to go and get a drink from the rill at the log-end.

"But you would never, marry a poor man," he ventured to say.

"Wouldn't I? That would depend very much upon circumstances," she rejoined, secure in the assurance that her secret was now double-locked in a dungeon of Brockway's own building. "If it were the right thing to do I shouldn't hesitate, though in that case I should go to him as destitute as the beggar maid did to King

Cophetua."

Brockway's heart gave a great bound and then seemed to forget its office.

"How is that? I—I don't understand," he stammered.

Gertrude gazed across at the shining mountain and took courage from its calm passivity.

"I will tell you, because I promised to," she said. "I, too, have money in my own right, but it is only in trust, and it will be taken from me if I do not marry in accordance with the provisions of my granduncle's will. So you see, unless I accept my—the person named in the will, I shall be as dowerless as any proud poor man could ask."

"But you will accept your cousin," said Brockway, quickly putting Fleetwell's name into the hesitant little pause.

She looked steadfastly at the great peak and shook her head.

"I shall not," she answered, and her voice was so low that Brockway saw rather than heard the denial.

"Why?" he demanded.

She turned to him with sudden reproach in her eyes. "You press me too hardly, but I suppose I have given you the right. The reason is because I—I don't think enough of him in the right way."

"Tell me one other thing, if you can—if you will. Do you love someone else?" His voice was steadier now, and his eyes held her so that she could not turn back to the shining mountain, as she wanted to. None the less, she answered him truthfully, as she had promised.

"I do."

"Is he a poor man?"

"He says he is."

"How poor?"

"As poor as you said you were a moment ago."

"And you will give up all that you have had—all that you could keep—and go out into the world with him to take up life at its beginnings?"

"If he asks me to. But he will not ask me; he is too proud."

"How do you know?"

His gaze wavered for an instant, and she turned away quickly. "Because he has told me so."

Brockway rose rather unsteadily and went to the rivulet to get a drink. The sweetly maddening truth was beginning to beat its way into his brain, and he stood dazed for a moment before he remembered that he had brought no drinking-cup. Then he knelt by the stream, and, turning his silk travelling-cap inside out, filled it to the brim with the clear, cold water. His hands trembled a little, but he made shift to carry it to her without spilling much.

"It is a type of all that I have to offer you, besides myself—not even so much as a cup to drink out of," he said, and his voice was steadier than his hands. "Will you let me be your cup-bearer—always?"

She was moved to smile at the touch of old-world chivalry, but she fell in with his mood and put his hands away gently.

"No—after you; it is I who should serve." And when he had touched his lips to the water, she drank deeply and thanked him.

Brockway thrust the dripping cap absently into his pocket, and stood looking down on her like a man in a maze; stood so long that she glanced up with a quizzical little smile and said, "Are you sorry?"

He came to himself with a start and sat down on the tree-trunk beside her. "Sorry? You know better than that. But I do believe I'm a bit idiotic with happiness. Are you quite sure you know what you have done?"

"Quite. I think I made up my mind last night to do it—if you should ask me. It was after our ride on the engine; after my father had let me see what was in his mind."

"Ah, yes—your father. He will be very angry, won't he?"

"Yes"—reluctantly.

"But you will not let him make you recant?"

She laughed joyously. "You think you are in love with me, and yet that shows how little you really know of me, or of the family characteristics. We have plenty of unlovelinesses, but fickleness isn't one of them."

"Forgive me," he said, humbly; "but it seems to me there is so little to hold you, and so much to turn you aside. I——"

A series of shrill shrieks from the locomotive in the valley below interrupted him, and he rose reluctantly. "They're calling us in; we'll have to go."

She took his arm and they ran down the steep declivity, across the small plateau, and so on to the bottom of the railway cutting. Just before they reached the train, Brockway asked if he should tell the Burtons.

"As you please," she replied. "I shall tell my father and Cousin Jeannette as soon as we get back."

They found the passengers all aboard and the train waiting for them, and Mrs. Burton scolded them roundly for their misdeeds.

"We had a mind to go off and leave you," she said; "it would have served you right for running away. Where ever have you been?"

"Up on the hill, taking in the scenery," Brockway replied; and Gertrude abetted him with an enthusiastic description of Gray's Peak as seen from the plateau—a description which ran on without a break until the train paused at Silver Plume, where the Tadmorians debarked to burrow in a silver mine. Burton burrowed with them, as a matter of course, but his wife declined to go.

"I shall stay right here and keep an eye on these truants," she declared, with great severity. And Brockway and Gertrude exchanged comforting glances—as who should say, "What matters it now?"—and clasped hands under cover of the stir of debarkation. And Mrs. Burton saw all this without seeming to, and rejoiced gleefully at the bottom of her match-making heart.

When the Tadmorians had inspected the mine, and had come back muddy and besprinkled with water and besmirched with candle-drippings, the train went on its way down the canyon. Having done what he might toward pumping the well of tourist curiosity dry on the outward journey, Burton was given a little rest during the afternoon; and the quartette sat together in the coach and talked

commonplace inanities when they talked at all. And the burden of even this desultory conversation fell mainly upon the general agent and his wife. The two young people were tranquilly happy, quite content to be going or staying, or what not, so long as they could be together.

At Golden, Brockway ran out and secured a copy of the President's telegram as it stood when written; and when opportunity offered, he showed it to Gertrude.

"It was purposely garbled by a friend of mine," he confessed, shamelessly; "but how much or how little I didn't know till now. I have no excuse to offer but the one you know. I thought it was my last chance to ever spend a day with you, and I would have done a much worse thing rather than lose it. Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you for daring to make me happy? I should be something more or less than a woman if I didn't. But my father won't."

"No, I suppose not. But you must not try to shield me. When you tell him, let it be clearly understood that I alone am to blame. Is there any probability that he has carried out his threat of leaving you behind?"

"Not the least," she replied, confidently; "it was only what you of the West would call a—a little bluff, I think."

"You still think it will be better for you to tell him first? that I'd better not go to him at once?"

"I do; but you may speak to him afterward, if you think best."

"It must be this evening. When shall I come?"

"Any time after dinner. If you will watch the window of my stateroom, I'll let you know when you can find him alone."

The day was going out in a dusty twilight, and they were again standing on the rear platform of the second observation-car.

When the train clattered in over the switches and stopped on the outer track of the Denver station platform, this last car was screened by the dimly lighted hulk of the Tadmor switched in to receive its lading. Brockway ran down the steps and swung Gertrude lightly to the platform; after which he put his arms about her and kissed her passionately.

"God knows when the next time will be," he said, with a sudden foreboding of

evil; and then he took her arm and led her swiftly across to the private car, leaving the Burtons to go whither they would.

XXIV

THE END OF A STOP-OVER

The waiter was laying the plates for dinner when Gertrude came out of her stateroom, and Fleetwell rose and placed a chair for her where they would be out of earshot of the others.

"Had a comfortably good time to-day?" he inquired, stretching himself lazily on the lounge at her side.

"Yes. What have you been doing?"

"'Socializing,' as Priscilla says; cantering about all over Denver, looking up people we shouldn't nod to at home. Where are your friends?"

"The Burtons? I think they went to a hotel. They are not going on till to-morrow night."

"I wonder what became of the passenger agent; I haven't seen him since morning," said the collegian, with his eyes lying in wait to pounce upon her secret.

"He was with us," she replied, calmly, and Fleetwell sat up immediately.

"Oughtn't I to be jealous?" he demanded.

"I don't know why you should be?"

"I fancy the others would say I ought to be."

"Why?"

"For obvious reasons; aren't we supposed to be as good as engaged?"

"I don't know about the supposition; but we are not engaged."

"No; and your father says it's my fault. Will you set the day?"

Her smile was sweet and ineffable. "What an enthusiastic wooer you are, Cousin Chester. Couldn't you rake up the embers and fan them into a tiny bit of a blaze?

just for form's sake, you know."

"That's nonsense," he answered, placidly. "We've known each other too long for anything of that sort. But you haven't answered my question."

"About the day? That is nonsense, too. You know perfectly well there isn't going to be any day—not for us."

Fleetwell drew a long breath and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Don't let us make any mistake about this," he said, soberly. "I'm asking you in good faith to be my wife, you know."

"And I am refusing you in equally good faith. I don't love you at all—not in that way."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Yes, surer now than ever before, though I've known it all along."

"Then you refuse me point blank?"

"I do."

He fetched another long breath and took her hand.

"That's the kindest thing you ever did for me, Gerty," he said, out of a full heart. "I—I'm ashamed to confess it, but I've been disloyal all along. It's——"

"It's Hannah Beaswicke; I knew it," she said, smiling wisely. "But don't humiliate yourself; I, too, have been 'disloyal,' as you call it."

"You?"

"Yes; I'll tell you about it some time—no, not now"—shaking her head—"dinner is ready."

It was thus that Fleetwell kept his promise to his cousin, and there had been never so much as a word about what Mr. Francis Vennor considered the main question at issue, namely, the fate of Gertrude's legacy. And when they came to the table together they were so evidently at peace that the President drew another false conclusion and wore his best King George smile throughout the entire dinner-hour.

At the conclusion of the meal, Fleetwell dodged the customary cigar with his cousin. Under the circumstances he deemed it prudent to give the chapter of accidents a clear field. Moreover, he conjectured that Gertrude had somewhat to say to her father, and would be grateful for an undisturbed half-hour; wherefore he proposed a stroll up-town to Mrs. Dunham and the Misses Beaswicke, and presently left the car with the three of them in tow.

The President was in his stateroom, refilling his cigar-case; and when he came out, Gertrude and Quatremain were alone in the large compartment.

"Where are the others?" he asked, pausing at her chair to light his cigar.

"They have gone up-town for a walk."

"H-m; and left you behind?"

"I didn't care to go." She saw that her opportunity was come, and gave the secretary a look which should have made him vanish at once. It did not, but her father cut the knot of that difficulty.

"It's a fine night; will you take a turn outside with me, while I smoke?" he said.

She acquiesced, and they went out to pace up and down the long platform. Two turns they made in silence while Gertrude sought vainly for words confessional, and at the third her father helped her without intending to.

"When is it to be?" he asked, abruptly.

She supposed he meant her marriage to Brockway, but she determined to make him speak plainly. So she said, "When is what to be?"

"Your marriage. Didn't you and Chester settle matters between you just before dinner?"

She laid fresh hold of her courage and answered, truthfully. "Yes, but not as you imagine. Chester asked me, because, I fancy, you told him to; and I refused him."

She expected nothing less than an outpouring of bitter words, but she was disappointed. Once and again they measured the length of the great platform before he spoke. Then he said, quite temperately, she thought, "So it is the passenger agent, after all, is it?"

"Yes." She said it resolutely, as one who may not be moved.

"Very good; you are your own mistress, and if you elect to be the wife of a wage-earning mechanic, I suppose it's your own affair."

There was so little heat in the innuendo that it seemed scarcely worth while to resent it; nevertheless she ventured to say: "Great-grandfather Vennor was a carpenter, and I suppose he worked for wages."

"Doubtless; but there is the better part of a century between then and now. However, I presume you have counted the cost. You lose your money, and that's the end of it—unless Chester happens to marry first."

"What difference would that make? It was I who set the conditions of the will aside."

"All the difference in the world. In this case, the law takes no cognizance of intention. If Chester marries first, it would be taken as *prima facie* evidence that he had prevented you from fulfilling your part of the conditions. But that is neither here nor there; Chester is not exactly the kind of man to be caught in the rebound; and I presume you wouldn't be mercenary enough to wait for anything so indefinite as his marriage, anyway."

"No."

"Then you lose your money." He could not forbear the repetition.

"I know it."

"Does your—does the young man know it?"

"Yes; otherwise he would not have spoken."

"No?" There was the mildest suggestion of incredulity in the upward inflection. "Since you have made your decision, it is as well you should think so. You are quite willing to begin at the bottom with him, are you?"

"I am."

"Because I meant what I said last night. You have made your bed, and you will have to lie on it; you will get nothing from me."

"We ask nothing but—but your good will." Gertrude was as undemonstrative as the daughter of Francis Vennor had a right to be, but his coldness went near to

breaking down her fortitude.

"My good will!" He turned upon her almost fiercely. "You have no right to expect it. What has come over you in the last twenty-four hours that you should override the traditions and training of your whole life? Has this fellow but to crook his finger at you to make you turn your back upon everything that is decent and respectable?"

"Don't," she said, with a little sob in her voice; "I can't listen if you abuse him. I love him; do you understand what that means?"

"No, I don't; you are daft, crazy, hypnotized." The gathering throng was beginning to make privacy impossible on the platform, and he led her back to the car. "You'll do as you please in the end, I suppose, but not here or now." He handed her up the steps of the private car and turned to go away.

"Papa—one word," she pleaded. "Won't you see Mr. Brockway to-night?"

"No; and if I do, it will be the worse for him." And when she had entered the car, he went away quickly and climbed the stairs to the train-despatcher's office on the second floor of the Union Depot.

Meanwhile, Brockway had eaten his supper and posted himself where he could watch what he supposed to be the window of Gertrude's stateroom for the promised signal. He saw the car empty itself, first of Fleetwell and the ladies, and then of the President and his daughter, and while he was waiting for the latter to return, Fleetwell came back, breathless.

"By Jove, Mr. Brockway, this is great luck!" he exclaimed. "You know Denver pretty well, don't you?"

"Fairly well. I knew it better when I lived here."

"Do you happen to know this gentleman?" handing Brockway a card with a name written across it.

"Yes; very well, indeed."

"Then I wish you'd come and help me find him. I've been out in a cab once, and the driver got lost. Will you do it?"

"With pleasure, if you'll get me back here quick. I have an engagement that can't be put off."

They ran out through the building and took a carriage. "Just get me to the house," said the collegian, "and you can come straight away back in the cab," but beyond this he offered no explanations, and Brockway gave the order to the driver.

When they reached the house in question, Fleetwell rang the bell, and the answer from within seemed to be satisfactory. "All right," he called back from the doorway; and a few minutes later Brockway was again on the station platform, watching the non-committal windows of the private car.

It was while the passenger agent was up-town with Fleetwell that President Vennor went to the despatcher's room. The result of his visit may be told in the words of a terse order which presently clicked through the sounder in the yardmaster's office.

> "J. H. M.,
>
> "Denver Yard.
>
> "Send out Car Naught-fifty, President Vennor and party, on Number 103, ten-five this P.M.
>
> "A. F. V."

Of this Brockway knew nothing, and he haunted the vicinity of the spur-track with great patience for the better part of two hours. At nine-forty-five, Fleetwell and the ladies returned. They were all laughing and chatting gayly, and when they entered the car, Brockway gave up his vigil. It was too late to hope for a private interview with Mr. Vennor, and he concluded to go over to the Tadmor to see if his people were settled for the night.

Passing the telegraph office, he asked if there were any messages. There was one; the much requested extension of the gadfly's ticket; and thrusting it into his pocket, the passenger agent hurried across to the special sleeper.

Two minutes afterward, a switching-engine ran around on the spur-track, bumped gently against the Naught-fifty, and presently backed out into the yard with the private car in tow.

XXV

WESTWARD HO!

When Brockway boarded the Tadmor, most of the thirty-odd had gone to bed; but a committee of three was waiting in the smoking-room on the chance that the passenger agent would put in an appearance before the departure of the night train for the west. The little gentleman in the grass-cloth duster and velvet skull-cap was chairman of this committee, and he stated its object.

"We've been trying to make you more trouble, Mr. Brockway," he said, pleasantly. "Before the others went to bed, we discussed the advisability of leaving Denver to-night, instead of in the morning. It would give us an extra day in Salt Lake City, and that is what most of us would like. Can it be done?"

Brockway glanced at his watch and answered promptly. "It'll take sharp work; the train leaves in ten minutes. I'll try it, but if I make it, I can't go with you. My hand-baggage is at the hotel, and there's no time to send for it."

Ordinarily, the amendment would have killed the original proposition; but Mr. Somers saw that in Brockway's eyes which made him hasten to forestall argument.

"I was afraid of that," he said; "but it can't be helped. Of course, we'd like to have you with us, but I believe the extra day is of greater importance."

Brockway made a dumb show expressive of his gratitude. "All right; then I'll bid you all good-by, and get you out to-night, if I can."

"But I ah—protest!" came with shrill emphasis from the vestibule, and the night-capped head of the gadfly was thrust around the door-jamb. "I ah—stipulated ——"

Brockway snatched the ticket-extending telegram from his pocket, thrust it into Mr. Somers's hand, and fled without another word. One minute later he was pleading eloquently with the train-despatcher.

"Oh, say, Fred, let up!" protested the man of orders. "It's too late, I tell you. The train'll pull out in two minutes, and I couldn't raise the yard in that time."

But the passenger agent would not be denied. He carried his point, as he usually did, and was shortly racing out across the platform, clothed with authority to hold the train until the Tadmor could be coupled thereto. Graffo, the conductor, was found just as he was about to give the signal, but he waited while the switching-engine whipped the Tadmor around and coupled it to the rear of the train, grumbling meanwhile, as was his time-honored prerogative.

"Like to know how the blazes I'm going to make time to-night, with them two extras hooked on at the last minute!" he growled; but Brockway corrected him.

"There's only one," he began; and when Graffo would have contradicted him, two belated passengers came in sight, hurrying across the platform to catch the waiting train. Brockway considerately ran back to help them aboard. It was the general agent and his wife; and Mrs. Burton made breathless explanations.

"Changed our minds at the last minute," she gasped. "John was afraid the President might not find him with his nose in his desk when he gets there." Then, with truly feminine irrelevance: "I've been dying to get a chance to ask you how you made out—to-day—with Gertrude; quick—the train's going!"

Brockway grinned. "You're the best chaperon in the world, Mrs. Burton—after the fact."

"Oh, I'm *so* glad. Can't you come along and visit with us in Salt Lake?"

"Not for a king's ransom," retorted Brockway, laughing. "You may be very sure I sha'n't leave Denver while the Naught-fifty stays over there on——" He turned to point out the President's car and went speechless in the midst of his declaration at sight of the empty spur-track. The glare of the masthead arc-lights left no room for uncertainty. The private car was gone.

"Why, Fred! what is the matter?" queried Mrs. Burton anxiously from the step of the sleeping-car; but at that moment Graffo swung his lantern and the train began to move.

Brockway stood staring across at the empty spur in witless amazement, but he sprang back out of the way when the step of the car next to the regular sleeper brushed him in passing. The touch broke the spell. As he started back, the sheen of the nearest electric lamp fell fairly upon the oval medallion on the side of the moving car, and he saw the gilt figures "050" flash for a half-second before his eyes.

In a twinkling he knew what had been done, and what he should do. When the Tadmor came up, he caught the hand-rail and boarded the train without so much as a thought for his belongings left behind at the up-town hotel. The Tadmor's smoking-room was deserted, and he went in to burn a reflective cigar, and to ponder over the probable outcome of this latest proof of the President's resentment.

Having failed to get speech with Gertrude, he could only guess at the result of her interview with her father, but the sudden change in the itinerary spoke for itself, and thus far the guess was twin brother to the truth. But two hours had intervened between Mr. Vennor's hasty decision and the departure of Train Number 103, and many things may befall in two hours.

XXVI

A BLIND SIDING

When the President went back to the Naught-fifty after his visit to the despatcher, he meant to tell Gertrude at once what he had done, and the reason therefore; but she had retreated to her stateroom, and in reply to his tap at the door had begged to be excused. After that, there was ample time for reflection, and the President walked the floor of the central compartment, smoking many cigars, and dividing the time impartially between wondering what had become of the other members of the party, and speculating as to the probable effect upon Gertrude's hallucination of the sudden and unannounced flitting.

Almost at the last moment, when he had begun to fear they had gone to the theatre, Mrs. Dunham and the young people returned, full to the lips with suppressed excitement; and in the midst of the bustle of departure the two young women made a descent upon Gertrude's room, while Mrs. Dunham took the President aside. What passed between them, Quatremain, who was pretending to be asleep in the nearest chair, could not overhear; but that Mrs. Dunham's news was startling and not altogether unpleasant was plainly evident to the secretary.

By this time the private car had been switched to its place in the train, and when the steady rumbling of the wheels betokened the beginning of the westward journey, Gertrude appeared with the two young women, and there was a dramatic little scene in the central compartment, through which the secretary did not even pretend to sleep. The President's daughter demanded to know where they were going, and why she had not been told, ending by throwing herself into Mrs. Dunham's arms and crying as if her heart would break. And, for the first time in Quatremain's knowledge of him, the President had nothing to say, while Fleetwell spoke his mind freely, though in terms unintelligible to the secretary, and Mrs. Dunham bore the weeping young woman away to the privacy of her own stateroom. After which, Mr. Vennor, deserted of all of them, lighted another cigar and betook himself to the rear vestibule, to what meditative end Quatremain could only guess.

The train was well out of Denver and speeding swiftly through the night on its flight over the swelling plain. The President stood at the rear door of his car,

gazing abstractedly at the bobbing and swaying front end of the sleeper which had been coupled to the Naught-fifty at the moment of departure. After a time the train paused at a station, and when it moved on again the light from the operator's bay-window flashed upon the name over the door of the following car. The President saw it and started back with an ejaculation which would have sounded very like an oath, had there been any one to hear it. Then he came close to the glass-panelled door and scowled out at the Tadmor as if it were a thing alive and perversely and personally responsible for this latest interference with his plans.

He was fond of boasting that he had no creed, but, in his way, Francis Vennor was a better fatalist than many who assume the name. When the grim humor of the relentless pursuit began to appeal to him, the wrathful scowl relaxed by degrees and gave place to the metallic smile. It could scarcely be prearrangement this time, he decided; it was fate and no less; and having admitted so much, he crossed the platforms and let himself into the ante-room of the Tadmor.

Brockway was still sitting in the smoking-room, and he was so taken aback that he returned the President's nod of recognition no less stiffly than it was given. Whereupon Mr. Vennor entered the compartment, gathered up his coat-tails, and sat down beside the passenger agent to finish his cigar.

Now Brockway inferred, naturally, that Gertrude's father had come to have it out with him, and for the first five minutes he waited nervously for the President to begin. Then it occurred to him that possibly Mr. Vennor had come to accord him the interview which Gertrude had promised to procure for him; and he spent five other minutes of tongue-tied embarrassment trying to pull himself together sufficiently to state his case with becoming clarity and frankness. The upshot of all this was that they sat smoking solemnly and in phlegmatic silence for upwards of a quarter of an hour, at the end of which time the President rose and tossed his cigar-butt out of the window.

"Going on through with your people, are you?" he said, steadying himself by the door-jamb.

"Yes; as far as Salt Lake," Brockway replied, wondering if he ought to apologize for the intention.

"H-m; changed your plans rather suddenly, didn't you?"

"The party changed them; I wasn't notified till ten minutes before train-time."

"No? I suppose you didn't know we were going on to-night, either, did you? or did the despatcher tell you?"

"No one told me. I knew nothing of it till I saw the Naught-fifty in the train."

"And that was?——"

"Just at the last moment—after the train had started, in fact."

"Ah. Then I am to understand that our movements have nothing to do with your being here now?"

Brockway had begun by being studiously deferential and placable, but the questions were growing rather personal.

"You are to understand nothing of the sort," he replied. "On the contrary, I am here solely because you saw fit to change your itinerary."

President Vennor was so wholly unused to anything like a retort from a junior and an inferior that he sat down in the opposite seat and felt mechanically in his pockets for a cigar. Brockway promptly capped the climax of audacity by offering one of his own, and the President took it absently.

"It is scarcely worth your while to be disrespectful, Mr. Brockway," he said, when the cigar was alight.

"I don't mean to be."

"But you intercepted my telegram this morning, and sent me a most impertinent reply."

"I did; and a little while before that, you had tried to knock me down."

"So I did, but the provocation was very considerable; you must admit that."

"Cheerfully," said Brockway, who was coming to his own in the matter of self-possession with gratifying rapidity. "But I take no shame for the telegram. As I told Miss Gertrude, I would have done a much worse thing to compass the same end."

The President frowned and coughed dryly. "The incentive was doubtless very strong, but I am told that you have since been made aware of the facts in the case—relative to my daughter's forfeiture of her patrimony, I mean."

"The 'incentive,' as you call it, was the only obstacle. When I learned that it did not exist, I asked your daughter to be my wife."

"Knowing that my consent would be withheld?"

"Taking that for granted—yes."

"Very good; your frankness is commendable. Before we go any farther, let me ask one question. Would anything I could give you induce you to go about your business—to disappear, so to speak?"

"Yes."

"Name it," said the President, with ill-concealed satisfaction.

"Your daughter's hand in marriage."

"Ah;"—he lost his hold upon the hopeful alternative and made no sign —"nothing less?"

"Nothing less."

"Very good again; then we may go on to other matters. How do you expect to support a wife whose allowance of pin-money has probably exceeded your entire income?"

"As many a better man has done before me, when the woman of his choice was willing to put love before luxury," quoth Brockway, with more philosophy than he could properly lay claim to.

"H-m; love in a cottage, and all that, I suppose. It's very romantic, but you'll pardon me if I confess I'm not able to take any such philosophical view of the matter."

"Oh, certainly; I didn't suppose you would be. But if you don't like it, the remedy is in your own hands," said Brockway, with great composure.

"Ah; yesterday you told me I was mistaken in my man; this time it is you who are mistaken. Gertrude will get nothing from me."

Brockway met the cool stare of the calculating eyes without flinching, and refused to be angry.

"You know very well I didn't mean that," he said, calmly. "I wouldn't touch a

penny of your money under any circumstances that I can imagine just now."

"Then what do you mean?" demanded the President.

Brockway thought he might as well die fighting, so he shrugged his shoulders and made shift to look indifferent and unconcerned.

"I'm well enough satisfied with my present income and prospects, and Gertrude is quite willing to share them with me; but if you think I'm not earning enough money, why, you are the President of a very considerable railway company, and I'll cheerfully attack anything you see fit to give me from the general passenger agency down."

"Ha!" said the President, and for once in a way he acknowledged himself fairly outdone in cold-blooded assurance; "you have the courage of your convictions to say that to me."

"Not at all," replied Brockway, riding at a gallop along the newly discovered road to the President's favor; "I merely suggest it to help you out. I'm very well contented where I am."

"Oh, you are. And yet you would consent to take service under me, after what has passed between us? I say you have courage; I could break you in a year."

"Possibly; but you wouldn't, you know."

The President rose and held out his hand with a smile which no man might analyze.

"You refuse to be bullied, don't you? and you say you would attack anything. I believe you would, and I like that; you shall be given the opportunity, and under a harder master than you have ever had. You may even find yourself required to make bricks without straw. Come, now, hadn't you better retract and go about your business?"

"Never a word; and where Gertrude goes, I go," said Brockway, taking the proffered hand with what show of indifference he could command.

"Very well, if you will have it so. If you are of the same mind in the morning, perhaps you'd better join us at breakfast and we can talk it over. Will you come?"

"Yes, if you will tell the other members of your party why I am there."

The President smiled again, sardonically this time.

"I think the occasion for that has gone by," he said. "Good-night."

When the outer door closed behind his visitor, Brockway collapsed as was his undoubted privilege. Then he revived under the stimulus of an overwaxing and masterful desire to see Gertrude again before he slept—to share the good news with her before the burden of it should crush him. And he was considering how it might be brought about when the engineer blew the whistle for Bending Bow.

XXVII

THE DRUMMING WHEELS

Bending Bow is but an insignificant side-track on the mountain-buttressed plain some thirty miles from Denver; and I would for the sake of the two young persons whose romance this is, that it might have been a meeting-point with a delayed train.

When the first of the switch-lights flashed past the windows of the Tadmor, Brockway went out and stood on the step ready to drop off when the speed should slacken sufficiently to permit it. While hanging from the hand-rail he glanced ahead and saw that which made his heart glad. The signal-lamp at the station turned a crimson eye toward the train, and that meant orders, and a few more seconds of precious time.

At the first shrill sigh of the air-brakes, he sprang off and ran beside the private car, trying to peer into the darkened windows, and taking all sorts of risks considering the hazard he ran of lighting upon the wrong one.

But good fortune was with him. Before the smoking wheels had quite ceased grinding fire out of the brake-shoes, he came to a window with a tiny corner of a handkerchief fluttering beneath it. It was Gertrude's signal, and he understood then that he had been keeping tryst on the wrong side of the car as it stood on the spur-track in Denver. The window was closed and curtained like the others, but it went up noiselessly when he tapped on the glass.

Now it was pitchy dark, both within and without, but love has sharpened senses and eyes which no night has ever yet been black enough to befool. "Frederick!" said a soft voice from within, and there was joyful surprise in the single word. Then a hand came out to him, and he possessed himself of it as one who will keep that which is his.

"God bless you," he whispered; "I hardly dared hope to find you up."

"I wasn't up," said the tender voice, with a touch of sweet shyness in it; "but I couldn't go to sleep for thinking how disappointed you must be. How did you find out we were going?"

"By the merest chance; but it's all right now—your father has just been in to see me."

"Has he? Oh, I hope you didn't quarrel!"

"Not at all," said Brockway, reassuringly. "We sat together and smoked like two Indians at a pow-wow, and neither of us said a word for nearly half an hour. After that, he got up to go away, and then he thought better of it and sat down again, and we had it out about the telegrams and other things. That cleared the air a bit, and before he left, he accepted the situation without saying so in so many words, and promised to graft me on the C. & U. in some place where I can earn more money. Don't cry; it's too good to be true, but the fact remains."

"I'm not crying, but I'm glad enough to do a much more foolish thing. You won't let my money make any difference now, will you?"

"Your money isn't in it, and I think I made your father understand that I'd never have spoken if I hadn't known you were going to lose it."

"But I—I haven't lost it. Didn't he tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"About Cousin Chester and Hannah Beaswicke; they were married this evening. I don't understand the legal part of it, but papa says that saves my money. You won't let it make any difference?"

Brockway gripped the small hand as if he were afraid it might escape him after all, and tried to flog himself around to the new point of view. It was a breath-taking process, but he compassed it more quickly since there was no time for the nice weighing of scruples. Moreover, it was too late to give poverty-pride a second hearing. So he said:

"I can't let it make a difference now, but I shall always be glad that I asked you when we both believed you were going to lose it. And I ought to have guessed about your cousin's marriage, but I didn't—I helped him find the County Clerk, and wondered why he was so anxious about it. I'm glad you didn't have to break his heart."

She laughed happily. "There was no question of hearts between us; he knew it, and I knew it; and when he spoke to me to-night, we settled it definitely. Are you glad or sorry? about the money, I mean."

"Both, I think; glad for your sake, though."

"I'll go and live in the five-roomed cottage with you, if you like, and we'll forget all about it."

"I believe you'd do it"—Brockway glanced up, and, seeing the red signal still displayed, blessed the tardy operator who was doubtless bungling the train-order—"but I shan't insist." Then with a touch of graver earnestness: "We are properly engaged now, aren't we?"

"I should hope so"—shyly.

He took a ring from his pocket and slipped it over the finger of the captive hand.

"It isn't every one who goes prepared," he said, with quiet humor; "it was a gift from a train-load of Grand Army people I took across last year; and I've carried it in my pocket ever since because I didn't think I had any right to wear diamonds. Will you wear it for me?"

"Always."

"Will you wear it to-morrow—before all the others? I'm coming in to breakfast, you know. Your father asked me."

"I said always."

Conductor Graffo, coming out of the telegraph office with a scrap of tissue paper in his hand: "All abo-o-ard!"

"That parts us again," said Brockway, sorrowfully. "Good-night, dear; God keep you safe"—the air-brakes sighed sympathetically, and he kissed her hand and released it—"till to-morrow." His face was at the window, and two soft arms came out of the square of darkness and went about his neck, and two lips that he could not see brushed his cheek.

"Till to-morrow," she repeated; and then the train began to move and she let him go quickly that he might run no risk of stumbling.

The engine groaned and strained, filling the air with a jarring as of nearby thunder; the steam hissed from the cylinders, and the great driving-wheels began once more to measure the rails. Brockway swung lightly up to the step of the Tadmor, and when the last switch-lamp had shot backward into the night, went to his berth to wrestle with his happiness until tardy sleep came, bringing in its

train a beatific vision in which the song of the drumming wheels became the overture to a wedding march, and the mellow blasts of the whistle rang a merry peal of joy-bells.

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