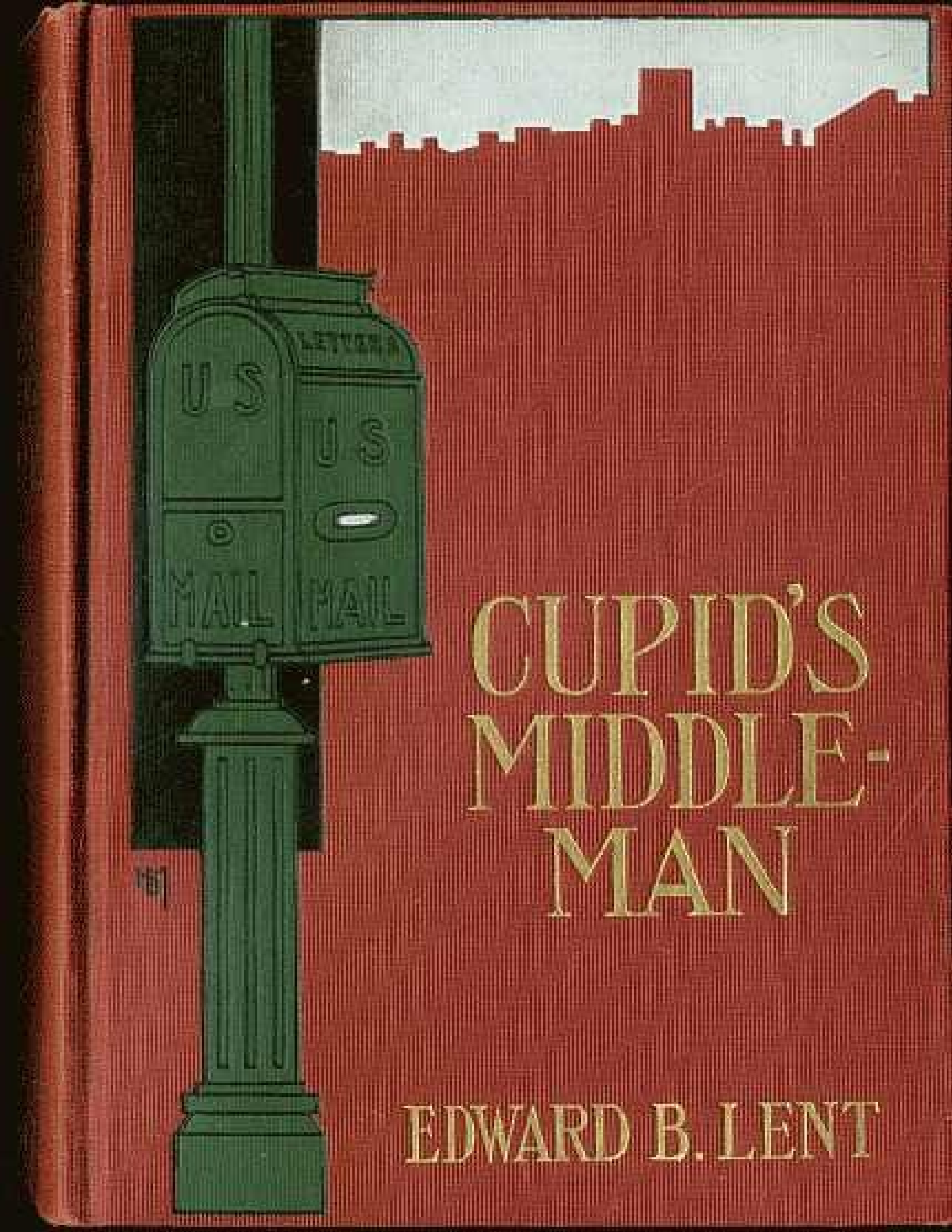

CUPID'S MIDDLE-MAN

EDWARD B. LENT

Title: Cupid's Middleman

Author: Edward B. Lent

Illustrator: H. B. Matthews

Release Date: March 8, 2010 [EBook #31561]

Language: English

Produced by Woodie4, Suzanne Shell and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

CUPID'S MIDDLEMAN

CUPID'S MIDDLEMAN

BY

EDWARD B. LENT

AUTHOR OF "BEING DONE GOOD"

ILLUSTRATED BY

H. B. MATTHEWS

NEW YORK

CUPPLES & LEON

To My Friend,

HERBERT F. GUNNISON,

of the
Brooklyn Eagle.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

John Alden was a celebrated Cupid's middleman. In presenting the cause of Miles Standish to Priscilla, however, he did not attend strictly to business as a jobber. He was not able to resist the lady when she asked: "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" That famous question has practically made it impossible for the middleman to make much headway in the assumed part. Benjamin Hopkins, of Oswegatchie County, was not a traitor—perhaps because he never met the fair Priscillas face to face.

This story can teach no new lesson; it can only recall the ancient wisdom which filled Miles Standish when it was too late. In the poem by Longfellow, the Plymouth Captain says:

> "* * * I should have remembered the adage—
> If you would be well served, you must serve yourself; and moreover,
> No man can gather cherries in Kent at the season of Christmas!"

E. B. L.

Cupid's Middleman

CHAPTER I

"Jim, it's years since you asked me to help you out in a love affair," I said. "Has your old heart grown cold, shriveled up, or what's the matter?"

"You're right, Ben; it must be a long time back. But why don't you put out a few letters for yourself?"

"I wish I could get a dollar a ton for all I have written for you," said I; "then I'd have a fortune and all the girls would be chasing me for my money."

"Say, was it as bad as that, do you think?"

"Well, cut the price in two and I'd be satisfied."

"What a fool I was, Ben, to let you trifle with my fair friends in that way! You came near putting me in a terrible hole several times."

"Is that so? You never said anything about it. Tell me now."

"Not for a mansion and forty servants would I tell you. Well, I should say not. Nay! Nay!"

"I'll bet you profited by my efforts and you're not willing to let on. Do you think that is a friendly attitude to take toward an agent who has increased the range of your powers of fascination?"

"You came near increasing the length of my neck by several inches. Why, the fathers and big brothers of some of those girls you wrote to came near lynching me."

"Well, I wasn't to blame for that, was I?"

"You certainly were. You laid it on too thick."

"Not too thick to please the girls, did I?"

"Suited some of the girls first rate, but it's bad to write so much. It's apt to come back at you when you least expect it."

"What do you care so long as the girls were pleased? You were not courting the

father. If you had intended to have the old gentleman read them I could easily have changed the style from a Grade A love to a nice assortment of short business phrases. But, say, Jim, you ought to tell me what happened. Come, now! Any bull's-eyes?"

"Do you know that you wrote enough letters to my girls to have married me off a dozen times or more? There are some streets I dare not pass through now—there's that foolish creature in West Thirty-eighth Street, for example."

I knew that Jim would leak a little if persistently tapped with interrogations.

"What about her? Did we send her many or was she easily won?" I asked. "Hard or soft?" As the middleman it was purely business with me.

"That girl was a queer case," said Jim, and he reflected for a moment. "Why, do you know, you had her running to clairvoyants for advice. She didn't think anything of putting up five dollars to learn how it was going to turn out. As soon as I heard that I quit calling and shut you off, for it was either that or get shot, I believed."

"That's quite a case, Jim. Let me into all of that, won't you?"

"I'm not going to tell you. It's past now, so let it go. You got me into enough trouble to fill a book. The book won't be written, though, for the inside story dies with me."

"Come, come, Jim; it's not fair to shut me out from all the excitement and fun after I did all the drudgery. Think how I used to struggle here to keep up my end."

"You struggle! Where do you suppose I came in? Still, I'll say no more about it, for I see you are trying to pump me. Let it pass. How do you find the state of the country to-night?"

Jim swung from the interesting subject to my hobby, political economy and measures for saving the nation from its impending doom. A man who can't make much headway toward home-building before or after marriage usually becomes a reformer. Men with families take things as they are, if they live at home instead of a club, and find plenty to do. I could not be moved without a protest.

"Never mind, Jim," said I. "You may want me to help you out some day and I shall not undertake to handle the case unless it is clearly stated in the contract

that I am to be in at the finish."

"Agreed; Ben, you are to be there."

"Even though you're going to be lynched, don't hesitate to send for me."

"That'll probably be the finish, if I give my secrets away to you again. Still, I am past that now." He seemed to doubt his words, however.

"Hanging or wedding, I'm to be there—is that agreed?"

"You'll be the best man in any event and you may stand just as close as the minister or the mob will allow."

I could see that he was in a good humor and had noticed its increasing hold upon him for several weeks. Such a fine specimen of farm-bred manhood as Jim Hosley could not escape, although he had kept from the net and in the free waters of bachelorhood until he was thirty. Six feet two inches, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, and as rosy as a schoolboy, he seemed born to remain young and handsome always. Well do I remember this conversation now, and how little we then realized the nature of the fruitage of our folly which we discussed so airily that evening in our bachelor apartments where we kept house together.

I regret that I am not a literary man. I never corresponded with magazine editors without paying the return postage and therefore I am not in shape to put in the soft touches where they belong, and I am also aware that the field is too big for me, for it includes the heart of a woman, a domain in which I am easily lost, although I did set up to be a pilot for my friend.

As for my own matrimonial prospects, they were dim. I really cared nothing about them, for I understood I was such a small potato I wouldn't be noticed for seed, and there seemed poor prospects for me to ever sprout into anything that would attract attention enough to draw a handful of paris green and plaster. I had a better opinion of my ideas on saving the country, however. I found a lot of people who agreed with me that the country was going to the bad; that there wasn't much use trying to get money enough ahead to go into business, because if you did you would only net fresh air and exercise and an appetite that would cut whale oil and consume the margin.

Jim found it an easy matter to turn me from prying into his private affairs. I had just been reading my paper. "Shall Autocrats Rule Us?" was the subject of the

editor's heavy work for the evening and it stirred me up. That fellow used "strong and powerful" language, as our dominie used to say when he was preaching and got two feet away from his notes on the pulpit and doubled on his tracks.

"You can put it down in your notebook, Jim, that I say the country is in a bad fix."

"That's right, Ben, and unless you get the job of mending it, no George Washington will appear."

"Listen to this," said I, paying no attention to his guying. "'Everywhere the voice is that of Democracy, but the hand and the checkbook are those of a respectable Autocracy.' Isn't that so? Why, when I had ploughed through a stack of those magazines" (and I pointed to our parlor table and its load of ten-cent literature) "I burned two fillings of the lamp, and I tell you I had to swallow hard on a lot of big words that would have kept old Webster chasing to the fellows he stole from; I wound in and out a lot of trotting sentences that broke twice to the line on a track that was laid out by a park gardener to go as far as possible without reaching anywhere, and I fetched up this morning with a swelled head, stuffed full of cold-microbes that had formed a combine from the nozzle of my Adam's apple clean up to a mass of chronic gooseflesh that had crusted on the top of my crown as solid as if it had been put there by a file-maker, expert in permanent pimpling—"

"Yes, I noticed them when you were at breakfast this morning," sniffed Jim.

"Why, it's no joke, Jim; this discussion about the country will wind up in some sort of a revolution. I have been talking around lately among the plain people, and a lot of them declare straight up and down that the country is going to peter out like the water in the tap here in our fifth flat when I am completely soaped up and have to stand there and feel it crackle and dry in my ears and burn me blind. Pretty soon those people who read my paper, say the prosperity of the United States will slow down into a quiet trickle, then a dribble shading off into a blast of air and a maddening gurgle, while folks stick their heads out the window and swear at the government for not giving them notice."

"It's an awful big country to save," said Jim. "Look at the Prohibitionists."

"Well, Jim, I must say I get discouraged when I read of one man being worth a thousand million dollars. It makes me feel mighty poor. I don't see any use in

being ambitious and taking any stock at all in anything so far as I am concerned, but I do hate to see the government come to harm. I get to thinking that if the Declaration of Independence isn't going to hold out that I'll change my politics and then see what will happen. When a fellow who is as set in his ways as I am changes his politics, reform must be coming, for I would probably be the last man to flop."

"If you could stick to one girl the way you do to the Republican party," said Jim, "you would soon be letting the country go to blazes."

I could see that he was inclined toward shallow conversation. It was evident that he had more to tell me than he dared in view of the calamity which had followed his former confidences. I said nothing, merely making note of his mental condition. I was not through with the country by any means. It was best to pump Jim by indirect conversation.

"It's an awful thing to think of changing your politics," I continued. "Why, up in Oswegatchie County, as far back as anybody can remember or read in the town papers on file, my folks have been Republicans and have been honored with office, earned good salaries and some of the longest obituary poems ever penned by that necrological songbird, Amelia Benson."

"She sang like a catbird for fifty cents a column," remarked Jim.

"Her style was good for the price and it was preferred because it never struck below the belt," I added. "Her occasional verse was a trifle worse. Don't you know 'The Pain Killer' used to be full of it when advertisements ran low?"

"I always liked that paper in your town," said Jim—"for shaving."

Our paper was called "The Pain Killer" down in Jerusalem Corners and other distant places when it was so full of stomach-bitters advertisements that the news of the week had to be left out for a couple of issues and seemed such ridiculous reading when it appeared, especially to the sick who were then out ploughing and the parents of the babies that had been hinted about some time before and were then swaddled, exercising with the colic and ready to have their names in print as among those present.

Jim had an important engagement and dressed with some care to meet what was evidently a social demand of consequence. I had observed of late that clothes were playing a greater part in his society drama. It seemed to me he must be

getting close to a leading lady.

The conversation ended with a "Good-night" from Jim and he passed out leaving me to ponder alone. The hermits of the country have time to consider its welfare, so I went to reading my magazines to gather more inspiration for denouncing the United States Senate and the rest of the rascals.

The railroads are to blame. I hold them responsible, for one of them brought me down to New York ten years ago on a ten-dollar excursion ticket, and an old Sunday-school teacher of mine who had seen all he could pay for here wanted to get back, so he made me an offer of five dollars for the return half, and after practicing my handwriting for a spell he got so accurate he could write my name about as well as I could, in case the conductor cornered him and wanted to throw him off into the Black River. He landed home all right and nobody was the wiser. Would that all my trickery had died as gentle a death! But I see now that fooling with another fellow's courtship and cheating a railroad are different, because the railroad is everybody's business and the other is supposed to be a private affair. Cheating a railroad used to be no crime till they got to cheating us so hard. I remember up in Oswegatchie County that all of my folks in the County Clerk's office held passes and seldom complained about the railroad robbing us of our land, so that five dollars taken contrary to the contract on the ticket did not worry me overmuch, because I knew my dad would have closed on it like Jim Jackson's foot always accidentally trod on and spiked anything that rolled his way in the old man's store.

Jim Hosley and I, two bachelors who have been down here in this great metropolis for ten years, looking for the fortunes we always hear about at the annual Waldorf dinners of the Oswegatchie County Society as being a part of the perquisites of our northern tribe, then lived together in a top apartment pretty well down-town, conveniently situated five flights up without an elevator and the same number back on the turn when anything was needed from the corner store. Jim came from Gorley and I from Dazer Falls. The solitude of the upper air, therefore, suited us. A man can stand for five hours at any corner in Dazer Falls and shout "Fire" through a forty-inch megaphone without starting up a native. Dazer Falls is a study in village still life. In Gorley silence and race suicide are equally common and not noticed except by strangers. Up in the fifth flat we got away from the world almost as well, except that the clatter of our dish-washing and the thumping of our disagreeing opinions would at times sound like the whirr of industry, for Jim and I did our own housework, our own thinking and lived as cheaply as monopoly will permit (monopoly, that is the

thing I am against as a political economist, I can tell you). The pile that was to come our way we had not yet receipted for. Once or twice, years before, we had thought we were getting close to it, but we found we'd have to change our politics to get farther. After that I lost all personal ambition, as I could get so few people to listen to my plans for making everything right. These kickers spent all their time kicking against monopoly, but wouldn't let me show them how to slay it. When I began my studies along this line I hesitated whether to begin war near the top with the United States Senate or at the bottom with the poor masses in the slums. Down at the bottom I would be more at home, for I know full well what it is to be bleached by the blues of adversity. In saving the masses though, by a direct appeal, I did not think I could do much to brag about down here, for they don't understand more than half you say to them in English and their suspicion sours the half they take in before they make any use of it. This would have made it extra hard for me, because advice was all I had to use in saving the country. Up in the United States Senate I used to think I might do something, but it was such a long way up from where I stood. They have been taking tremendous fees up there for their own advice, generally given to other members of their distinguished body or to members of their own State legislatures, as to how to vote wisely on this or that piece of law ordered by their clients. Therefore, it seemed to me it would be only reasonable for them to take my advice, as they might be able to turn it over at a good figure a little later on when the custom-made law business picked up again. Just now I don't suppose they could do much with it, for most of those old codgers are as glum as a funeral march; but, of course, I admit I am no judge of chin music and could not understand what they said, probably, if they spoke.

I want to state right here, though, that it is a mistake for a man to undertake to save the country and to have ideas on that subject when he tries to help another fellow win the heart of a girl and gets mixed up in the tangle that such interference is bound to bring on anybody who attempts it. I didn't know, and therefore I should have thrown up the job as soon as I began to get wound in it. You have heard that gentle hum of the buzz-saw? You have seen how still it runs and how its feathery edge seems calm during the lull in the sawmill? You also noticed that no one who understands the sawmill business ever goes near it to give it a friendly tap just when it is looking that way? It is the same with the other fellow's love affairs. Leave them alone when all is quiet, and when there are ructions leave them alone. They are buzz-saws for theorists. A man with ideas on saving the country is the poorest man in the world to undertake to help save a friend with a sick heart. The little matter of the country is a cinch

compared to that job. Why, the little matter of stringing a few extra stars to make traveling at night safer on the Milky Way would be an easy contract compared to that. But I touched the saw and it certainly did cut off a lot of opinions I used to be proud of.

Jim and I had a habit of going over the sad state of the country pretty thoroughly during our leisure moments in the evening. There were chairs in our parlor that fitted us to a dot. They were seldom if ever dusted, unless they were accidentally turned over and then some would fall off, but no one ever disturbed them and ruffled them into hard knots just to improve their appearance. We sat on the chairs, not on their appearance. During our talks Jim did the listening. This constituted a *de facto* conversation. His knowledge of Gorley and up-State affairs, after an absence of ten years, was well maintained by regularly reading the county papers, but his knowledge of monopoly and our foreign affairs came wholly from me while we would sit and cure the air of our front room with our smoking corncobs. And dad, who used them in his smokehouse, used to say they beat sawdust for flavor. We mixed a little short-cut tobacco to sweeten the cob. This was not our ideal way of spending the evening, for we had a Perfecto ambition. For ten years, though, we had been gradually squeezing ourselves to fit circumstances and had come to realize that the pipe and kerosene oil are the cheapest fuel and light the trusts offer in New York. A gallon of oil a week, a pound of tobacco and seven scuttles of coal stood us in for our quota of comfort, and as we paid our humble tributes to the concerns that had cornered these articles we were happy in the thought that it wasn't as bad as it might be. They had not yet cornered the air necessary to oxidize these commodities, although they had the connecting link, the match, and would no doubt soon get the air.

We perched there in the top flat after a long trial of the abnormalities of boarding-house life. I heard them called that once and it seemed to me that it fitted. We were fairly cosy, although, as I have hinted, there was nothing over-ornate about the furnishings. No woman had ever seen the place and therefore our ideas as to keeping it always the same were never disturbed, and it had never been spoken ill of. In the winter we kept house with more system than we did in the summer, when dish-washing became too much of a burden and appetite dwindled to chipped beef and angel cake, two simple things to serve. We got fagged out in this climate in the summer, and if you had been born in Oswegatchie County, where forty degrees below zero is as common as at the North Pole, and had then lived up there beneath the roof of that flat, you would understand. In all our wanderings through the art galleries and the comic papers

we had never found an artist who could draw the sun like that tin roof.

Jim was almost as much interested as I was in having no harm come to the government, but not quite. We both worked for the city, holding civil service jobs. His was only a small city job, that of Sealer of Weights and Measures, while I was connected with the Department of Health as an Inspector of Offensive Trades, with more pay to offset the larger responsibilities.

Jim once asked me what I did and I explained it this way:

"An Inspector of Offensive Trades must have a nose as delicately trained as a Sousa's ear, so that when a blast from the full olfactory orchestra rolls up from Newtown Creek and its stupefying vibrations are wafted on the fog billows driven by a gusty east wind toward the Department of Health, he can detect strains of the glue hoofs quite independently of the abattoir's offal bass, and tell at a sniff if discord breathes from the settling tanks of the fish factory or if the aroma of the fertilizer grinder is two notes below standard pitch as established by the officials to meet the approval of the sensitive ladies of the civic smelling committees."

You can see that my work called for a peculiar kind of brains.

Jim, in those days, went around to the grocery stores and made sure that the scales were in working order and that the weights balanced with the official weights he carried in a small bag. If he found a groceryman using weights that had been bored out to make them lighter he made an arrest and usually laid off for two days because he had to be a witness against the prisoner at court. He took these vacations at regular intervals, about twice a month, so I figured he did not pounce down on a man as soon as he found him giving short weight, but saved those desirable cases for use at regular periods when he required rest with a day or two at home.

Jim was not lazy, but he was not so spry as he was ten years ago when he was fresh from playing full-back on our scrub team. For a number of years he had been tramping around outdoors all day and had been inclined to play full front on the gastronomic flying wedge at the restaurants, where we commuted for our meals as long as we could stand it before taking up the primitive notions of the culinary art practiced in our own kitchen. Our cooking became very simple. After we tackled making fried cakes and both went to bed with headaches from the cottonseed oil, I asked Jim to take what we had turned out to a neighboring machine shop and see if they didn't want some three-inch washers for

locomotive work.

The farmer and the manicure artist have discovered the same law of compensation. If a man has a big ear he may have only a little corn. With Jim it was about the same. He chased short-weight fellows all day and when it came night he piled on all the weight he could just to lift himself out of the under-weight rut of the day's work. Fat kept Jim sociable—I don't mean that he was portly, but he was filled out well over the angles of youth. This was desirable, because a lean bachelor can't live with another lean one. I don't know why, except it's Nature's law. He hyenas in the same cage act the same way.

Before Jim started in to take on weight he had been passing through quite a long correspondence with a young woman, and it was so long that I began to give out on poetry and was thinking of laying in more stock in that line to drive the arrow home to a finish. Jim had never done any courting without consulting me. I attended to the correspondence and rather liked my job, because it gave me experience that might be useful. Now that it is all over, of course, I know better —I look the other way.

At the time we were very busy in one of these affairs, I remember, Jim was blue-eared, ragged-nerved and petulant to such a degree that I began to think of shipping him back to the old farm, where pork gravy and fried cakes would certainly restore his nervous system; otherwise I felt he would land in a padded cell. Nothing he ate agreed with him and I felt sure it must be a bad case of unrequited love. He looked sour upon all the world, mistaking me most of the time for the man who ran it. We were both on the point of getting a divorce when he began to take a bottle of ale regularly at dinner. The first week Jim mounted a pound a day and we were both overjoyed to note the improvement in our relations which the ugly co-respondent (did you ever see a co-respondent that wasn't ugly?) had threatened to disturb with the Dakota chills.

The remedy proved it was not a girl who bothered him. For a long time after when Jim felt nervous I would recommend ale. I did not believe it was possible for a woman to disturb him, but I was wrong again.

When Jim had returned two cases of empties we were on thoroughly good terms again. Of course we are glad he tried the ale, but if we had parted then and there we might have saved ourselves a lot of trouble. The small amount the junk man would have paid for our outfit might have been better than what we netted.

CHAPTER II

Any man who knows the first thing about housekeeping, who has gone deep enough into it to bring in wood or light a lamp, ought to know that the upper story of a double boiler is not the thing to fry eggs in. How any man with the faintest glimmering of a suspicion that he can cook an egg should hit upon a tool as unhandy as that, is beyond me. A double boiler is a telescopic arrangement used by first-class cooks for boiled puddings. I understand that they prefer them because the raisins do not get frightened and all huddled up at the bottom trying to escape, like they do if boiled in the New England fashion in a towel. Jim Hosley knew nothing of this, never having read the *Gentleman's Home Journal* to any extent. One night when I came in—one of the big nights in our history, all right—I found him frying two eggs with this back-handed device. Of course it made no difference to me if he fried them right on the coals and lost everything except the fun of doing it; at the same time I felt called upon to point out the skillet as the appropriate kitchen furniture for the occasion. It was certainly a peculiar notion and hinted to me that another woman had arrived and would soon be everywhere in that flat.

"Jim, you don't know enough about frying eggs," said I, "to deserve them at six for a quarter. You ought to eat canned goods or something you can't damage by fire."

"This thing suits me better than your flat pan," said he. "You see how I can take off the lid and jam it right down on the coals and have it all over while you are waiting to warm up on top. Never used to cook eggs up home—always sucked them; down here, been pulling at this pipe so long, or eating brass goods in the restaurants, I seem to have lost the liking for them. Tried them when up there last summer, but it warn't no use; they didn't taste the same."

"Same with me," I sadly admitted, with my mind on the girl. "There didn't seem to be enough nicotine in them to suit."

"Ben, chase yourself and find the pepper and salt, and be good enough to tell me whose funeral it is down-stairs to-night," interrupted Jim, changing the subject.

"I didn't know there was one," said I. "How far down is it?"

"One flight."

"Think of that," said I. "When the world gets crowded it seems to grow careless and unneighborly. We don't either of us know who lives there, and here we have been coming and going for about three years in this place. Still, we are only here nights. Yet it's a strange world. Think of living within ten feet of anybody in Oswegatchie County and not knowing them—especially if they have a vote."

"It is a queer place here in New York," said Jim, quietly. "It keeps getting busier all the time. Even the women hustle." I think now he sighed there, but I am not certain. "We don't get time to get acquainted with ourselves, let alone our neighbors ten feet away. A man might have his own funeral here and never know it. Never thought I'd have to live in such a place," he continued. "This will be a lonesome world when there are no country folks."

"Jim, you're getting to be a philosopher," said I. "In you that is a sure sign a woman's picture is focusing on your brain. I've never known you to drop into sentiment while using the double boiler. Is it that girl down-town?" (I had heard her name from others, Gabrielle Tescheron, for I kept close watch of him, but he did not know that I knew it.) "You know the one I mean—the girl who sticks her tongue out to straighten her veil."

"No, no," said Jim, laughing. "I made it plain to her that she'd have to marry both of us."

"A kind of matrimonial sandwich, eh? But say, Jim, come to think of it, I have heard you tell several times lately just what bad weather we have been having on Sundays for the past three months. It's a clincher. No?"

Jim began to pound the bottom of the inverted boiler with the lid lifter to secure a release of the eggs, which he earnestly hoped would let go and land on the plate.

"Did you grease that thing?" I asked, as he tum-tummed in vain, for the eggs had glued into a fresco showing a rising and setting sun on opposite sides of the bottom.

"No; didn't know where you kept the grease. What would you recommend in a case of this kind?"

But before I could advise, Jim had made fair headway in transferring the eggs directly without the intervention of a plate, an economy we practiced frequently.

The meal was served in the kitchen to save steps and progressed with customary smoothness, each getting up a dozen times or so to bring things from the shelves or the stove. While we were slicking up the dishes I got to chuckling and Jim began to blush and look foolish. I could see that he knew I had found him out. We made short work of the chores. I wound the alarm clock and sent down the milk bottle via the dumb waiter, which you can't tip with a dime, but have to push or pull clean to or from the cellar, unless it happens to be en route just as you get there and can chuck your load aboard.

We then stretched out in the cosy front room, and lighting our pipes warmed to the task of being comfortable. I was pained to feel that the day must come when woman would part us, but I said nothing more, determined to let time and Jim's confiding nature reveal the tender secrets of his heart now melting for that girl with the dancing brown eyes, the mass of filmy dark hair straying in wisps from a harness of braid, ribbon and pins, to Jim's utter distraction and the poor girl's despair.

All my efforts in Jim's behalf had been lost apparently, or Jim, having won the prizes in each case, became disenchanted for one reason or another. Perhaps like my love letters, the girls were works of art and would not bear too close an inspection. The coming case would make one more failure, I imagined; still, I was sorry I had remarked how she had coaxed her veil into shape; but with that wanton hair, a hat which was a department to manage in itself, a tailor-made primness of figure to superintend and the curvatures of Jim's conversation to follow, I could understand that she needed the help of all her senses to keep her pretty, light-hearted poise. I sighed to think of the trouble in store for Mrs. Jim, not in the least knowing what a remarkable woman she was; in my estimation of her at that time I think I was about as far off the track as I got at any subsequent turn.

Jim had been uninterested so long (nearly three years), I felt love was now a proposition which wouldn't find a crevice in his heart to trickle into and widen until it split him asunder. But with the clever young woman of business, in the rush and turmoil of the down-town hustle, it is such a gentle humidity it seems to work its corrosion unseen in the broad daylight. Thermometer readings don't show it. You have to keep close to the barometer of eyes and sighs to know anything definite of its ups and downs—unless it passes into fog or pours, then everybody can see it dropping through the air. I began to feel that it would pour soon around Jim, and I shuddered, for I thought I already heard the patter of light feet in the hall. Some of the gray poetry of loneliness began to spread around my

disturbed and anxious soul for fear no drippings like that would ever fall on me. Race suicide conscientiously practiced is a hard game. Nature abhors a vacuum, and especially human nature. Perhaps this girl had a sister. A comfortable introspection began to take the contract of illuminating my mind. Agreeable family scenery was thrown around by the magic of the thought. It scattered about six kids for Jim and the same-sized bunch for me—enough to prove that human nature abhors the inter-marrying of men as Jim and I had tried it.

We naturally drifted away from the subject we were both thinking about and got around to talking on old home matters—the day's doings and the state of the country; graft, buying and selling law, and what it all had to do with harming the government and the likelihood of losing our jobs.

It was about 8:30 o'clock as near as I can remember, when a timid knock on the front door startled both of us. I answered the call, expecting to find that fairy Miss Tescheron ready to pop in and oust me like a Republican hold-over on a Tammany Happy New Year's. I peeped out as charily as a jailer. The dim light revealed a tiny messenger boy—something awful had probably happened up home! A messenger boy was enough to startle both of us, for no one in the world would spend half a dollar to tell us anything unless they were scared into it. I swung the door open and the boy took off his cap and removed from its sweat-band stronghold a neat-looking note.

"Say, boss, does Mr. Benjamin Hopkins live up here?" he asked between breaths, for the five flights had tuckered him.

"That's me," said I, reaching for the note and carefully scanning the typewritten address, for upon second thought I believed love and not fright might have sent a note to Jim. But it was for me, so I opened it and leaning toward the lamp read in diplomatically suppressed wonder:

"Mr. Benjamin Hopkins,

"97 East Eighteenth Street, New York.

"Dear Sir: Do not mention this matter to Hosley, but I wish to see you at once at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. I have instructed the clerk to send you to my room immediately. Please come right away, as the matter cannot wait."

"Yours truly,

"ALBERT TESCHERON."

"Her pa," thought I; but I didn't let on. A stale actor in a play couldn't have pulled himself together in a more unconcerned-I-do-this-every-night fashion than I signed for the note, tipped the poor little shaver and closed the door.

Jim eyed me in surprise, but it was nothing to my own astonishment. What did old Tescheron want of me? No matter.

"Jim, I've got to run up-town for a few minutes about some work," was the wording of my deception, eased by the thought that it was in his behalf. I slipped on my hat and coat and started for the door, taking in at a glance that Jim was smoking hard and squirming uneasily.

CHAPTER III

One thing I liked about Tescheron—he talked business from the start. He jumped into it at once, so that I had no time to take notice of anything except that he talked without an accent, was probably French only in name and that he wore clothes which were superfine. I never saw such a dresser for a man with iron-gray hair and fifty-five years to contend against in the youth-preserving business, which I calculated was one of his pleasures in life, if not his vocation. Nothing I figured on coming up-town happened except that I found my man. A sixty-year old boy brought me to the room on the third floor.

I could see that Mr. Tescheron was a whole encyclopedia on manners, but he gave me the paper-covered digest which retails for ten cents, and began:

"Hope I reached you just at the close of the funeral."

"What funeral?" I asked.

"Say, see here, Hopkins, I want you to talk fair and square with me—no nonsense, you understand. You know of the funeral—Mrs. Browning's—and if you weren't there you know when it was over and when Hosley returned. I am pretty hot in the collar over this business; all happened right under my nose; never thought of such a thing happening; but I'm not too late to stop this infernal impostor, not too late! Of course you don't know anything about my end of it, Hopkins, and I know that you, too, have been fooled at your end, for I've looked you up. I have reports from a dozen business men who say you are perfectly square and that is why I send for you now that we may work together and make the greatest headway. Do you know that the scoundrel Hosley has become infatuated with my daughter?—a pretense for criminal purposes, of course. To-day he seeks me out to tell me they are engaged! A few hours later I hear he is crying at the funeral of his wife!"

There was some French in Tescheron after all, for he waved his arms and danced about like a man whose tongue won't wag fast enough to please him.

If Jim had dealt with large business concerns as an inspector, instead of corner grocerymen and small storekeepers, they might have saved him. The business men whom Tescheron had consulted regarding me, I afterward learned, were the

manufacturers whose plants I had investigated for the city. Some of the best families in New York are connected with Newtown Creek glue and they, it seems, had stuck to me in this emergency. A fish man will believe anything a glue man tells him; I don't know why, but it's so, and the fact was certainly to my advantage.

When Tescheron had calmed I broke out with a hiss and a stutter; it wasn't a laugh, for I haven't laughed in years. All my laughing since 1889 has been a strictly intellectual process; but I did have an awful pain because I could not digest his statement with a bouncing laugh. All I could do was to stammer and splutter like a bass viol tuning up, while I sozzled around in my chair trying to break in with something that would count. Why should a man of my temperament take a hand in love, war or diplomacy? As a theoretical manipulator of fathers-in-law, as a text-book writer on the subject, I was in the extra fancy class, but the part of Daniel in the lion's den could not be played by me unless I agreed to step in the marble-lined vestibule of open jaws and get kicked down the back stairs after a thorough overhauling. On the firing line my plans did not fit and I became a failure.

A smell of fish in the room restored me. I knew not whence it came, but its soft presence yielding to my keen detector restored my professional pride and self-respect. I then felt I was something of a detective after all. I eyed a revolving ventilator in the window-pane as a possible avenue of its entrance from the culinary department. I did not suspect Tescheron.

"I see you are not inclined to side with me in this matter," he rattled on. "To-night I notify the coroner. I—"

"Are you a fool?" I blurted with that rare presence of mind which will some day save me by putting me in jail. "Are you an idiot? You seem to be gone in the head. Call a dozen coroners, by all means, and be the laughing-stock of the town. Drag your whole family into the illustrated newspapers. Go ahead and have a good time at your own expense. Get out the fire department and have them squirt on you!" I was surprised at the string of sarcasm which rolled forth when I did start.

Tescheron danced a first-class vaudeville turn and shouted: "Say what you please, I notify the coroner! Hosley killed his wife so that he might marry my daughter; I have had detectives out, so I know and you don't. I—"

"How long have you had them out?"

"Since two o'clock to-day—soon as he left me."

"Since two o'clock to-day, eh? And what did you have against Mr. Hosley before that hour, pray?"

"Oh, nothing except a strong personal dislike to him—but I have enough against him now; I have enough now! I had told him he was too old; that he had done nothing to merit her—just to gain time, you see. I wanted time to find out; to look him over with care; with the same precaution I would use in a cold matter of business. It was well I did; it's a mighty good thing I used my business sense in this matter. You see, you are no man of business. You—"

"Well," said I with a calmness affected to aggravate the man who was sure, "you couldn't have hired a better lot of men. They pass you out Jim Hosley, married, and a widower by murdering his wife, and have him engaged to your daughter in six hours. It is as pretty a story as I ever read. A man who wouldn't ring up the coroner on that needs one for his own autopsy. Why, any man would be proud to have a coroner in the family on the strength of all that. Tescheron, let's talk about the pleasant memories of the past. What asylums that you have been in do you prefer—eh?"

Tescheron proceeded to give me the repertoire of the dancing school. When he began to polka and upset the furniture he dropped his cologned handkerchief. I tossed it up on the ventilator, for somebody had ordered a lot more fish.

"So he has fooled you, too? Yes? You have been living with him there and did not know he was married to a woman in a flat right below yours—her name is Browning. I saw that you remembered it. Strange, ain't it? Do you know how she died? No? I see you do not. You are very smart, very clever. You have talked just as I hoped you would. Let me introduce Mr. Smith."

And from behind a screen stepped a slight, middle-aged man with keen blue eyes and fair complexion. I shook hands with Mr. Smith. He was a wide-awake little man, not in the least embarrassed by the eavesdropping, as it was part of his business. I have lived long enough to know that there are all kinds of Smiths. He was one of them.

Of course I began to feel that they were crowding me to turn State's evidence against my faithful Jim. The thought of the funeral in the early evening in the flat below ours, and Jim's innocent inquiry concerning it, had flashed upon me. I still felt that Mr. Smith was only making out a good case to match a big bill. If Jim

Hosley had been leading a double life at such short range without my knowing it I must be a chuckle-head. I knew Jim Hosley was honest; that easy as his conscience was in trifling matters, he knew no guile. If a Mrs. Browning had been living below us she was as much a stranger to him as her relative's poetry—in fact it might have been hers for all Jim knew or cared.

Smith answered a knock on the door and stepped into the hall for half a minute.

"You don't begin to know this scoundrel," continued Mr. Tescheron, eyeing me like a man with the facts. "Perhaps you will deny that this fellow Hosley served two years in prison at Joliet, Illinois; that he was indicted for forgery in Michigan and got into a mix-up in Arizona, whence he skipped at the point of a pistol and made his way down into Mexico. This fellow Hosley has passed under a dozen different names. He is notorious in criminal annals. He is so clever that he can completely fool you and deceive my daughter, who, I would have you understand, is a smart woman—one not easily fooled. It is lucky I took this thing in hand when I did, or, as you say, we would have all been shown up in the papers."

Well, I let the old codger run along at this clip. It beat anything I had ever heard, but it didn't disturb me, as I have stated, except to create a pain that a good laugh would have cured. What could I say up against a know-it-all combination? Hadn't the detectives been at work a whole six hours? What kind of records did they keep in their office if they couldn't bunch a choice bouquet of crime for a fellow willing to pay for it? You can buy anything in New York. The detective bureau had found good enough clues in Mr. Tescheron's desire for a discovery and in his commercial rating which showed that he could pay top prices for the disgrace of a would-be son-in-law in the estimation of his devoted daughter. The detective bureaus, lawyers' offices and "society" papers that deal in this blasting powder and take contracts to shatter good names were common enough; everybody knew them. People like Tescheron, though, only knew their names, not their reputations, and like many honest folks went to one of these concerns because he had seen its name frequently in print. Publicity draws trade sometimes without reputation, especially first customers. Tescheron was a new hand at this business of ruining character with the aid of a criminal detective bureau and its lawyer allies and associates on the slanderous "society" papers that fatten on the frailties of human beings with money to buy exemption, but too weak to fight the slimy devils whose pens drip this filth from the social sewage pots; he knew not the parasites who cling to the maggoty exudations of every form of social disorder. That is the way I figured it. I want it straight on

the record here that my devotion to Jim Hosley at that interview began to tighten like the Damon-and-Pythias grip of a two-ton grab bucket. I was figuring to die beside Jim with a Nathan Hale poise of the head and some pat remark.

Smith, the sharp-eyed, handed a paper to Mr. Tescheron. They whispered about it for a minute or so in one corner, and then Mr. Tescheron read it aloud:

> "Hosley and the undertaker drove away in coach together following hearse. Two men following."

As he finished they both looked at me, probably expecting me to be convinced that all virtue was on their side and to unite with them or at least listen while they revealed all they knew about Jim Hosley's career of crime and deception. But I had enough. I knew where the crime was there, I believed. I opened up on a new line.

"I guess I'll notify the coroner," said I quietly, starting to go.

"No, no!" shouted Tescheron. "I did not mean to do that. I only said that to draw you out. All I ask of you, Mr. Hopkins, is that you give your evidence against this man when I next summon you. I am glad to find you convinced at last—but never mind the coroner. I can accomplish my purpose under cover."

I edged away.

"No, I think you have convinced me that it is my duty to notify the coroner," said I, "so that this murderer, Hosley, may be put to death. It's a nasty business for all of us," I said, "except Smith, here, who won't mind it."

"Hopkins, if you do that you will spoil all my plans," pleaded the now completely flustrated Tescheron. "Stand in with me. Help me to present the truth about this rascal in the presence of my daughter and all will go well. As for the authorities, let them take care of their end themselves. The Tescheron family is not to be sacrificed! Think of yourself, man! Surely you don't want to be mixed up in such a horrible crime—you who have been fooled for years. Come, now! Agreed, eh?"

"I'll think it over," said I, giving one down-stroke of the handle for a parting shake to each of these brainy men and then I passed out. As I traveled toward home, I regretted I had been so confident, and had not asked to be shown all the evidence they had against Hosley. That proved to be more of a mistake than I

supposed, as I hurried along.

Just before entering our house, I called a boy and sent this message to Mr. Tescheron, at his home in Ninety-sixth Street. I found the address in the telephone book:

> "Have notified Coroner Flanagan. He has telephoned all the cemeteries to hold body. Autopsy to-morrow. Rest easy. I am with you.
>
> "HOPKINS."

CHAPTER IV

Flanagan would enjoy the joke, I thought, on my way home. Coroner Tim Flanagan, the Tammany leader of the district in which we lived, was the friend of everybody in his territory, and took a kindly interest in Jim and me, although we held office on other tenure than "pull." We bought tickets every year for the annual clam-bake of the Timothy J. Flanagan Association, held at Rockaway, and there mingled with the politicians big and little, and the fellows from our departments. We office-holders knew which side our bread was buttered on, and we also liked clams. We did not attend the annual mid-winter ball of the same association, but we never failed to buy tickets admitting "ladies and gent." If the news that I had taken undue liberty with his name came back to Flanagan I knew he would quickly forgive me. Flanagan was a good fellow, straight and loyal.

As I passed through the vestibule of our apartment house I looked at the letter-boxes and noticed the narrow string of crape tied on the little knob, under the badly written name, "Browning." If the sad event had closed, as reported by the subordinates of Smith, the careless undertaker had forgotten to remove this shred of formality.

I found the murderer, forger and bad man of the border, in bed, snoring as if he was glad he had always stuck to the treadmill of virtue, and had never murdered a wife to get another with money, or had raised a check for a cool million or so without the formalities of a pious purloiner from the people's purse. No criminal in history had ever slept with a smoother rhythm to his heart-beat than this one, with the élite of New York's private detective bureaus hot upon his trail for a long chase. His sonorous snore might have sent a waver through the mind of the crafty Tescheron, and made the wily Smith feel that the case would dwindle to less than a week's job, when he was probably figuring on a good two thousand dollars in it, having sized up the buyer pretty well.

I felt satisfied that my telegram would put some insomnia in Ninety-sixth Street when the great work closed for the night at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and the protector of the household returned to rest those tired wheels that had been whirring fast in his head since 2 P. M., short-belted to the Smith dynamo of fraud.

I didn't expect to do much sleeping myself, so I proceeded to divest and relax under the sedative pull of my pipe. For about half an hour I creaked the comfortable rocker, and pondered on that old subject of fools and their money, and how it was that wise men like myself had so little of it. The solitudes and soliloquies of life appealed to me—especially with a nice bunch of fake crime hovering in the air between me and, say, a few feet beneath my rocker. I was lolling in our front parlor, probably not ten feet above the spot just vacated by the latest victim, and the man who would swing or singe for the deed was playing a soft nostrilian air two doors down the hall—but, no! The tune stopped! The villain had turned 216 pounds over on a set of springs which shiveringly reported the man-quake in their midst. A brief moment of calm—just enough for a murderer to lick his chops and gather a lulling sense of monotony from the contemplation of a fresh wife-slaying, and he was off again with the sheriff after him for exceeding the speed limit. His horn was clearing the track and the vibrations blended in a romping continuity.

The deeper Jim got into his Bluebeard dreams, or his fairyland of love, the deeper I got into my hobby, political economy, and to thinking of the wide difference between us.

Somebody had to do a little thinking, for Fate was tying our affairs in hard, wet knots, and the chances were we'd have to stay under the stream of life's perplexities. Jim was so smooth in appearance (alas! but not in tongue) he might slip out of a corner as easily as his fine manners enabled him to progress in society. But I was no man for style. I could cut no swath with women. The few times I had tried it, the scythe had turned upon me, took me for an extra tough bunch of wet grass and stung me badly. I could see that my chances there were poor. If Jim got out of this murder business, as I believed he would soon, I intended to run the flat alone, fill it full of books written by people who have advised the country out of a spirit of pure patriotism (and into a worse hole), and after reading all they had to say, I thought I could produce something original that would put them all out of print, with my small volume standing alone on the shelves, as the last word on the pursuit of happiness, containing full directions on how to keep to the trail, from birth to the grave, with a stop-over ticket at the last-named junction. I felt that all this was in me, just as Jim felt there was something in him, he didn't know what, but so long as it kept him fidgeting he knew it was there.

It was not surprising to my friends that I had given up all hope for myself. As I have said, I was no man for style. It always seemed to me that my clothes fitted

me when I was buying them, but it never struck anybody else that way afterward. I paid the same prices as Jim, but I would have done just as badly at three times as much, and might just as well have saved money buying second-hand through a want "ad." Nature designed me to spoil tailoring. If I had lived in Eden the fig leaves on my belt would have browned and cracked before noon the first day, and if a few figs were then worn on the side as fringe ornaments, I would have carelessly picked them inside out, making the suit look seedier still. On a foggy morning the dewdrops of Paradise would have spotted me, and on a windy day the flying burrs and feather-tailed seeds would have taken me for good ground; the pussy willows and all such forest fuzz and excelsior—for a good thing. If I had been a Roman no one would have seen me down street, for I would be in the baths waiting for my wrapper to be scoured, washed and mended.

This is a way Fate has of keeping a few scholars and investigators in the world. Herbert Spencer would have been swamped in a family, and the same with George Eliot. If they had married each other, as Herbert says they might (had Georgie been better-looking), philosophical and imaginative genius would have been lost in getting the meals and bending posterity over the parental knee to make sin seem undesirable. I had always felt that Jim was cut out to get married, and I stood ready to help him through the entire catalogue of crime and conspiracy, for I knew he could not undertake so much alone as well as I knew glue from tallow coming two miles by air line. If Jim wanted to do it, though, I would give him the benefit of my knowledge of the theory of courtship, a subject I was well up in, having read considerably more fiction than he had. This with my keen intuitive perceptions, I felt fitted me to act again in an advisory capacity, for my critical faculties were massive, although, as I have hinted, my executive qualities as a lover were undersized.

I had time for Jim's affairs, because society had peculiar horrors for me. Let a woman say something at a dinner or a reception, and my neck would begin to swell like a pouter pigeon's and my collar would close down like a pair of hedge clippers centered at the back collar button. This would cause no alarm in the young woman, for she would imagine the choking symptoms were only signs of an embarrassment produced by her interest in me. This would not have been a bad thing, for bashful men always get the most encouragement, and if persistently bashful, are coaxed into all the intricate arts of the gentle game by the woman who is interested in them. Thus I always seemed to have the good luck of the bashful man up to the last gasp, and until I began to turn blue. She

would then see that it was apoplexy, and not her charms, which was undoing me. But the apoplexy, the bulging veins and the reddening eyes were forgotten when I sought relief by inserting the first two fingers of each hand on either side of my collar, and with a short, outward jerk, would open the starchy shears that were fastening like a constrictor around my air valves. This would startle the young creature into diffidence, and I always hated to do it, but it was the only way I could assume my self-control. Following the application of the two-finger movement, relief would come quickly, with a splutter and a stammering apology for not catching her last remark. My volubility from that point to the next attack, when interrupted by a suggestion which would derail me, or by a third party not following our train of thought, would impress the hearer that it was the collar which was tight. This remarkable misfortune, of course, deprived me of the influence of the bashful man, and as I was no dissembler I could not take advantage of the appearance of my distress. My blushes were wholly due to choking and could not pass for flashes reflexed by heart-throbs.

There was another thing I had to battle with from my entrance into society. Jim could look like a lord in a dress suit. I always looked like a lord knows what! The *Sun* once published a picture of the dress trousers of Grover Cleveland and David B. Hill lined up with those of Governor Montague of Virginia, for impartial presentation by a flashlight photograph. It was an astonishing revelation of Democracy below the waist line. Jim cut it out and put it in a pretty straw frame. He said he never wanted me to lose sight of the styles set by great statesmen. Montague, as became his aristocratic name and lineage, was a model of perfection about the legs, and Jim said it proved he would never get to Washington and take rank with our great men. Cleveland and Hill, however, who had been there, evidently pinned their trousers in curl-papers, so that they were always ready to look fancy in society and be snap-shotted. Mine followed the Washington route without urging. Then, as to vest, coat and shirts: no tailor could make a coat for me that could trail after my neck when it was engaged in the throes of a society conversation. The coat had to go off at the back of the collar and stand to one side until the neck was through talking. The vest generally showed only two square inches and gave little trouble to the public, so long as I kept my coat on and hid the safety-pins which reefed it in the back. The shirt, up to a certain course of the dinner, would keep under the napkin, but until I learned of a patent mixture to cover the bosom with a transparent waterproofing, used to protect wall-paper and other delicate fabrics from ink stains and finger-marks, I found it a burden to carry so much exposed linen. But with this wax paint, I care not what drops on it; it won't stick unless it's hot

metal, and there is not so much of that in the air at dinners this side of Arizona.

Studs are a source of mortification to me. I have paid as high as fifty cents for a set of three and had them all break off the first night, exposing the brass settings. I sought to reduce this torment by wearing only one stud-hole, but that makes it necessary to go away into a far country, three times during the dinner, to bore out the stump of the old stud and drive in the new. Any man who has done the job with his collar and tie on, knows that he is as pop-eyed as a lobster when he gets through, trying to keep the field of operations in view. I had special bolts made which I had soldered on. This is practicable where the wax paint is used and the mangle of the laundry avoided. A good paint will last three years.

Shaving for society appearances cut windfalls all over my face, that I had to cover with the overhang of whiskers. I tried the old-style razor, but my shaving ran into big money for court plaster, so I got some safety razors, several brands of them, determined to keep a decent-looking lawn. These devices are like mowing machines in that they have teeth to grip the crop and make it stand straight for the attack of the knife, but the knife doesn't move in a shuttle like that of the mowing machine—it is stationary, so that you have an arrangement that is a combination of mowing machine and road scraper. I think the safety razors were responsible for most of the blanks in my whisker area. They dug chunks out of some of the most fertile spots, and as nothing would grow there, I covered them by the ivy process adopted by bald men, who train eighteen hairs from back of the left ear diagonally up and across the cranial arbor and down the front to a point over the right eye, where the ends are brought up short as if they were rooted near there. I could say I was not bald. This gave me some satisfaction, but I never boasted of it in public. There was a streak of porcupine in our family. This accounted for the trod-grass appearance of my head, even when prepared carefully for public appearance. It was at its best when it looked like a meadow of tall timothy that had been walked over by the cows on a wet day. Curry-combing would not disturb it. Herr Most, Ibsen, Old Hoss Hoey and I had a common quill-haired ancestor.

There were some other points that fitted me to blush unseen. When I was fifteen years old and my voice was changing, it struck a peculiar gait. It ran up and down about six octaves, to the tune of a five-finger exercise. I talked around town for a few weeks in a surprisingly new style, that reminded me of a boarder who came up to our place one summer from New York and undertook to show us how to ride a horse. When the horse got as fast as a spry walk the boarder would teeter up and down in the saddle as if he had been practicing on a spring

bed and had kept a chunk of it in each hip pocket for elasticity. George Honkey, our druggist and censor of public manners, said it was the most insipid piece of equine pitty-patter he had ever seen on Main Street, and from the get-up-and-down of it, he guessed it must be the Episcopal ritual for horseback exercise. My vocal cords, while tuning for my lowly part in life's orchestra, for a day at a time would seem to stick to a decent tenor or drop to an impressive bass which would have fitted me to be a preacher, but a sudden attack of mumps, with measles complicating, pulled them to one side and burned the bridge. They afterward drew tight down on the sounding board, so that now when I talk the rickety buzz is like that of a horse-fiddle played with the tremolo and the soft pedal. An æolian harp made of rubber bands on a bicycle, aroused by the wind as the machine moves swiftly, gives the same soft rasp—a prolonged "sizz."

What chance had a man with women, handicapped as I was? And I have mentioned only a few minor matters, which have come quickly to mind, as I hastily pen this narrative of my adventures as the middleman in Jim's love affairs. And yet I had a true and noble heart, with a capacity for manly devotion as great as any ever advertised on Sunday in the "personal" column. I make this statement because a man in my position must take the stand in his own behalf, if any testimony is to be given for his side of the case. I am the only competent witness to my own virtues. In order to appreciate me, a woman would need to have a fine discrimination. My beauty might have been revealed to such a woman if she had concentrated by absent treatment on my lofty, self-sacrificing character, evidenced by my pursuit of the chaste in art and the sane in philosophy. But all hope had then well-nigh departed. I realized that there were inconsistencies in the theories of the survival of the fittest and natural selection. I was an example of the exception to the rule. Excluded, I became the last of my race. I was the last candy in the box—just as full of sugar as those that had been devoured, but condemned to rattle in solitude because, forsooth, chocolate creams are preferred to gum-drops. Chilled by a want of sympathetic appreciation while mingling with my fellows, I had gradually withdrawn to the scholarly cloisters of our fifth-story apartment, adjacent to the tin roof, which so fascinated the summer sun, and far above the turmoil of a world of men and women wholly disinterested in me. Perhaps this may seem a little too pessimistic for a philosopher whose experience had taught him to be above disappointment, yet I must confess it is true I could not witness the social achievements of my companion without pangs of remorse; the indifference of the world to merit, to much pure gold in the ore, convinced me that a varnished label in six colors maintains the market for mediocrity. Driven to desperation, I might yet seek a

beauty doctor and obtain the glazed surface so essential to social success. Bachelorhood with Jim seemed to have been due to his lack of appreciation of others, for according to the favorable comment his comely appearance created, he seemed to be filled with indifference; while with me, as I warmed into high enthusiasm over certain well-defined representatives of the angelic sex, coolness, growing to statuesque frigidity, would develop in the object of my devotions, and the beauty whose charms had bedeviled me into insomnia and wild-eyed desperation became related to me thereafter as the angel surmounting the tombstone that marked the resting place of my folly.

Moderation, therefore, I concluded, was the keynote of success in courtship. When the current became balanced in negative and positive qualities, the desirable equilibrium recognized by each pole as the real thrill of mutual romance, jealousy and despair would spark, blow out the fuse and short-circuit into a proposal and an acceptance. Jim was negative in desire and positive in appearance, thus securing neutrality, and my passive state was the resultant of a positive inclination and a negative exterior. Thus Jim was admired and I was tolerated, but he had progressed no further than I.

One Sunday he and I were strolling through an art gallery.

"What do you call this, Ben?" he whispered behind his hand, pointing to the portrait of a red-haired Diana sitting on a low, mossy stump in a lonely spot. Her back was turned toward us, and she seemed to be taking a sun bath. He looked stealthily around to make sure his curiosity was not noted by the spectators near us.

"It says on the label that Titty Ann painted it. It is the bluest-looking woman I ever saw; how did they come to let it in?"

"Yes," said I, not attempting to disturb his view of the painting or the name of the artist, "Titty Ann was a great painter of the blue-blooded women of the aristocracy, so blue-blooded they seemed to be bruised all over, and Titty Ann wanted you to see there was no place they had not been hurt."

The incident shows how keen was Jim's appreciation of this great subject of universal interest to bachelors. It seemed to me in those days that the fairest creature that ever fluttered could not charm him with the siren whistle of her swishing silk, nor throw a damaging spark from her bright eyes. But here he was, plunged into the most dreadful complications, which seemed in the mind of Tescheron, at least, to be fastening him in the electric chair.

It must have been about 11:30 o'clock when Jim got out of bed and began to mope around the flat, tramp nervously up and down the private hall and scuffle through the closets, the cupboard and among the pots and pans, which fretfully clashed in a heap upon the floor when he sought to unhook his favorite, the upper story of the double boiler. I wondered what ailed him now. From the way the alleged murderer was rattling the crockery and the tinware, back in the kitchen, I knew he had it bad. What prompted him to invade the kitchen and unhook our outfit I don't know, but I think he was trying to heat some water, poor chap!—to accompany a certain pill, on a theory that it was dyspepsia which disturbed his dreams.

Presently he wandered into the front room, looking badly rumpled. He had on his yellow and brown dressing gown and a pair of pink-bowed knitted slippers of a piebald variety, that I had seen displayed by a neighboring gents' furnishing goods store.

"Ben, what are you doing up this time of night? Pretty late, ain't it?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm just cogitating," I answered. "You look sick; anything the matter with you?—and, say, when you go into that kitchen, I wish you wouldn't chuck everything in the place on the floor for me to pick up."

"I picked 'em all up, Ben," was his meek reply.

I never could scold him, so I forgave him and invited him to sit down and have a smoke. He fairly jumped at the idea, and it pleased me to see him bite. I thought

then how little Tescheron could know of this innocent blockhead, Jim Hosley, whose heart and brain traps were built on the open, sanitary order, with nothing concealed.

Jim continued fidgety and wide-awake as he took his seat near the table and the county papers. He squirmed on the cushions, smoked hard and complained of the tobacco, the weather, the police magistrates, his tight shoes, the careless washerwoman and a string of matters incidental to the world's work and its burdens that he had never mentioned before so long as I had lived with him, and that was pretty close to ten years. It was easy to see that this was no ordinary case. Several times I had suffered the same sort of misery; had looked for a soft seat and reposeful thoughts in vain. Jim had not noticed it.

A man who has been forty miles over a mountain road on an empty lumber wagon knows what thrills are. I could see that Jim was aboard and that the team had cut loose down hill, for his bones were fairly rattling with the vibrations from the bog hollows, "thank yer, mums," old stumps and disagreeable boulders. He needed help. He couldn't hang on much longer.

"Say, Ben, there was a little matter I wanted to speak to you about," said Jim, with the same uneasy manner in which he had rubbed all our household arrangements the wrong way and aroused the resentment of the frying-pan and its "pards" of the domestic range.

I at once began to talk about something I was reading, to let him down easy and to open him up wider, for I was anxious to burrow into the mystery and dig exploration shafts in all directions. As he seemed to close again, I allowed my comment to drool off into a hum, and then looked up short in a way to send his ideas from mark-time to a continuance of the procession.

"You know that young lady, Miss Tescheron—Miss Gabrielle Tescheron?" asked Jim, tossing his hair into windrows and looking straight away from me.

"Why, I know that lovely girl I've seen you with; is her name—"

"Yes, that's her name, and we're to be married."

"Jim, old boy, let me congratulate you." And we shook hands over this creature who was to wreck our happy home—still, I felt there wouldn't be enough crockery to continue on unless the thing was settled in church or at Sing Sing pretty soon.

"When is it to come off?" I continued, that question usually being No. 2 to the hand-shake and congratulations.

"Ben, I mention this matter because I feel that I need your friendship now more than ever," said he, disregarding my inquiry in a way which clearly showed that Cupid had stubbed a toe. "I am up against it. Tell me, what should be done? You must know a lot about such matters, and I don't seem to understand. It's the old man, her pa; a little whipper-snapper of a dude. I could swat him with my little finger and settle him in a minute. George! I've a mind to, at that."

"That, of course, is out of the question," I advised, tackling the matter as if time and again the fat of my theories had been tried out into the dripping of wedded affinities. "Soft dealing with parents is essential." This wisdom came also as if I were quoting from a book by a Mormon, who had handled every variety of father-in-law. "On what does pa base his opposition?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Jim, preparing to confess all and let me do the penance. "But it's such blamed nonsense, I'm almost afraid to. It shows what an infernal old fool he is."

"How old is pa?" I inquired.

"Oh, he's an old 'un."

"Says you're old enough to be her father, doesn't he?"

"That's it, but he's off; and how would you get around it, anyway—by postponing it?"

Jim's notion of ages, and Tescheron's, I feared were both wide of the mark, but I let that pass. One was vain and mad, and the other did not observe closely.

"Is that all he said?" I asked.

"Well, no. I'll tell you just what he said as near as I can remember, and see if you can figure out the answer. I came away to-day from his office, squeezed out and dried up, but I gave him no back talk. I simply said, 'Mr. Tescheron, I love your daughter, Gabrielle, and I am here, sir, to ask you to set the day for the wedding,' just like that, as pleasant as if I was chatting to him after church. Say, I thought he would hurrah, or take me around to lunch (it was then after noon) and introduce me to his friends. But he proceeded to breathe an early frost on my green and tender leaves. As I was about to say, Ben, as near as I can remember

after rehearsing all this afternoon is this—and I tell you, because if I don't the chances are I'll go right on rehearsing it forever in some asylum, and then everybody will hear it till they are sick and tired of it, and the curtain won't rise on the real show. Said he: 'Well, so you say, so you say, so you say!' This beat me. I had never heard a man talk that way."

"I've heard that kind," said I, knowingly. "He took stitches in his conversation."

"'So you say, so you say. What say I? So? No.' That has been running through my head in a way to set me crazy," continued Jim. "'Do I want a son-in-law nearly as old as I am?' the little jackanapes asked me. 'Not I. So you see, you are too old for Gabrielle.' Now, what do you think of that? Doesn't that beat you? Why, the old chap is over fifty, and he says I am older than he is. I actually believe he's crazy. Hair dye and cologne and young men's clothes seem to give him the notion that he is about thirty and became Gabrielle's father when he was about five years old. He's got an idea from somewhere that I'm twice as old as I am because I'm twice as big as he is—that's the most reasonable way I can look at it. Well, I got so dry in the roof of my mouth I couldn't stub my tongue on it to turn a word; my eyes burned and a cold sweat started. No man his size had ever floored me before. I tried hard to remember he was Gabrielle's father, and out of respect for her I should not injure him. He then piled in on me again. 'That is not all,' he said. 'Gabrielle is ambitious. You are lazy. You have wasted your youth. Look at you! A man of your age who has done nothing yet!'"

From this I gathered that Tescheron's objections were at first personal. He did not find Jim to his liking and was probably urging his daughter to regard the suitor in the same light. Later in the day the better excuse learned from the great detective bureau came to his support.

"What do you think of that, Ben?" continued Jim. "What has he done to brag about? Should I bring a birth certificate?"

"Yes, but he is not marrying Gabrielle himself," said I. "He is trying to help her to find a good husband. You must be generous, Jim, and give a father his due."

"Shucks! He spends all his pay on his clothes. Such a dresser you never saw, and what is he? A rubber-neck, that's all."

"A what?"

"I asked one of the fellows who worked where he does, some time ago, what old

man Tescheron did, and he told me he was a rubber-neck. Now, I know very well that a rubber-neck is a fellow who goes around to corner groceries to see what other kinds of crackers are sold there besides the brands furnished by his house. He starts in talking about the price of green-groceries, drifts along for five or ten minutes, and keeps squinting over the cracker boxes. To stave off suspicion he buys an apple, peels it carefully and eats it slowly, while he incidentally craves a cracker and proceeds to pump the innocent grocer on his cracker business. He writes out his notes in full afterward and that grocer is then described on a card index at the main office as handling such and such goods. I ought to know what rubber-necks are, having been around groceries enough."

"A sort of cracker detective," said I.

"That's all. A common, ordinary rubber-neck—gets about fifteen a week. By the way he dresses you'd think he had a king's job. Think of him looking down upon me. Small as I am, I lead him."

"I wonder would he turn up his nose at me, an Inspector of Offensive Trades?" I queried, sadly. "But go ahead, Jim, and stick to your story, for I can see that there is plenty of trouble ahead for you."

This startled Jim into a more direct presentation of his problem.

"Well, I up and told him, said I: 'Mr. Tescheron, Miss Gabrielle and I would like to be married at her home some time soon,' said I; 'and if you don't wish it that way,' said I, 'I guess we can find a place that will be big enough and will answer just as well,' said I; and then I began to start up warmer and get bolder, when he shut me off with a string of cuss words that ran all over me. I didn't suppose he could talk that way, but no one in the office seemed to mind, although I'll bet you could have heard him a mile down South Street."

"South Street?" I asked, in a surprised tone not observed by the single-minded Jim. "Where's his office?"

"Fulton Market."

"The place they deal in fish at wholesale. And yet you say he is a rubber-neck for a cracker house?" I connected the faint suggestion of fish at the Fifth Avenue Hotel with the case at this point, and knew at once Tescheron's business, and from my knowledge gained by many inspections at the market inferred that the father of the girl was a millionaire.

"A queer place for the cracker business," said I.

"Well, a fellow told me; that's all I know," said Jim. "I haven't been sitting on the same sofa with the old gentleman asking him questions."

"Jim, do you know that you have this prospective father-in-law all twisted? He's something besides a cheap dude," said I. "He's no rubber-neck. I'll bet the old chap is well off, and do you want to know why he dresses so fine and keeps cologne on his handkerchief?"

"That's right, he does," said Jim with a wondering gaze. "And it's sickening to find a little, weazened, sawed-off cuss doing it—just to get people to look around to locate him, I warrant. There'd be no questions about old Tescheron if it warn't for his gasoline."

"No, no. You are away off, Jim. You don't know so much about perfumes and their antidotes as I do, and besides, you're not expected to, because it is not your profession. My nose is my bread and butter. I am an expert in the analysis of the nether atmosphere. Any composite bunch of air striking my acute analytic apparatus is at once split into its elements. Put me blindfolded in a woman's kitchen and I can tell you if there is pumpkin pie and rhubarb under cover there, and where they keep the butter and cheese. I can tell you what kind of microbes live in the cellar and all about their relatives, and even if there are moths or other evidences of winged occupancy among the fauna of the mattresses on the floors above. Wonderful, of course; but it's in my line, that's all. Given a peculiar kind of brains and any man can do it just as easily. My great deficiencies in other respects have all tended to the enlargement of this faculty. By some accident of nature my ancestors appear to have inclined toward obtaining a higher development of this sense so important to the protection of life in these days of crowded living. Of course, they did it unconsciously; but Fate wisely predisposes, I believe—"

"Well, what has this all got to do with Gabrielle?" interrupted Jim, crossing first one leg and then the other, and tossing his hair into cocks ready to be thrown on the rigging.

"Patience, Jim, old boy. You can't solve these great mysteries of life which confront us at every crisis of our existence, by jumping off the handle. I am ready to tell you, however, that I have hastily turned over in my mind such data as you have given me, and I find that you have blundered into a favorable position. It will not do for you to make any moves without consulting me,

however. If you can patiently bear up while I handle the case for you for a few days—"

"You may handle the father all you please," interrupted Jim, "but not Gabrielle. Everything is quiet at that end of the line."

"Of course," said I. "I would be no good there. Let me adjust the old gentleman. You may be thankful that the trail leads to a wholesale fish-market. I will be right at home there. I think I can surprise you."

CHAPTER V.

Jim shuffled off to bed after receiving my assurances of support. I had been extremely careful to keep from him the knowledge that I was in the game at both ends. In five minutes he was asleep.

Now for a good think on love, murder, political economy and fish. No sleep for me—just a good, long think, with breakfast at 6 A. M., with the correct solution as snugly stored in my mind as ten cents in a dime.

First, I knew nothing about the Brownings and cared less. They didn't figure in my plans at all. My purpose was to startle Pa Tescheron into a full knowledge of his lunacy, and command his appreciation of his future son-in-law.

As I was about to plunge deeper into my cogitations, I picked up a card from the table and read it. It chilled me some, but only for a minute. It ran like this:

PATRICK K. COLLINS,
UNDERTAKER AND EMBALMER,
9 West Tenth Street, New York.
Cremations a Specialty.

I had heard of that fellow Collins, a notorious man in his line. His specialty, cremations, removed all possibility of pathological or toxicological investigation weeks afterward, when public suspicion became aroused. The political coroners were supposed to be partners of his in crime, and the police had tracked many a case through his establishment to the retorts at the Fresh Pond crematory, where nothing but a few handfuls of ashes remained. Was there to be a cremation in the Browning case? Of course, I asked myself that question, and I also wondered why the sleuths of Smith's had not reported the fact, if it were a fact, to the hotel headquarters. If they knew it, then my telegram to Mr. Tescheron about Coroner Flanagan telephoning to all the cemeteries and his further purposes need not cause alarm. Perhaps he would laugh when he received it. The card had been placed there during my absence. Jim would tell me about it in the morning, so I gave the matter no further consideration.

By that time, 12 o'clock, the detectives must have had Tescheron talked tired, I guessed, and he was probably at home trying to figure how he might escape the

coroner's ordeal of publicity on the morrow, unless, of course, they knew this man cremated his victims right after the service.

It so happened that the detectives had him fairly crazy. When he read my message he was completely daft. Instead of working out my plans carefully, so as to achieve a complete fourth-act reconciliation by 6 o'clock, I spent the night answering and sending messages like a general looking through a telescope on a hill-top.

The first lad in blue uniform came just about midnight and scared me a little, but as Jim was not disturbed, all was well. It seems that instead of going to bed, Pa Tescheron took a new start as soon as he read my message about notifying the coroner. Smith was called again to meet him at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, about fifteen minutes by messenger boy from my headquarters. Here is the first message from General Tescheron:

> "You have done your worst. If you attempt to expose my family, I will have you prosecuted for blackmail and punished to the full extent of the law. Please call here at once.
>
> "TESCHERON."

General Hopkins sent this back by return boy:

> "Only evidence of attempted blackmail in this case so far is your message just received. I will keep it. Is Smith also your lawyer? He's a bird. Thanks, but I never go calling after midnight. Please accept my regrets.
>
> "HOPKINS."

I kept copies of the answers also, for I didn't know how far Smith and his bureau might carry this fanatic, for they seemed to have touched him where he was as tender as a wet spot on a paper napkin.

This came back in half an hour:

> "Your course is incomprehensible to me. You seem to take this matter as a joke. It may be necessary for me to let the law take its course to achieve my purpose. I do not fear your threats. Please call and talk it over.
>
> TESCHERON."

Of course, he didn't fear the exposure, for he knew what a smart lot of detectives he had. But he knew, according to my analysis of the workings of his superheated brain, that the few times he had been real mad in his life and had trusted to his impulses, he had gone deep into the mire of expense or ridicule. Some of the skeletons of these experiences were beginning to rattle in opposition to the oft-repeated easy solution of Smith, who had been stoking that inflamed head since 2 P. M. with the kind of gore which kept it ablaze. Tescheron was certainly getting a fine run for his money, and he had seemed to lose sight of the fact that Smith was filling the part of bookmaker and taking his pile.

I replied:

> "This is no joke. Wait until you get Smith's bill. Hope you have a good picture of yourself for the papers?—it saves the disgrace of a sketch from life. They are bound to make your wife and daughter look well. I have just laid aside a half dozen of our portraits for publication. Seems as if we would have pleasant weather for the coroner's party to-morrow. Don't miss it—or they'll drag you there in the hurry-up wagon.
>
> "HOPKINS."

I guessed he could see I wasn't rattled and was sticking close to my method of play. He could see that a thirty-year-old was no ordinary lad of the fish-market, to get excited when the boss turned red from boiling. This renewed activity on his part, however, threw me clear off the track that was to fetch me up at 6 A. M. with the whole business settled.

The murderer, who had comfortably thrown his burdens on me, in the meantime, snored again with a regularity and smoothness which proved he had banished all thought of his first wife and was preparing his trousseau for a comfortable wedding, with Pa Tescheron controlled and delivered by me at the altar, ready to speak his little piece.

It was a shame for Tescheron to keep those boys running all night, but he did. This came next:

> "I'll have my men at the autopsy, but I shall not be there, so you see our pictures will not be printed, as you seem to fear. I do not understand you. Don't you realize what your position is if this crime is revealed? Do not delay further, but come at once.

TESCHERON."

In my next I assured him that all our pictures would be printed, for he would be served by subpœna from the coroner, unless he and his family left the State before 8 o'clock.

And so it went, till finally I sent him a line saying that I would guard the murderer all night and meet him at the Fifth Avenue Hotel at 9 a. m. on my way to the coroner's.

Then I turned in and forgot all Jim's troubles. It must have been about 4 A. M.

Now, if early that evening I had learned my lesson, I might have minded my own business, gone to bed early, and, like a wise man, awakened early and left the house before it all happened.

It was just as I had predicted a hundred times, so I was not surprised afterward when I learned how it was. A short time after I went to sleep, Jim was overcome by the fidgets again and took one of those Turkish baths invented by his home folks. This style of bath was pure turkey. It was a regular turkey gobbler system of bathing and I had never heard the like of it before I began to live with Jim. The way to know a man is to live with him when he's in love. It was different in a number of ways from any country custom I had ever heard of up North, but all Jim's folks did it regularly, so he had told me, because they thought it was the greatest thing in the world for a person who felt out of sorts. I had been over to his house many and many a time, but it so happened that I never saw his dad or his ma, or in fact any of them, sitting on their kitchen stove.

Jim rigged up the bath in our flat kitchen with a lot of care. First he would take our set of three sad-irons—the kind that are run with the same handle, especially designed to press trousers under a wet rag—and he would put them on top of the range, one under each leg of a chair as far as they would go, and an old tin cup bottom-side-up under the fourth leg. He was always particular to have a cane seat in the chair and a piping hot fire in the range.

Then he would simplify his toilet till he got it about as we used to have it before diving into the old swimming-hole. When he had reached that point, he brought out a dark-colored quilt with a white ruffle all around the edge. (We liked dark quilts and had quite a number that never seemed to need washing.) In the middle of this quilt he had cut a hole, just large enough to poke his head through and be snug about the neck. When he got that on he pulled on a pair of old slippers that

he had tacked tin soles onto. The next and last piece to the harness was his red and blue worsted toboggan cap with a long peak minus the tassel—it was very necessary for the head to get the full benefit or you'd catch cold. This cap he pulled down well over his head and ears, and then he stood on a box and mounted the fiery throne, sitting down mighty easy while spreading the quilt over the back of the chair, and holding it out well so that the pointed ends were as close to the lids as possible to keep the cold air of the room off his shin bones.

It sort of reminded me of an old turkey gobbler; I don't know why, for it was such a serious business with Jim, and he looked so glum. But with the pointed ends dragging, he seemed to be strutting, and when he got heated up nicely and began to drip on the hot lids, the "hist" noise it made was just the same as an old gobbler's.

I've known him to swelter there in his turkey bath till he fairly sizzled, "hissing" like the proudest gobbler on the farm, and then step off easy onto the box, jump into bed, pull a heap of blankets over him and enjoy a good wilt.

It is the most natural thing in the world that the quilt caught fire without Jim noticing it. And thus ended our housekeeping.

I woke up six weeks later in a hospital.

CHAPTER VI

The circus side-shows used to exhibit specimens of the human family who were nothing but head. They had been sliced off clean at the neck and rested comfortably with the stump on a parlor table. The underside had evidently healed over nicely without corns, for they were the most amiable and smiling people you would find in the whole show. Spectators were not allowed within six feet of these people in reduced circumstances, for it was plainly desirable that no one should kick the table over or playfully tap them to see if they were really alive. Sceptics in the crowd said that mirrors did it. A razor might have done it, for all I cared. It gave me joy as a boy to think how it would feel to be only head and decorate a table. Brains certainly counted with them—they were always on top. And if they trained their tongues to run out and wash their faces and comb their hair, a valet would not be necessary. I've seen a man with no legs find a way to jump on a Broadway car and a man without arms can't be kept from playing the piano with his toes. This is because human nature has such a persistent way of trying to do the difficult thing, usually with wonderful success. Man can't fly nor be a fish naturally, but he wants to know how it would feel, and so he makes some startling flights and dives at doing both.

Well, I never tried falling out of a five-story window before just to see how it felt, but I got the sensation by doing it without trying. My first knowledge after the act was the sensation of carbolic acid making an appeal to my best-educated sense. That is all I knew for a long, long time—probably a year or two; then I began to have larger ideas, but not very broad or deep. I began to feel that I was just a head, and from this I figured it was all over with me on earth, and I was starting in to be a young angel. At first, I was to be only a small angel, just a cherub, with nothing but a fat head and two little wings about as big as your hand spreading out from under each ear. I tried to bend an ear down or cast an eye to feel or see if the wings had started, for as I thought of my condition I imagined a couple of inflamed lumps were swelling where the wingroots ought to be. But the ears were stiff and the eyes would not reach around so far.

The wing-boils made me feel a little colicky; I don't know why, for there was no substantial excuse for a case of colic, as I was all gone below the collar. Winging, I concluded, was like teething. Infant angels naturally felt colicky for some time before they cut their ear-wings. By-and-by, the little wings would, no

doubt, drop out, and the second wings would come in at the shoulder-blades, when I sprouted out below and took on shoulders with blades.

I slept, and slept, and the wings began to unfold and feather up nicely, but they were too sore to flap yet and the feathers were mostly pin size and very fluffy. Only at the top there were just a few that you might say had real quills on as yet. The carbolic acid kept getting stronger. I fancied it must be what young angels cry for. Why they should sprinkle so much of it around me, I didn't understand at first, but as I got to thinking about it I concluded that an Inspector of Offensive Trades would need it good and plenty, like Tescheron needed his cologne.

It must have been six months, so I then thought, after I had cut my first set of wings, that I began to think about getting weaned, for I was a bottle angel and I was getting almighty tired of watery victuals, and besides, I was losing my appetite for the rubber tap. The reason I didn't get a cookie or a chicken bone, I figured, was because I was now handling everything in my crop, and it wouldn't do to crowd it too hard or I might choke—the overload point being very close to the choker.

Well, I had never in all my worldly career wanted a cracker so badly. If they had thrown in some sweitzerkase or a Yankee sardine I would have been pleased; of course, I understood that it would be all out of order to call for a glass of beer. Still, if there were any soft drinks I would like a "horse's neck," promising to sip it so as not to get drowned in it.

By and by, I began to feel an awful thirst for something sour. Would it be in order for a small angel to have a pickle to cut his wings on? If so, I prayed, please let me have a jar of the mustard variety, full of red peppers and other emphatic food.

My eyesight began to improve, and after many years of craving for a pickle I began to see them in all sorts and sizes, dripping with delicious vinegar and aromatic of tasty cloves and cinnamon. There was no way for me to reach them. When I tired of trying I would drop into nothingness again. By-and-by these lapses seemed to give me strength. The floating pickles grew smaller and faded away and I began to discern the dim outline of pillows, bed-clothes and bed-posts, and the four walls of a narrow room. I burst the chains of bondage one morning by saying:

"Pickle, please; pickle, pickle!"

A consultation of the house staff and the leading members of the advisory corps was called immediately, and grouped around my bed they formally voted that this was excellent for so young an angel. The vote was not unanimous, as one of the doctors present gallantly led a strong opposition. He tried hard to have his motion carried. His motion was to lay the subject on the table (in the operating room) and take time to go into it deeper before deciding.

When the learned men had gone away, my mother angel (angel is the only word good enough for her), in a starchy blue and white uniform, leaned over close to my lips and I saw her smile in such a lovely way, shake her head and press a finger to her lips as she gently lifted me and drew a smooth, cool pillow under my tired head. But she did not speak. She placed a screen before the window and I fell asleep.

The next time I saw my mother angel she was laughing at me softly while looking over the foot of the bed. I was able to respond by raising my eyebrows and turning my creaking neck on its rusty hinge toward the sunshine that brought the glory of life into the room through a broad window.

"Good morning, ma'am," I said, not venturing to be too familiar with the lady, for I was at once struck with my inferiority to this saintly vision.

"Good morning, sir. Do you feel well to-day?"

"Yes, ma'am," said I; "I have never been ill."

A low, pleasant laugh, like the soft trill of a muffled music box, greeted my statement.

"I believe you," she said. "You will soon be out again."

"Am I in? Where am I in?"

"This is Bellevue Hospital," said she. "But you'll soon be gone from here. You're as tough and strong as rawhide and wrought iron."

Here was a woman who could size me up. I took her word for it and tried to turn over and get up, but nothing happened.

"Tush, tush! Don't get lively now! Think what you've been through. Take it easy. Dr. Hanley says you are a wonderful fellow; that he will always be proud of you."

"Is the pickle coming?" I asked expectantly, as if I had heard it knock on the door.

"Yes, it's coming," she laughed. "But it won't get here this week. Here's something that is a good deal better."

She squeezed out a thimbleful of orange juice and placed it in a low cup with a long snout like a locomotive oil can, designed to poke in out-of-the-way places. With this device she was able to get through my beard and find my mouth. As she gently tipped it, the goodly nectar trickled upon my desert tongue, to be quickly evaporated in that arid area before it reached far along the parched wastes. I wanted to swim in it, but these hospitals provide poor entertainment for their patrons.

"Pretty flowers there," said I, pointing to a great mass of roses and orchids, showing the freshness of recent arrival.

"Oh, she hasn't forgotten you"; and her large blue eyes danced playfully as she said it. I could see that those blue eyes would aggravate me yet, but I wanted to linger forever under the spell of their teasing.

"Who sent them?" I asked in surprise.

"Miss Tescheron."

I was about to say that I didn't know the lady, but I decided that the plot was too thick for a brain foddered on orange juice by the drop through a dripper, so I just threw the complications all over, willing to bide my time. Some accident had tossed me upon this bed of bruises, but I was pulling out and I gritted my bridge-work, determined to get out as quickly as possible and pick up my tasks again.

The following morning I felt like a new man. I could actually reach out for my food. Eighteen hours of sound sleep had put abundant life, hope and courage into me.

"What a fine color you have!" said the cheery nurse.

"That braces me," said I. "But what I want to get at is this: How did I come to get here? How long have I been here? How long must I stay here?"

And she laughed joyously, jacking me up several notches in spirits and at the back with the pillows.

"The doctor says I may tell you," she began. "He left just before you awoke. The three upper stories of your house were burned out early that morning, six weeks ago, and the house next door was also damaged. You must be strong while I tell you this, will you? You were thrown out of the fifth-story window while you were unconscious. You fell on the outspread net held by the firemen, but you were badly injured by striking against the ironwork of the fire-escapes that were rendered useless because the flames were so great; it was a quick fire. I got the story from the ambulance doctors. You have been wavering between life and death ever since, almost, although about the third week you seemed to begin to mend slowly. Are you comfortable now?"

"Where is Hosley? Is he in jail? Hasn't he been here to see me? Was he hurt? Was he killed? Hasn't he written to me?"

"My heavens! Why do you ask me is he in jail, and all those questions? Who is Hosley, pray? Is he a jail-bird? And are you only a jail-bird? Why do you begin to talk about jail so soon?"

She was born to nurse the ill and tease well folks, and she saw I was better and could stand it.

"How about those flowers?" I asked. "How is it she brings flowers to me?"

"Oh, my! Oh, my! Well, I never heard a man complain of the devotion of a beautiful woman. Dear me, you are a fortunate man; and she must have lots of money, too. Orchids like those are three dollars. You can get them for seventy-five cents each, but not that kind. Did you ever price roses like that? Just look at them! Um, how sweet—how I love them! A two-dollar bill blooms on every one of them. Isn't that devotion for you! And how does she come to send them to you? Well, now! What a hard shell there must be on your heart! What a pity the fall didn't crack it!"

As she talked she busied herself about the room; it was a bare, antiseptic spot, fragrant of carbolic and formaldehyde. I could see that she was chaffing me; but I let her have her way in this, just as she ruled the diet, the naps and the airings.

Why should I lie for six weeks in a hospital without Jim Hosley coming to see me? thought I. Why hadn't he insisted on sleeping on the mat just outside the door if they would not let him in? Why had he not sent notes hourly to learn of my condition? Why had I been left to strangers? There could be no excuse for this, even though he were in jail, for he could at least write me. If he were dead,

killed in the fire, Miss Tescheron would have told the nurse, for had she not brought me flowers? Had he been injured she would certainly have told the nurse about us. He had not been near me. He must, therefore, have skipped. In that case he must be all that Tescheron had pictured him to me. But why had Tescheron placed such confidence in Smith, whom he had known for such a short time? That was certainly not like a shrewd business man. Of course, I understood how anxious Tescheron was to get damaging evidence against Hosley; but what had Smith shown him? Why had he taken no further interest in me? Hosley must have skipped and Tescheron must have settled down, believing that no more would be heard of him. Miss Tescheron was still devoted to Jim, because she was sending me flowers. She still hoped to reach him through me and prove him innocent. But I would discourage her. I would not let her throw herself away on that fellow. If he were not a wretch he would have been there to see me; and if he were helpless as I was, then Miss Tescheron would be devoted to him and would have told the nurse about us, as she was enough interested in me to send me these beautiful flowers—me, whom she had never spoken to. And so it wound around in my weak head.

It was hard to believe this of Jim Hosley, that great lumbering hulk of humanity. How had he been able to assume that childish air and play the part with me, a shrewd, calculating observer of men, whose advice he always sought? Such villainy seemed to me to be beyond the art of any actor, and it certainly seemed to be a superlative degree of crime and deception impossible in real life. I remembered that he had shown some uneasiness that night when I started for the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and there was the card of the notorious undertaker, the ally of some of our worst criminals. Still, this was not connected with him and could not be regarded as damaging. When two bachelors are so wedded, is it possible for one to deceive the other? Married men had before this deceived clever wives. Could this companion to whom I would have trusted my life have deserted me at the moment of danger when I lay there overcome by smoke? Who tossed me from the window? Quickly I put that question to the nurse.

"There now," she said with a cautioning shake of her pretty head; "if you are going to keep thinking about that and get all upset, we won't let you out of here for a year—it was a fireman, perhaps; but what matters it?"

The bravery of a plain fireman mattered not, I thought. They must save lives as a business; chums, friends, they may slink away and leave you to a horrible death.

Jim Hosley was all that Tescheron had painted him, and yet there were doubts in

my mind. But these doubts were soon removed.

CHAPTER VII

For nearly five weeks after regaining complete consciousness I lived and gathered strength in that bare and polished room at the hospital. Dust found no place to stick there, it was all so slippery, and the flies were discouraged when they came in and found it so miserably antiseptic. The food was sterilized and peptonized until there was nothing a fly could find in my pre-digested tid-bits to snuggle up to—it was just like licking the plaster off the wall or biting the glazed, enameled paint on the bed. The enameled iron furniture seemed to be made to order without cracks, and there were no tidies or fancy work about. Any insect that came in, slipped around until he figured it was a toboggan slide and a mighty poor place to spend the day.

"Please send out for all the newspapers containing accounts of the fire and let me read them," I requested one day soon after my wits improved.

"No, indeed; I shall not. Reading is the worst thing you could do," said Hygeia. "You are gaining and must take no risks."

So it went. There was no one to obey me. I brooded over my hard luck. But life would have been wholly dismal in such a room without the companionship of one of those inspiring daughters of Hygeia. Now that I am beyond the confines of that room I must confess there seems to be little in life anywhere without one. Bachelors are quickly restored by their antitoxin cheer, but there is a more dangerous bacillus hidden in this powerful living therapeutic agency which in afteryears works its damaging, enervating effect in the heart of a man. They save but to slay! Can there be no healing balm benign in a woman's tender sympathy? Cannot the microbe of remorse be isolated from this serum beautifully administered by melting eyes and graces so fair that we wonder to find them so near our bitterest experiences? But there are wounds that will not heal; some mysterious infection lingers in them to sustain a slow fire, and the ashes of its discontent clog the channels till life seems cast in the vale of death.

But no more of this anguish! I have not told her name—in this at least, I shall be wise. I have not told of her family; why she became a daughter of Æsculapius; and beyond those dancing blue eyes, she shall not enter here. Neither shall anything be written of the things that passed between us during those five weeks

of my convalescence. What matters it? Was I not in the world simply to be tempered and hardened by all the adversities to which a heart may be subjected? And was I not an inhuman wretch, who touched with the sting of sarcasm, ridicule and scorn the vital things that interest normal beings? To me she became only Hygeia—a goddess!

What a man of thirty years needs is mirth more abundantly than at twenty, but the clouds were too thick around me then to take sane views. Contentment comes when a man can shake the clouds inside out and bask in the reflection of the silver lining that makes the other half of the comedy agreeable. I seemed to be plunged into despair, to be confined in a dungeon, with the devils of hate and all the monsters of abandoned hopes shooting their tongues at me from the crannies of the damp, green walls that hedged me in. Were they to be my torturers to the death? Then why send a sick man to the hospital?

Even though my mind had been at peace otherwise, it would have been impossible for me to regain my habit of unconcern and reliance upon my own resources, deserted by the man in whom I had anchored my faith since boyhood. Thought of his guilt oppressed me.

"Which would you rather go to—a wedding or a hanging?" I abruptly questioned the nurse, waking from a troubled nap.

"Calm yourself all you can. You are not so well to-day."

"I am beginning to think better of a hanging," said I. "It seems like a sure thing, so it's well to get used to it."

"Tut, tut!" said Hygeia softly, adjusting a cold cloth to my brow. She reported to the doctor that I was wandering again. But I wasn't crazy. I was looking for consolation.

The detectives had reported Jim with the undertakers in the same carriage that night, while I was at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and the card of the notorious Collins, whose specialty, cremations, removed all traces of such crime, lay on the table. I waited to inquire about the card until the next morning. The morning came and here I was, alive, but hardly thankful for my escape. Why was it, I asked myself, that the only two circumstances, the carriage and the card, that pointed with any directness to Jim Hosley's guilt, should have come under my notice the same night? Why, if he had deceived me for years, should he leave a damaging card where it could be seen by me at a time when he was deep in one

of his most awful crimes? But, on the other hand, had he not fooled me for ten years? So why should he be careful about the mere card of an undertaker? How did he know where I had gone that night to be enlightened? Still, why did he squirm and appear so uneasy when I went out? Was it only because he had so much to tell me about his disappointment over the interview with Mr. Tescheron? Certainly, that must be it. Then came the last "but" of all—Why didn't he come to see me, or why had I not heard from him? If Jim Hosley had been devoted to me like a loyal friend there was no possible way for me not to have heard from him before this. Any man in his right mind could take the same state of facts and reach no other conclusion. Suspicion had worked its way through narrow openings, and my doubts were giving way to convictions, so that soon I believed I would be as much against Hosley as the fiery Tescheron, when goaded by the mercenary Smith.

I cannot tell how hard it was for me to believe this of Jim Hosley, that great, lumbering fellow, handsome and manly, the personification of comfortable, attractive indolence and agreeable indifference.

"Pity you never saw Hosley," said I to Hygeia. She was now prepared to hear me speak of him at any time.

"What did he look like? Dark and swarthy; rather short, I imagine, with curly, black hair."

"Turn that upside down, inside out and stretch it and you'll have it," said I.

She laughed and left the room.

What a charming fellow Jim was to get on with! Perhaps those virtues had been his resources in a wild career of crime and his strongest allies in effecting a concealment of his true self. Thus my analytical mind threshed out the ramifications of possibilities. My intimate relations with him for so many years further convinced me that if he had followed that long career of crime outlined by Tescheron he must have begun when he was playing "Injuns" up in Oswegatchie County.

Then I would cheer myself with the thought that something in Jim's favor would turn up soon and all would be well again, and we would get a new outfit of stuff for about eighty-five dollars—that's what we paid before—and start in housekeeping again; perhaps on the second floor, so as to get in line with the inexorable law of falling bodies.

Mr. Tescheron, I supposed, would somehow blame Jim for the fire and count it part of the grand plot to seize his daughter. Well, it was all too much for me, with my weak body and easily fatigued brain. It was hard work to keep my nerves calm under the circumstances.

My brother Silas had come down to see me, but when I began to mend he returned to Oswegatchie County, completely worn out with three weeks' tramping on city sidewalks. He made a number of inquiries for me concerning Hosley at the City Hall and among our old neighbors. He could learn nothing, however, so it was clear that Jim had departed for parts unknown. Silas carried back the news of my returning health to the folks, and was also able to inform them that the cars ran all night down here in New York—a matter they had never seen reported in the papers and I had never referred to in my letters. When he left, I was as lonesome as a retired pork packer dabbling in the fine arts. It seemed that

"Turn where'er I may I find
Thorns where roses bloomed before
O'er the green fields of my soul;
Where the springs of joy were found,
Now the clouds of sorrow roll,
Shading all the prospect round."

These lines of George P. Morris came to mind, and they, too, recalled Jim Hosley and the early days when I began to be the middleman in his love affairs, and gave my aid to his amorous cause by writing his love letters. I had worked Shakespeare, Scott, Burns, Byron and Morris (the only five we had handy) in relays to support his fervent song of love, for behind the scene with my pen Jim said I was a wonder in stringing this fetching gush together. But I tried to be modest about it. There was enough in those five to marry the inhabitants of Europe to those of Africa. I understood that anything Jim said to a woman would be taken in good part, and those love letters in which the green fields of his soul must have appeared well irrigated by those bubbling springs of joy, undoubtedly pleased the fair dames and, I supposed, did no harm. But a joke is the most dangerous thing a middleman in the love business can engage in. The business is full of danger anyhow, but joking is worse than dynamite.

If the mechanical part of our arrangements had been seen by the young women —Jim generally asleep and I copying the poetry from a clumsy, big book and scratching my tousled head for sentiment enough to glue the verses together in a prose somewhere near the same temperature—I don't suppose there would have been many victories. Perhaps there were none; Jim never spoke of results; he kept them to himself and I don't know what he did with them. All the margin there was in it for me was the literary exercise which in value hardly covered the cost of the ink. Perhaps he had married each one of the women and had killed them off, because he enjoyed the excitement of courtship's gamble more than the sure thing of matrimony. If so, I was undoubtedly an accomplice, although entirely innocent. A jury, however, might not take that comfortable view of it, if a handwriting expert were called and took seven weeks to tell them his story. They would certainly hang me to get home.

So first my grief and loneliness recalled the lines of the poet whose music I had used to Jim's advantage, and then followed the matters attached to the same chain of thought. The moment was ripe for one of those coincidences that occasionally arise to startle us. It came sure enough, and gave me the worst

shock of all, for when I afterward considered its full meaning, I realized that I had for ten years been the innocent tool of the criminal whom Tescheron had discovered after an investigation of six hours. Had the truth been revealed to the world, thought I, with evidence of Hosley's guilt, my bust would be lined up on the same shelf with his in the Hall of Infamy.

"Must I to the lees
    Drain thy bitter chalice, Pain?
Silent grief all grief excels;
    Life and it together part—
Like a restless worm it dwells
    Deep within the human heart."

More of Morris came to mind. I was sitting alone in the sun parlor at the hospital that morning, gathering strength in the abundant sunshine that poured through the glass windows on all sides, reaching from roof to floor. Wrapped in a single blanket, in my cushioned wheel chair, I was as comfortable as a man with a half dozen or so newly knit bones could feel if he sat perfectly still and did not exhaust his energies by worrying over the slow ups and the rapid downs of life, as one who had dropped five stories into the depths of solitude might, if not careful to turn to the saving grace of his philosophy and political economy. Learning is the only thing a man can count on in the bottomless pit, and then it won't help him unless he has a little humor for a light. Alas! my light had gone out.

Well, I was sitting there sunning myself and thinking how deep a hole I had fallen into, when Hygeia appeared, as ever a vision of loveliness, a picture of a merry heart gathering the sweets of life and scattering the seeds of contentment by passing busily from one task to another, full of the joy of sound health and thankful for the privilege of service. How did she find time to pursue a course in medicine? Her ambition amazed me.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir," she said, and she handed his card to me. It read:

A. OBREEON,
30 West 24th Street,
New York.
Private Detective Service.

I felt that light was about to break on a dark subject, and I was not mistaken. A. Obreeon was as much Dutch in appearance as French in name; he had a rosy, round face and cheeks that were like a picture of two red apples. He seemed husky enough to be a corner groceryman, who benefits incidentally through the fresh air advantages bestowed on his vegetables to keep them marketable. His beard was trimmed to look like a farmer's, with a clean-shaven upper lip—a form of barbering that prevents bronchitis, but not soup. No one would suspect him of anything except tight boots, for his mouth and forehead were wrinkled as if he were suffering from acute cornitis; you might call it "an injured air," for a man who has just run a sliver in his toe shows the same symptoms.

Mr. Obreeon seemed interested to the point of being worried when I asked him to have a seat, and at this and every suggestion he was taken with violent shooting pains, and his lips were pursed for a drawn whistle of discomfort. A smooth man was never so ill at ease. Any promoter who will abandon his air of supreme confidence and adopt the Obreeon principle of disinterestedness in all worldly affairs except his agony, will pull millions from the pockets that now begrudgingly yield ten thousand dollar allotments in return for smooth talk concerning gigantic ventures, as viewed from the sub-cellar of enterprise.

Obreeon apologized for coming; said he ought really to be home, he felt so badly; had been so wretched, etc.; but he had waited so long, if he was going to do anything with me, it must be done now. Then he would draw a few whistles, pinch up his face and screw his mouth around in a way that convinced me he had no axe to grind. No one but a philanthropist would go out to see a man when in such pain.

"There is a matter which I wanted to see you about before going to my friend Smith," said Mr. Obreeon. "Of course, I know he is working on this case—we tip each other off sometimes, you know, and would like to have this bit of evidence." He pointed to a small leather bag. I eyed it, but failed to identify it as a Hosley exhibit. "Some of my men gathered this evidence at the fire," he continued. "Of course, what I have found out won't be of any use to them unless they have plenty of Hosley's handwriting for expert examination—"

Hosley's handwriting! My swallowing was on walnuts. I could see that they were close on Jim's trail, but I dared not reveal where I stood in the matter or that Tescheron had not been near me. If there was any handwriting it must be mine,

moreover, for Jim never wrote; he sent telegrams in great emergencies. I pulled myself together, offering to get Mr. Obreeon a drink or a drug that would ease his intense pain, so that he might be persuaded to remain and divulge all he knew. This man was at work independently of Smith, and might help me. No, he would not take anything, thank you, as it might cause him to collapse! Gracious, but I was afraid he might collapse. He assured me he shared my fears, and made me promise he would be taken at once in the ambulance to the address on the card, should the worst happen. My assurances calmed him and he proceeded, but with great effort:

"Yes, I have here one hundred and sixty-two letters written by Hosley. I—"

At that moment the collapse was on me. I fell back in my recovery a clean two weeks, because of the nerve force squandered in trying to take that in.

"I think they prove he was connected with the woman down-stairs, for after the fire my men found them in one of her private boxes, tied up with a lot of her letters. But I have here only those written by him."

"Perhaps another man named Hosley wrote them," I ventured, after recovering, "if you found them so; Hosley is not such an unusual name."

"Well, now, that's just what I want to get at, Mr. Hopkins. Maybe you're right, and so, of course, I wouldn't want to bother Smith with 'em, you know, if they are only a false clue; he'd only laugh at me, you see. As you, I understand, are friendly with Tescheron and against this Hosley as much as he is, I thought I'd consult you first and find out if these letters were really written by your Hosley or another. If they are his, I think I have the evidence you all will want."

Letters written by Hosley, and found with that woman's things! Then I had written them and they might prove to the world that I was his accomplice in crime, for if he had won her heart with these letters and had done away with her, as alleged, and Smith had the evidence to prove it, then I was his pal. My protestations of innocence would not avail. There were the letters and Smith had the specimens of my handwriting in the many messages sent to Tescheron at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. But how lucky for me that the sleuths of Obreeon and not those of Smith had found them! How I clutched at that thought! Surely all luck had not left me. How fortunate that Obreeon did not suspect me as an accomplice, for with those letters he might have convicted us both!

How eagerly I reached for them as Obreeon took them from the bag while

undergoing a wave of pain that I felt sure took his attention from me! They had been written for Jim several years before in one of his most severe cases. That villain, Hosley, had certainly fooled me. I could see that I had been his dupe all through. I, his chum from boyhood, blinded at every turn by this clever knave! But at last I was getting wise to the trickery of the world; from this time forth I would be wary of every suggestion and live and die alone to insure the preservation of my innocence. What a harvest of whirlwind these letters would have brought me had they passed into the hands of Smith or the authorities! Here's where the profits come in, thought I, when a fellow sets up to do a jobbing business in love, as I read on and on through the first pile, pretending to have some difficulty in recognizing Hosley's handwriting. A few off the top of pile No. 1 ran as follows:

April 4,——

My Dear Miss Brown:

You have not forgotten the honor granted to me at Mrs. Pratt's. May I call to-morrow evening? I shall be eager to hear from you.

Sincerely,

JAMES HOSLEY.

April 10,——

My Dear Miss Brown:

You and I in H, middle aisle at Daly's, to-morrow night. Jolliest show in town under these rare circumstances. If I come early, you must pardon me, for I shall be so eager to meet you again.

The star, the breeze, the wave, the trees,
Their minstrelsy unite,
But all are drear, till thou appear
To decorate the night.

Sincerely yours,

JAMES HOSLEY.

Great Morris! It must have made him squirm in his grave.

April 12,——

Dear Miss Brown:

Thank you for the kind invitation for to-morrow evening.

Sincerely,

JAMES HOSLEY.

April 14,——

Dear Miss Brown:

What a delightful time we all had at Mrs. Pratt's last night! I shall call to talk it over with you to-night.

Sincerely,

JAMES HOSLEY.

April 15,——

Dear Miss Brown:

What a pretty name Margaret is! I had no idea all your friends called you that.

O lingering rose of May!
Dear as when first I met her;
Worn is my heart alway,
Life-cherished Margaretta.

And when we parted last night, believe me,

As morn was faintly breaking,
For many a weary mile,
Oh, how my heart was aching!

Sincerely,

JAMES H.

April 17,——

Dear Margaretta:

How long are you to be gone? Write me daily when away, that the period of your absence from town may be as brief as you can make it, to lessen the anguish of the one who "at the trysting place, with tears regrets thee."

I shall be with you early this evening,

Yours as always,

JIM.

April 23,——

Dear Margaretta:

The time drags heavily, and were it not for the cheerful letter that arrives every morning, so full of your enthusiasm for the unfolding beauties of the spring and your tender assurances *occasionally* given in return to the pleadings that pour from my overflowing heart, it would seem that I could not bear the struggle against life's disappointments. Time? What has time to do with love?

Love cannot be the aloe tree,
Whose bloom but once is seen;
Go search the grove—the tree of love
Is sure the evergreen;
For that's the same, in leaf or frame,
'Neath cold or sunny skies;
You take the ground its roots have bound
Or it, transplanted, dies!

My dear sweetheart, my love for you is the evergreen, and write me, darling, not of the budding trees and the wild flowers so tender in the

morning dew, for there is an aggravating indirection to such devotion. Write me, my dearest, so that I may feel

Those tender eyes still rest upon me, love!
I feel their magic spell,
With that same look you won me, love.

Oh! these spring days and thoughts of you combine to swell my song to bursting. When, Margaretta, do you return? for I would behold again

Thy form of matchless symmetry,
In sweet perfection cast—

I miss thee everywhere, beloved,
I miss thee everywhere;
Both night and day wear dull away,
And leave me in despair.
The banquet hall, the play, the ball,
And childhood's sportive glee,
Have lost their spell for me, beloved,
My soul is full of thee.

Your story of the springtime is very sweet. The descriptions are true to life, and as I read on and on, I behold the exquisite beauties of your character, for as you so lovingly and simply tell of the birds, the flowers, the brook and the mist enshrouding the lowing kine, you artlessly sound the great depths of your own soul.

How I envy the winged denizens of the country! even those black beetles you so playfully refer to on page 18, line 56. I wish *I* might come in somewhere:—

Has Margaret forgotten *me*,
And love I now in vain?
If that be so, my heart can know
No rest on earth again.
A sad and weary lot is mine,

To love and be forgot;
A sad and weary lot, beloved;
A sad and weary lot!

And, of course, it pleases me to know they are making much of you up there in the country. I can see the swains for miles around polishing their manners and taking astonishing pains with their Sunday's best, to make a good impression. They, too, are baring their hearts to your melting glances, completely enchanted under the spell of your womanly graces. But believe me, my darling Margaret,

When other friends are round thee,
And other hearts are thine;
When other bays have crowned thee,
More *fresh* and *green* than mine—
Then think how sad and lonely
This doting heart will be,
Which, while it throbs, throbs only,
Beloved one, for thee!

And oh, how I fear, not the spring songs of the birds so mellow with love's endearing persuasion, the whisperings of the soft winds, nor the caprice of the beetles, but the gentle pastorals of those sturdy rural bards. List not to their tender minstrelsy, my darling! List not to the country poet's song, but hie thee home to thy awaiting Jamie. List not, for—

How sweet the cadence of his lyre!
What melody of words!
They strike a pulse within the heart,
Like songs of forest birds,
Or tinkling of the shepherd's bell
Among the mountain herds.

Can't you hurry home, Margaret? The town has not lost all its fascination for you, I hope. Are there no other joys in life but the top notes of the birdies and the murmurings of the awakening forest?

Come, come to me, love!
Come, love! Arise!

And shame the bright stars
With the light of thine eyes;
Look out from thy lattice—
Oh, *lady-bird*, hear!

Write me, my darling, the good news of your home-coming, that I may greet you at the Grand Central. Oh, promise me that you will hasten home, and name the minute the train is due, that I may be there an hour early.

'Tis then the promised hour
When torches kindle in the skies
To light thee to thy bower.

Your only, devoted, well-nigh distracted, but fondly true

JAMIE.

Whew! Shade of Morris, forgive me for the base uses to which I turned your love songs!

When I had finished going over the letters I proceeded to be extremely wise and diplomatic.

"These letters seem to bear Hosley's name," said I; "they might help us—in fact, I am glad you took the pains to bring them to me. Are there any more?" He might not have noticed how anxious I was to have them all.

"Yes, you have the complete and most damaging documents in the case," he answered. "They only need your identification, or if there should be any handwriting for comparison, you can understand—yes, just so—why, it would be easy without your evidence. I see you appreciate their enormous value."

This fellow was getting around to talk cash in a way that made me squirm, and as he eased off again his pain kept him engaged and gave me a chance to think. When I wrote those letters I thought they were pretty nice, but I never put any cash value on them, and never supposed there would be any market for them.

"Mr. Obreeon," said I, "about what would compensate you for your trouble in gathering up those letters?" I was calm.

"One thousand dollars." And as he said it his pain left him and shot into me.

I rocked and gripped the chair. I could see there was no use to get mad and talk loud, for he had me where there was only one move I could make without getting in check, and that was into my pocketbook. Besides, if I talked too much he might find where I came in on the thing.

"Five hundred, cash down, I'll give you," said I, trying to look disinterested, as if I dealt in autographs and letters of great men.

"One thousand dollars, hair and all," said he, rubbing his palms in a net-price manner.

"Hair?"

"Yes; there's a lock of Hosley's hair and some rings—everything is included in my price."

What was it worth to keep out of the electric chair? That is the way I figured it; it wasn't so much a question of letters and mere poetry and hair.

"That's an awful price," said I, "*an awful price*."

"Well, let me take them around to Tescheron. My price to him will be three thousand dollars, and I know from the prices Smith is getting that he'll pay. Glad to see you improving. Anything in my line, Mr. Hopkins, would be pleased to hear from you; old established house—"

"Sit down! Sit down, Obreeon! I'll split the difference with you and let you have my check." I touched a button and requested that my new handbag containing my checkbook and fountain pen be brought. Thank goodness, my bank account had not burned and my reputation might yet be saved.

"No, Mr. Hopkins, I am favoring you, really I am, in this matter, you know, and I could not—I could not cut that price."

What was the use? It almost cleaned me out, but I never hankered after money if it meant publicity. You may say it was only a fad or fancy of mine. I drew my check for $1,000 of hard-earned cash, slowly gathered by years of saving out of a small salary, and gave it to him, making sure I had the goods and extra fittings.

Mr. Obreeon started for home with warm feet and a remarkably steady gait.

Well, I never thought any letters of mine would bring that sum in the open market, and as for Jim's hair, I had known him to pay a quarter to have a lot of it

cut off and thrown away.

I did a little figuring with my pen after Obreeon left. Taking the hairs and letters combined, they cost me an average price of $5.55. I worked it out this way:

162—of my letters.
18—of Jim's hairs.
———
180—total hairs and letters.

You then divide $1,000 by 180 to ascertain the average price of $5.55.

Or, if you want to get at the price of each hair, counting the letters as dead stock, you grasp at a glance that the hairs are just 10 per cent, of the outfit, so you divide 180 by 10, and that gives you 18; take this amount and you run it into $1,000, and you get the price per hair as $55.55. When you arrive at this answer you may note that you might have obtained it by multiplying the average price by ten. In other words, the hair, if entirely loose from the poetry, costs ten times as much. To get at the price of the poetry loose from the hair, you simply divide $1,000 by 162, the number of letters, and that gives you $6.17 as the price of each letter, wholly disregarding the hair. It will be seen, therefore, that the commodity of highest value in an ordinary love correspondence, such as this was, is the hair, so that it is important for purchasers to consider if it is worth the price should the poetry go out of style.

I have often thought I might have bought four or five Persian lamb coats for—well, never mind. There is no cold-storage expense keeping this fur of Jim's. Every deal shows its profit one way or the other, and sooner or later you'll find it. There is a heavy expense attached to making over Persian lamb coats, besides. What I have of Jim's coat I wouldn't alter for the world, because whenever I have a craving for poetry with hair, I turn to that and get all I want for some time to come, just at a glance.

CHAPTER VIII

Now that I know Gabrielle Tescheron, I am for giving woman the largest liberty in all matters; let her have suffrage if she will take it. I am for giving woman everything—just let her run loose, here, there and everywhere, and then you'll see the world tidy up. It's time the worldliness of the world was viewed with fresh eyes. Woman, so long held in restraint, in many ways is a better observer than conventional man. She is like a countryman newly arrived in the city. It takes a countryman to see the real sights of New York; of course, he won't let on or be surprised at anything, for he wants you to feel that the only metropolis worth while is the place he calls "down street," up home; he is taking it all in, however, like an old-fashioned sap-kettle, and if you have dumped maple juice fresh from the trees into one all day, you'd think it held the five oceans and the Great Lakes. For years afterward his views on New York illuminate locally every city scandal reported in the New York papers; he probably saw it coming when he was down, and can tell a lot of incidents there was no space for in the crowded papers.

At one of the Oswegatchie County dinners held in a swell New York hotel I once saw one of these confident, you-can't-surprise-me countrymen take a drink of water from a goblet with a scalloped edge; it stood fourteen inches high and six across. The waiter had placed it on the table near him full of celery, but when the last piece had been taken and only a few green leaves floated like lily pads on its calm surface, he knew the proper thing to do. He just blew off the stray leaves, stretched his mouth around the prongs on the edge, got his paw under it, turned it up and enjoyed his simple highball. All our strong men come from the country. They drink and see things straight. They are more particular as to contents than containers, for they are nearly all prohibitionists or very high license advocates. When they are "dry," they drink equally well from a spring-hole, a spigot, a dipper or a pail.

"Rather generous with the water at these dinners, Reuben," I said, addressing him across the table, as he covered his mouth with his napkin preparatory to resuming his composure.

"These fashionable glasses always cut my mouth," he replied, wrinkling his brow to emphasize his dislike for the fads of the aristocracy.

But when an out-and-out city man goes to the country, he can't see anything; it's all just like Central Park, in that there are no houses to be seen, only it's not laid out so well nor raked so clean. I have often seen these chaps when they came up to our place. The city man is as blind as a cave fish, and all he wants to know is when do they eat and are there any mosquitoes and poison ivy. The air suits him, only it's a little too strong; and the dirt is satisfactory—all else is away below par, and if it weren't for the air and the dirt, which the country-bred city doctor has told him the kids need, he'd like to be home, where he can be sociable in his sub-stratum of atmospheric poison, amid the clatter that consumes his vital forces and keeps him pleasantly anæmic and tolerably dead.

Did you ever go through the woods with a native New Yorker? There has been an incessant stream of startling things running before his eyes since his birth, with plenty of noise, dust and expense, so that when he is thrown out into the fields or the woods he finds he can't be one of Nature's Quakers and hold communion with the silent worshippers through whom the Spirit speaks. His outdoor religion is in the Salvation Army class, and he can't warm up enough to admire a potted geranium unless he hears a bass drum or a hand organ to distract him on the side. If the sweet air and comforting silence of the country were to fall upon New York, the town would probably drop to even lower levels from the shock. The country boy, who has been used to concentrating on the wood-pile, runs the country; or, if it happens to be a city boy who runs it, he is a fellow who had the wood-pile grafted onto him in time to save his career. Gabrielle Tescheron, the woman in a new field, saw the world aright; there was no mystery for her at any time. Her intuitions guided her unerringly while we who reasoned became entangled.

Shrewdness in the country lad, however, is not commended very highly by me. It may be that the country boy has been tutored by the most unscrupulous politicians that ever got out a big vote on a moral issue—usually the one coined at the mint with unanimous consent and a cry for more: "In God We Trust." If the country boy has fallen, it may be that he was blinded by this, so that when he came to the city and took the prizes he used the same old methods. We find some of these shrewd country lads with abundant health, close observers, selling their birthrights here in the sort of deals that were regarded as clever in up-country politics, and so became legitimate in their eyes.

There's more politics in the country than they can dilute in their sermons, although they absorb about thirty times as many of these as the city man. Some day all the country fathers will reform, even if they have to change their politics

and half of them die because of it. They will think it more worth while to save their sons than to save the country.

What about the morality of the city man? It isn't a factor because he isn't.

If the management of our affairs had been entrusted to Gabrielle Tescheron there would have been no trouble. Had her father been a wise man and allowed this only child to have her way—to have noted the whole situation from her fresh view-point, he would have found peace where he found an abundance of perplexing conditions and ample expense closely adhering to every bramble bush into which the tactics of Smith hurled him. Gabrielle could not save him and she did not try. Where the cause of the trouble is idiocy of the Tescheron quality, it has to go through a long course of pulverization, maceration and cure; if you hurry the process, the goods will be sour and hurt the business, if the lot gets out under the trade-mark. The best thing to do with it is to send it to the coal heap, for if you try to get your money back at a Front Street auction room, some hand-cart syndicate will nab it and cut your price. They'll undersell the direct trade, and when you have finished writing an explanation to the men on the road, you'd wish you had eaten the whole carload yourself.

It was part of the wisdom of this remarkably prudent young woman to thoroughly comprehend—by some of those fresh intuitions, probably—that her truly repentant father would plead for her forgiveness and ask her blessing upon his prodigal return only after a long, long wrestle with the wholesalers in blasted reputations, who so showily presented designs for a disgraced suitor that pleased him greatly. He had placed an order with these architects of infamous character to build one according to the plans and specifications presented, and as the construction work progressed there were extras, extras, extras! Gabrielle knew of these and never murmured. To her father's urgings, she guardedly replied:

"My dear father, I know my heart and I know yours. Some day you, too, will reach the truth and we shall again be happy."

There was no mystery in this situation for Gabrielle Tescheron, as I have stated. She would not tolerate it. At the time her father and myself were confused, she was sure of herself. He thought of his family, and I of my reputation, whose spots had never been advertised. Gabrielle thought only of Jim.

Gabrielle could not be swayed from her devotion to the man whose simple ways and sturdy honor made their silent appeal to her. He was nobody's ideal man but hers, perhaps, and people who knew them wondered what she saw in him to

match her ambitions. Well, there was her wisdom coming to the surface again in a way to confuse those who would have managed her affairs differently. Gabrielle had a firm faith in herself. Jim was the complementary type of man; he approached her with qualifications that met all the practical conditions the careful father had a right to demand, prompted by his love for his child—at least, this was true according to her conception—and beyond that the father could not enter to live her life for her. She was at once convinced of her father's folly and paid no further heed to his objections. She gave full liberty to others, and firmly but not excitedly demanded it for herself. This was a manifestation of love's controlling power in the stress of storm that I, as a theorist, knew not, but having gained the wisdom through the course it prescribes in the school—I might say the *Correspondence* School of Hard Knocks, I think I am now qualified to have my name in the catalogue, if not as a member of the faculty, then as janitor—for no man was ever more ready than I to eat humble pie.

Gabrielle Tescheron was a graduate of Vassar. When only twenty she had her degree and an ambition to progress farther in knowledge by direct contact with the world of business. The opportunity came on her Commencement Day, when John MacDonald, an old friend of her father, playfully suggested that she come into his law office and be a Portia.

"Your black gown," he said, "makes me think you are a Justice of the Court of Appeals."

He smiled, and she became very happy with this thought to carry home. Even then I believe she had the good sense not to feel badly because he had not praised her essay on "Constitutional Provisions Bearing Upon Our Federal Control of Inter-State Commerce."

"Ten years from now, I'll tell you what I think about it," was all he had to say.

John MacDonald was getting well along in years, but was at the height of his active professional career when Gabrielle induced him to seriously confirm his suggestion made a few months before. This persistence of hers in the matter pleased him. He liked her self-confidence and that quiet manner which told him she would win by taking the sure road of steady, earnest endeavor to grasp the whole by taking each part, day by day. She began, he saw, with scientific methods and abundant enthusiasm. The plan was for her to master stenography and typewriting, become John MacDonald's confidante in the office, and at the same time take a law course at one of the down-town schools. The mechanical

aids afforded by stenographic note-taking and the typewriter's rapidity gave her the short cuts to mastering the details and routine of the business—the shop-work of a law office. Mr. MacDonald, a kind, mild-mannered man, but an exact and careful lawyer, who demanded the utmost thoroughness from his subordinates, had known this girl from childhood and took a fatherly interest in her. She, in turn, admired him for his justice, and she felt that the progress she was able to make in her work by keeping busy and taking pains, might not have been so marked under his tutorship were he not a man whose sympathy never ran to coddling and spoiling. He was in sympathy with her, that she knew; but he never went out of his way to tell her how well she was doing. He incorporated much of her original work in his own, and let her infer his opinion of her from this. This man was, I believe, the source of the girl's wisdom in the events which drove her father and me into the most unusual forms of insane conclusion. We assumed that we understood human nature. This girl assumed nothing. She walked with sure feet after she had gone over the case with some of the old-fashioned common sense that hovered around John MacDonald's law office. How fine it was for her to attach herself to some of the real problems of the world rather than bury her talents in the shallow social activities she might have entered into and come to regard as her limited sphere, when in reality she had the widest liberty for the mere seeking and deserving!

I was not present at the reception held at the home of mutual friends, Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, some three years prior to these events narrated here, when Gabrielle Tescheron and James Hosley first met. I was out of town that New Year's eve, and so missed the jolly party at the Gibsons', although I had been present usually on these anniversary occasions in bygone years, for the Gibsons were kind friends of ours and pitied our lonely lot. They lived in the cutest little home in all the great city—in the most romantic spot you could find when the waning hours of the old year were danced away by merry feet and jolly hearts sang the New Year in. Mr. Gibson was a mechanical engineer (not from Stevens', but from Cooper Union), and he was the superintendent in charge of the big Produce Exchange building, whose tall, red tower is one of the landmarks of New York. Their home was a conveniently arranged and tastefully furnished apartment high up in the tower just beneath the clock, where, perhaps, you have seen those round windows that look out upon the world of surrounding harbor and soaring skyscrapers, like tiny portholes. Those windows of the Gibson home are larger than you imagine when viewing them from the street. What a spot to meet a charming girl! Why, I used to lose my heart there every New Year's night as regularly as the big clock marked the minutes, but it always came back to me

with a bounce six weeks later; the dense atmosphere of romance hovering there made competition extremely keen. Who would not fall in love in that clock tower!—far up among the stars, separated from the dull routine below by encircling fairy lights of harbor, misty outlines of buildings and busily moving craft—all seemingly in mid-air, flashing the scenery of a joyland, while mellow chimes of the neighboring Trinity pealed their glad welcome to the New Year. At that magic moment, when you pressed far out of the window to hear the bells—she and you—suspended above that vast expanse of earth, sea and air shrinking away, as if you two together were flying aloft with arms entwined, you passed very close to heaven. The shouts from the street were heard but faintly, and awoke sighing echoes in your heart, like the minor chord accenting the ecstatic movement which seemed to hold the world in rhythm. How lustily you caroled the chorus to hide your tender feelings! Some of those round windows have such dear memories clinging to them—aye! clinging is the word—that I dare not look up at them any more from Broadway.

My story tells of Trinity bells,
When chimes ring clear
And harbor lights are flashing,
    Beneath the starry bower,
Where a dying year brings not a tear
    To young hearts in the tower.

How sweetly swells—how merrily bells!
The song of youth,
To lift the soul enraptured—
    A glance may tell the story,
Prompted by Cupid, now shyly hid—
    Anon he'll claim the glory.

Remember that Gabrielle Tescheron was enjoying herself like all the other girls that night—that New Year's eve, a little more than three years before the opening of our tale, and Jim Hosley was deep in all the fun. On the floor above the Gibson apartment, the young folks danced around the works of the clock to the music of a violin and harp, and from early evening till late—or early, as you please—they had the best kind of a time—the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters—for it was a family party. All the Gibson relatives and their friends were there, for it would not seem like New Year's to them to celebrate the coming of the year away from that romantic nest. Don't ask me to analyze the

hearts of Gabrielle and Jim to the whys and wherefores, for the potencies of love are beyond the analysis even of the purists, although they give us many words of explanation which get around at last to the old formula: "They fell in love." And it was as if they had dropped from one of the round windows as they leaned far out together to catch the sound of the chimes, so sudden and so deep was the fall.

Education and training in modern business methods had left Gabrielle just a simple girl, aside from all her accomplishments. Her laugh was the loudest and her zeal for a good time the strongest. She entered into the revels with zest, prompted Nellie Gibson to exhibitions of mimicry, recited, cleverly told anecdotes evolved from her own experiences, played, sang, danced and cheered for the host and hostess. It was well there were no neighbors to complain.

Jim, I have been told, was completely fascinated early in the evening, and his devotions became marked by nine o'clock; by ten o'clock he was lost to all the rest of the company in beholding her. Early the following year he was happy only when dancing with her, singing so that his top notes blended with hers at short range, or helping her to hear the chimes at one of the round windows. At 3 o'clock he started for Ninety-sixth Street with Gabrielle—her mother and father were not present—and there is no record of the time he reached our flat.

That was the beginning of a courtship which was carried on without the assistance of the middleman of former years, until the unexpected interference of the father-in-law threw the case into my expert hands.

CHAPTER IX

Mr. Tescheron became badly involved by swallowing the bait, hook and line, in my joke about notifying the coroner. When I went to bed at last, wearied with deep thinking and the sending of messages, he began again on a new line which I had not figured on. I supposed he would see the folly of proceeding farther, conclude that I knew more about Jim Hosley than his man, Smith, return home and wait to see me again before going ahead. But he didn't seem to realize that I was only joking. I was so plain-spoken about it—put the thing so broadly—that I supposed any sane man would understand I was merely stating my loyalty to Jim in terms of sarcasm. All jokes to fathers-in-law of the Tescheron inflammable character should, however, be labeled in big letters, the same as the dynamite they ship on a railroad, accompanied by the Traffic Association's book entitled, "Rules for the Handling of Explosives."

To Mr. Tescheron it was a most serious matter to consider his family entangled in a betrothal following immediately the commission of an awful crime by the man who had won his daughter's hand. I had informed him in my little joke that none could escape the coroner's subpœna unless they left the State. He had traveled very little in this country, and knew few places out of the State where he could be comfortable with his family till the affair blew over. The Teschersons spent their summers at the quiet village of Stukeville, where they had a comfortable country house; it was not pretentious, but it was beautifully situated on a knoll, overlooking the neighboring lake, and from the broad verandas a glimpse of the distant, more densely inhabited portion of the town might be obtained. But it was not possible to fly to Stukeville, because that is situated in New York. He had once stopped at a hotel in Hoboken overnight, before taking one of the German steamers for France. He knew the place, and he would have his family there before eight o'clock that morning. He informed Smith that he would stop with his family in the Stuffer House, Hoboken, N. J., just beyond the jurisdiction of the subpœna servers of the New York coroners, and he accordingly hastened home to move in the early morning, his wife, daughter, one servant and enough of their belongings to supply the apartments of the Stuffer House with a few of the cosy comforts of a soft-cushioned and warm-slippered home.

Now, I meant no harm to anybody, and certainly not to the innocent women of

the Tescheron family, when I airily lied about the coroner. At the other end of the line the joke exploded, and not long after I had touched the fuse with my last telegram. Think of driving the Tescheron family out of the State! Why, nothing could have been farther away from my mind, but what happened only goes to show that theoretical knowledge of love begets idiocy, while the XXX variety of A1 purity cannot be fooled, but travels with sure steps the path of service guided by wisdom that springs from a devoted heart.

"Marie, Marie! Wake up and dress! Gabrielle, the worst has happened! Quick, we must be in Hoboken in half an hour! Do as I say. Ask no questions. Arrest awaits you if you delay. What! Aren't you going to stir? Why do you lie there, Marie? Be quick!"

Briefly and excitedly Mr. Tescheron outlined to his startled family what had taken place. He told them of the awful crime and Hosley's connection with it, fully convinced that it had all happened just as Smith had reported and satisfied that the Jim Hosley of our household was the guilty villain. He heaped on a violent denunciation of Hosley, using many of Smith's phrases, and he illustrated his comments with a few additional incidents in that infamous career taken from the forgery cases and the borderland episodes. As a Californian would say, "he burned him up."

Thus at 4 A. M., just as I was turning in to take my last nap in our dear, dilapidated paradise, and Jim was fidgeting himself into the mental attitude which would call for a turkey bath, Mr. Tescheron was sustaining the movement of the play by wildly arousing his family to flight.

"Albert, you are all unstrung again, my dear," remonstrated Mrs. Tescheron, who was in no position at that time to be described. "Take some of those tablets to quiet your nerves—"

Mr. Tescheron had no time for the taking of sedatives. He rushed away to call Katie, the maid, and to telephone for a coach. When he returned, his exasperation knew no bounds, for his good wife had not stirred from her warm couch. This was too much. From that point Hosley received the worst denunciations; his ferocity made the wife murderers of criminal history and the cruel Roman emperors seem like mud-pie and croquet efforts in this line of infamy. The entreaty was then renewed.

"Come, come, Marie, do not be foolish, my dear. Get up and get ready. I have awakened Katie and she is here to help you pack a small steamer trunk and a

dress-suit case. Gabrielle! Gabrielle!"

"Yes, father, let us start," replied Gabrielle, and she entered her mother's room, rosy and wide-awake, with her gown faultlessly arranged and her hat on straight. Her fire-alarm father found her right there to give him all the rope he needed to hang himself. Gabrielle's gloves were on and buttoned. Her neatly rolled umbrella was under her left arm and in her right hand she carried a new leather bag. There were no signs of wonder in her face; perhaps a touch of sadness might have been noted as she glanced at her poor mother in pity; but she was far above the influences which agitated her father and drove him into precipitate action. Gabrielle, with the assistance of the maid, soon persuaded Mrs. Tescheron and prepared her for departure into that foreign land vaguely situated on the map of the earth, as she remembered it. With heavy sighs and gasps she told where things could be found and how Bridget, the cook, was to feed the parrot. She would take the parrot, but she did not know if the air of Hoboken agreed with birds. While undergoing the process of hasty preparation, she remembered a number of things that would need attention that morning, so it was necessary also to bring Bridget in with a quilt around her—there being no time then for her to dress—to take orders.

When the drowsy Bridget was hustled in to receive instructions, she was not a tidy-looking cook, and until Mr. Tescheron withdrew, she kept the quilt entirely over her head, for her womanly spirit had not yet been stiffened to defiantly glare at man by those delicate touches—the pasting on of her front hair-piece; the tying on of her back switch to the diminutive stump of original tresses; the proper adjustment of her dental fixtures, her collar and tie and the various articles constituting the sub-structure necessary for their support. We cannot go into the details, because the plans and specifications are missing. Bridget held that quilt with her hands and mouth to keep behind the scenes as much as possible.

"Bridget, we are called away this morning," said Mrs. Tescheron. "Where to in Hoboken, my dear Gabrielle? We must leave the address."

Gabrielle called down the hall to her father, who shouted back so that Bridget might have heard if buried under the product of a quilt mill:

"Stuffer House! Stuffer House!"

"It's a pretty name, ma'am," said Bridget. "I'll bet their pancakes taste like this quilt. You'll not be gone long, ma'am? Is it near Stukeville, ma'am?"

"No, no, Bridget, it's nowhere near Stukeville. I wish it were. It's in Hoboken, New Jersey, Bridget. Gabrielle, please write it down for her. Tidy up this room, Bridget, and if anybody calls, say we are away visiting for a few days—"

"In Hoebroken, ma'am?"

"Out of town will answer, and write me how things are going. Do not use soap again when you wash the shell in the aquarium. If the parrot becomes lonesome —you can always tell because he goes back to swearing—let him hear the phonograph for half an hour night and morning, if you are too busy to ring the dinner bell to amuse him. Be careful about the gas—so many girls are dying that way now—but whatever you do, do not neglect the parrot; he is such a comfort to me and is such a good parrot. He has reformed so much since—"

"Aren't you ready yet, my dear? The coach is here!" shouted Mr. Tescheron, who was anxiously pacing the hall, watch in hand. It was 4:30; a whole half hour had passed and Hoboken had not yet been sighted, whereas visions of the coroner's agents and scarehead publicity were everywhere.

"Yes! Yes! Be patient, Albert; we are nearly ready. And, Bridget, I wish you would make up a pound cake and a fruit cake, and send them to me by express, for we shall miss your cooking so much." Mrs. Tescheron was a good manager of Bridget, who had served her over ten years, and she knew the value of a little appreciation. The last time they moved, Bridget had been hurried into the yard to bring the clothes-poles, but she was so long about it that Mrs. Tescheron went to look for her. Bridget in those emerald days knew little of clothes-poles, the sticks they used to keep the sagging line up, but was bent on moving the clothes-posts, an entirely different variety in the forestry of a city back yard. The four posts were firmly planted in three feet of hard-packed dirt. She bent her stout back to the task of bringing them up root and all, and with a winding hold of bulging arms and feet braced to the flagging she yanked, tugged and strained, turned boiling red and spluttered brogue anathema. Mrs. Tescheron found her thus engaged.

"The bloomin' t'ings is sthuck in the dirrt, ma'am, but I'll take the axe to 'em."

Mrs. Tescheron had frequently told this story with pride in close relation to some modern instance of Bridget's cleverness in domestic service to set off the then and now, with the reflections of credit for the mistress the historical anecdote involved. No harm could come to the home in Bridget's hands, Mrs. Tescheron believed; but no woman could leave without giving orders. When Bridget moved

away, sure she had everything in mind just as it was to receive attention, Mrs. Tescheron gazed about the room blankly as if she knew something must have been overlooked, till her eyes rested on her calm, patient daughter, the harbor in every domestic storm.

"Gabrielle, my dear," asked Mrs. Tescheron softly, "are you sure this Mr. Hosley is the strong, brave man you think he is? Remember, darling, I have said little to you about him—but really he seems to have greatly upset your father, and having done that, of course, our home is involved. All I ask of you, my dear, is, are you sure? That is all. I know how easily your father is led away to follow the bent of his own desires and I know you, too, my dear—you are my own sober, thoughtful father again. Tell me, Gabrielle, are you sure?"

"I am perfectly sure, mother. Father places more faith in hearsay and in the statements of the knaves who are leading him on, than he does in anything we can say. I am glad to have your confidence, mother. My plan is to allow father to do as he wills, so that he may run the full length of his folly. To me, it is most foolish and absurd; but why argue with father if we would convince him? You know all we can do is to let him act as he pleases. He shall not make you uncomfortable, mother. I will let him storm and rage, but he must not send you to some horrible hotel to live away from your friends. I will—"

"But you will stay there with me, Gabrielle, will you not?"

"I shall see that you are comfortably settled there and then I shall be with you as much as possible—but I cannot involve the office in these wild capers. Come, or we shall be scolded. Wouldn't it be fine, mother, if we could tame father? But cheer up, mother; we may laugh last about this. Let us see the bright side which is—Come! You hear him."

Mother and daughter descended the one flight of stairs arm in arm, preceded by the impatient guide, who was calculating on every circumstance that might arise between Ninety-sixth Street and the Hoboken ferry. Katie trailed behind with bags and shawl-strap bundles. A small steamer trunk that Katie had filled with things easy to find had been placed on the front of the coach by the driver, who evidently regarded the job as the early departure of a European party.

When the three women were stowed in the coach after less than an hour's preparation, with their sleep rudely disturbed and without even a cup of coffee to vanquish the chill of the early morn, it may be assumed that they were not more cheerful than the dismal gray of the town. The man of the inside party had been

awake all night; he was feverish and fretful, but he had nothing to say in the presence of the servant. Katie probably believed there had been a death in the family, and they were hastily driving to the home of some relative. Most of the conversation was between Mrs. Tescheron and Katie, and was carried on in whispers. Mrs. Tescheron drew forth the information that about a dozen things she would not need were in the trunk, and several score of necessities had been left at home.

"I remember the Stuffer House," said Mrs. Tescheron, making bold to address her daughter. "Don't you remember four years ago we stopped there overnight? It's named, I suppose, for the proprietor, who told me he was of the same family as the Stevenses of Hoboken. Yes, I remember, he said Stevens, Steffens, Stuffens and Stuffers all came from the same family."

"I remember the stuffed birds everywhere," said Gabrielle; "many of them exceedingly rare specimens, I believe some one said. Somehow, I have always connected stuffed birds with the Stuffer House. It did not occur to me that Stuffer was the name of the proprietor. How odd!"

But conversation did not flow freely, for the tension of the occasion had been too tightly wound by the impulsive guardian of the family's honor. It was well that Katie was present to check his temper, through pride, or the poor women might have been scolded again for their dangerous delay, as coroners go forth early with their guns loaded for game hiding in coaches.

It was even more dismal, cold and damp in the ferryboat. Mrs. Tescheron fell quietly into tears there. This overflow of her emotions was not noticed by Mr. Tescheron, who looked steadily out of the window at the moving engines. Gabrielle saw her mother crying, and was at once overcome with pity; to Katie it seemed as if she was on the point of sharing her mother's grief for the loved one now mourned. Katie could see that Mrs. Tescheron had thought a good deal of the person, whoever it might be, and that Miss Tescheron had shared in this regard. Mr. Tescheron, on the other hand, seemed to be provoked that it had happened until the boat struck the Hoboken pier, and then he looked out of the coach window with a smile, indicating a change of opinion. The smile was that of the conquering hero, outgeneraling in retreat allied forces outnumbering his small army a thousand times. A great head, thought Mr. Tescheron, may beat the law, especially if it keeps awake all night to be on the field early in the morning.

The Stuffer House, founded by the great-grandfather of the present proprietor,

August Stuffer, was situated not far from the ferry and steamship piers. Its Colonial front and three stories of red brick, and windows with small panes, gave it the air of a Washington's headquarters, which Mr. Stuffer could undoubtedly prove it had been, for his tales were the most convincing arguments that the hostelry had been named by a whimsical fate not too dignified to stoop to punning. There were times when the hungry boarders thought the name facetious, but they conceded it to be quite exact in a descriptive sense, if its brick and mortar were intended to honor monumentally the tales of the host. His first name, August, was not an adjective of limitation as to time, for the proprietor was A. Stuffer every month and day in the year; and his son Emil, a quiet, inoffensive student of birds, a taxidermist, ornithologist and mechanical engineer, and a graduate of the neighboring Stevens Institute, world-famed for the breadth and thoroughness of its training, was a worthy son in practically applying to birds abundant science and all the art employed by his father to hold and encourage trade among the guests.

It was about 6 o'clock when the Tescheron coach drew up at the old port-cochère, and no one but the night clerk was about. He swung the great door open and welcomed them to the hotel office, a large living-room, with a wide brick and rubble fireplace in one corner, dimly lighted by a log fitfully blazing, fed by scant draughts, so deeply was it choked by the pile of ashes from the logs that had served to brighten the busy room the night before. It is important to note this fireplace, for long afterward, when I went forth to gather impressions at first hand, and there heard Mr. Stuffer and his guests warm to the discussion of every topic under the sun, I decided that the glow of inspiration and the stimulating incense of resinous knots, arising from that corner, cast the witchery which wrought conviction in the minds of men less wary than Mr. Tescheron, who might, indeed, have renounced all his worldly possessions had he remained more than six weeks under its spell to escape the horrors of an entanglement in the meshes of foul crime across the river. I see now how it must have affected him—this fireplace talk. Steam heat is the only thing to preserve a man's common sense, and if he be shy of that desirable faculty he should be extremely careful when listening or talking, even under the weak spell of a gilt radiator. It is a fact of science that certain rays of light exert a hypnotic influence that may be employed to effect anesthesia for minor operations. Perhaps it was the influence of these rays; I know not. Nervous persons are especially subject to their vibrations, and when sitting before an open wood fire, highly productive of this subtle chemicalization, the victims become drowsy and fall easily into the mood of the most extravagant speaker. Minor operations, under which head we may

include the extraction of a tooth or a bank balance, are then simple, if the operator be calm and skillful in the handling of his instruments—often mere words, but powerful tools under these favorable conditions.

The hotel clerk was assured that the Tescherons did not intend to take a steamer or a train; that they might remain a day or two, perhaps longer, and would need four rooms and a bath on the sunny side of the house, on the second floor, away from the elevator and the noise of the kitchen. They would take breakfast as soon as it could be served.

"No breakfast for me, thank you, papa. I am going right over to the office now. Good-bye, mother dear; Katie, look after her well. I shall return early. Good-bye —" and Gabrielle turned to kiss her father, having embraced her tearful mother. But he could not recover himself to display his affection at that time.

"Gabrielle, you surely are not going! You surely are not! Think of the consequences and accept my judgment in this awful extremity!"

"Father, you may have your own way in everything, but my business affairs must not be involved. The coach is going. I'll ride back in it."

Quickly she kissed him and darted out of the door and into the carriage and away.

CHAPTER X

What is this unerring clairvoyance that prompts devoted hearts in moments of danger, in crises demanding supernatural judgment? It is the very essence of much of our song and story, but the wise men do not grasp its origin; to them it is as elusive and incapable of isolation from its forms of manifestation as that phase of force we call electricity. An old gentleman whom I knew well, a learned man, far above all superstitions, arose from the sofa in his home one afternoon and announced to the startled family that his son was in the water. He noted the time and anxiously awaited news, so firm was his belief that truth must have inspired his vivid dream. That night he learned that the very moment he had announced his fears his son had fallen into the river and was so held under by logs that he narrowly escaped drowning. This was probably the same miraculous power love employs in youth to laugh at locksmiths; it is the inherent wisdom of the passion deeper than our philosophy can delve; it warns at times, and then again it will save without warning, strangely leading us to the post of duty.

It was too early to go to the office—then about 6:45—when Gabrielle Tescheron's coach landed on the New York side of the North River. While coming across the ferry she believed it would be wise to take the opportunity to visit Jim at his apartment in Eighteenth Street, and inform him of the action I had taken in notifying the coroner, and therefore to beware of me, for it was plain that her father had convinced me, although he was unable to restrain and sway me to accept his plan of privacy. Gabrielle had classed me as a dull fellow, not able to see beneath the shallow case of Smith. Little did she imagine that I had laughed at her father and ridiculed his course at my interview with him. She jumped to the conclusion that I had notified the coroner, to make sure of a conviction at any cost, so thoroughly had I been convinced of Jim's guilt by the evidence her father had laid before me, and so high was my sense of honor and duty to the community. This action on my part she assumed would result in the publicity her father dreaded, but eventually would lead to Jim's vindication; she deplored my lack of faith in my companion; she marveled that I, too, should have fallen so easily a prey to the sharpers who were deceiving her hot-headed, obstinate father, whose senses were alert for every word or sign that would smirch, by even so much as a shadow, the man he would overthrow. If it had been possible for Gabrielle Tescheron to understand that I had read her

impulsive father's character aright, and that my loyalty to Jim Hosley at the time was as firm as her own, our difficulties would have been greatly simplified. My joke turned its other edge on me and cut me off from her confidence, but not from her good-will, as expressed in the beautiful flowers, in the hope that I might turn from pursuing Jim and become a staunch advocate of his cause, when I realized, as she did and as I surely must, how strong and true he was and how far above the rogues who would smirch him for gain. But it was plain to her that I had been turned against Jim by her father, and had gone far beyond the point her father intended to reach in his attack on Hosley. Jim must be quickly warned not to place any more confidence in me, for I had taken hasty action that would soon involve them all in a criminal investigation, full of unpleasant notoriety even for the innocent. Jim should also be well advised by an able criminal lawyer to protect him against these rogues and intemperate reasoners.

But these thoughts which came to Gabrielle and seemed to her to be the impelling force that directed her to Eighteenth Street that morning, to my mind now, read in the light of the whole story, were really only the miraculous methods of that clairvoyance, operating under the veil of mystery beyond reason. My shallow joke, I insist, could not have been the cause. With an unshaken faith in Jim and no danger threatening him, I am confident she would have remained at the hotel, taken breakfast with her father and mother, and then, perhaps, have leisurely departed for her office, to tell laughingly of the early morning flight to Jim at some trysting place in the commercial section of the town later in the day. Faith, without real danger, would have meant a contented mind, whether or not, it seems to me, I had notified one coroner or a thousand, for it would have been only part of the general plan to give the widest scope to Jim's detractors, and to take no part in counter-plotting any more than she would ally herself with her father's villainous advisers. The utter absurdity of my joke, I firmly believe, would have appeared plainly to her had the real danger of the fire not been apprehended by her intuitions, far keener than she suspected, and so interpreted to her will as to lead her without fear to the very spot she was most needed in all the world.

CHAPTER XI

As the coach turned into Eighteenth Street, Gabrielle was prepared to meet the emergency, for all at once it came upon her that duty had brought her to the spot. She saw the excitement surrounding the fire and knew why she was there. The coachman, following her order, drew up to the curb, so that she might alight. She dismissed him and then pushed through the crowd, now scattering, to the fire lines, and as she proceeded she saw the building on our corner had been partly destroyed; apparently the flames had done the most damage in the upper stories. Her first question was put to a policeman on guard near the edge of the crowd:

"Officer, please tell me if there were any persons injured at the fire?"

"Yes, ma'am, two men; they were taken to Bellevue, ma'am."

With a simple word of thanks she turned away. If the officers were then in pursuit of her Jim, she would find him first and shield him with her wit as many a woman had done before under like conditions. The ambulances had gone half an hour before, but she would follow directly to the hospital and first seek out there the man whose terrible fate was foretold by her fears. Why had she not kept the coach to take her to Bellevue? It had been dismissed when she wished to avoid even the possible testimony of a coachman. Quickly she summoned a cab and a few minutes later she was in the hospital ready to shield Jim Hosley from all harm if he were there.

Gabrielle found him unconscious and quickly identified him as her brother, George Marshall.

"I should like to have him placed in a private room," she said to the hospital superintendent. "Please have it next to that of his friend, Mr. Benjamin Hopkins. I want them to have the best care from your physicians and nurses that may be obtained. There is no sacrifice that I would not make to save the lives of these brave men who have suffered so terribly."

Several weeks afterward I learned that my name and that of George Marshall had appeared in the papers for a few days until the hospital doctors announced that we would probably recover. The public accepted that as a finality quite as agreeably as if we had died of our injuries, and so we sank below the horizon

again. Our thrilling rescue by the fire department net, with a vague mention of our injuries received while falling against the useless fire escapes, was part of the news of the day; also the fact that I had been thrown from the window and that a search had been made of the ruins, but no trace of Hosley could be found. In a few days, he, too, appeared to be forgotten. My brother had not seen any of his folks up home and none of them had driven over to our place, a distance of ten miles. We boys had been away so long, the two families had rather lost track of each other, I supposed, although it did seem strange to me. I made little mention of Jim in my letters to the old home folks. The bad news, I knew, would leak out in time and my chuckle-headedness would be as much a part of the village gossip as the story of his crime.

A few days after I had regained consciousness I began to discuss with Hygeia the other man who was injured at the fire.

"What sort of a looking man is that fellow, George Marshall, who was hurt?" I asked, thinking he might be Hosley under another name and she not know it.

"He seemed rather slight in build," she answered demurely. "I should say he weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds." Jim had lost weight, but I did not think of that.

"Any of his folks been here? With whom did he live? What flat? Which house?"

"Well, now, I shan't say; really, I shan't say who has been here to see him. Look to yourself."

"Why can't I go in and talk to him? Is he awake?"

"How could you? Why are you so foolish now to worry about him? He doesn't bother his head about you. Haven't you had all you want of that fire, without talking it all over again with that man?"

"I'd like first rate to have a talk with that fellow. Maybe I know him."

"Well, I know you are a great man to talk, but we shan't let you talk him to death."

"Say, can't you tell me what sort of a looking dub he is?"

"A what? Most of the time you seem to speak Welsh."

"How are you so cock-sure his name is George Marshall?"

"How do I? Well! well!"

"Why, look here! Isn't it natural for me to ask about him? Didn't we pass through almost the same experience? Why, I am simply bound to know that fellow, that's all there is about it."

"Tut, tut! Certainly you shall know him. But not now, when you are too weak to walk and he is suffering even more pain. Rest easy, now; be as calm as you can and soon you and the other patient may talk it all over together."

"Say, haven't you seen anybody around his room coming to see him?"

"Um! Let me think." And she knitted her brows and shaped that small mouth to a Cupid's bow, whence many an arrow has shot through me. "Why, I can't say." And she smiled teasingly.

"Come, you must have some idea. How far from here is his room?"

"Why, yes; I do remember seeing some one there a few times. It was his little girl."

"Oh, I see, a married man. Egad, I remember a man in the house next door who had a little girl. She was an awfully sweet little thing—dimples in her cheeks; little curls down at the side over her ears—most generally, though, wagging around in front. I've often seen him kiss her so tenderly. She was so pretty! Well, there's nothing like it."

CHAPTER XII

The old joke that a woman can't keep a secret still appears in many variations to illuminate the mind of the waiting man, driven to lithographed hilarity in the barber-shop comics. In real life, when not under the spell of this brilliant six-colored wit, we find ourselves at a disadvantage frequently, because women keep their secrets too well. Hygeia was loyal to Gabrielle, and together they shielded Jim Hosley from his pursuers, and among the latter I was reckoned as one of the most dangerous.

Mr. Tescheron was soon convinced that Hoboken was the place he should tarry. It might appear that a day or two of rest in that place would have satisfied him that he might return to New York, but there was a good reason why he should not take the risk of living in his own home. And this reason strengthened Gabrielle in the belief that I had notified the coroner of the Browning case and really entertained the same view of Hosley as her father. On the third day after their arrival at the Stuffer House, Mr. Tescheron received this letter from the manager of his company, Mr. King, who wrote from the market:

> "A man came to this office this morning with a coroner's subpœna for you to testify in the Browning case. I read it carefully and noted that it was signed by Coroner Flanagan. The man told me he had been up to your house in Ninety-sixth Street. He seemed very anxious to find you, and waited around for some time after I had positively assured him you had gone West on business. Hope what I did was O. K. He also wanted to know if you had spoken to me regarding a fire and the disappearance of a Mr. Hosley. I had no knowledge of the matter and so informed him. Shipments are running heavy to-day on Western orders. As you have gone that way, there may be a reason for this.
>
> "Yours truly,
>
> "J. M. KING."

This letter stiffened Mr. Tescheron considerably in his purpose to remain in

Hoboken. The following from Bridget to Mrs. Tescheron added corroboration, which tended to brace that purpose still more, and it was quite sufficient to keep the family under Mr. Staffer's roof for six weeks:

> "A man from the corner was here wid a bit of paper, an' sed he shud see yer. I ast him which corner, and he sed it was Flanigans the sayloon is Finnegans do yer no any Flanigan on our corner the Parrit is lookin well the cakes is dun.
>
> "Respectably yours,
>
> "BRIDGET."

I am not surprised, realizing Mr. Tescheron's mental condition, that these letters convinced him the place of safety was beyond the borders of New York State.

"It is a very cosy spot here, Marie," said Mr. Tescheron, after he had read the letters to his wife and Gabrielle, who made it a point to be with her mother early every evening. During the day she spent most of her time at the hospital ministering to Jim.

Mr. Tescheron's admiration of the Stuffer House intensified as time wore on and he found he was safe there. His sagacity in the matter encouraged him, and he soon took risks by venturing into the heart of New York dressed in a suit which made him appear like a City Hall Park hobo, with slouch hat and long ulster, such as market men wear loosely belted like great aprons. Under these coverings he dared to go as far as Fulton Market about three times a week, taking the most circuitous route around the lower edge of New York, via the slow but sure Belt Line horse car along West and South streets. To be sure, he put in most of his time traveling, but the coroner did not catch him, and this fact demonstrated the cleverness of the tactics.

The shabby disguise might have saved him, it seems to me, even if the entire police force of the city had been after him, for normally Mr. Tescheron was one of the tidiest little men. He usually shined like a new hat out of a bandbox. He was patent-leathered, smooth-jowled, rosy, crisp, pretty-nailed, creased, stick-pinned and embossed on the vest. Nothing that a steam laundry and the latest machinery for man-embellishing, from custom tailoring to Staten Island and hair dyeing, could do to obliterate the fish business from his personality had been omitted in compiling this *de luxe*, numbered and signed copy of a man. But my

investigations lead me to believe that Mr. Tescheron was not exceptional in this respect at the market. Like Napoleon, the wholesale fish dealers all fit circumstances to obstacles. A man who slips and skids around all day in a wholesale fish market is usually rich and, I find, makes up his average on pulchritude after business hours.

Mr. Tescheron maintained a high record. When he was not in his shop togs you would not recognize him any more than the made-over old family umbrella that has ten times recovered its ribs and boldly fronted the hilarious wind, ever ready to blow it off. It was always surprising to me how he could produce such marvelous synthetic effects from the elemental forms found on the Monday morning's clothes-line.

I don't know how true it is, but a chap down in the market once told me that all the members of the Market Men's Association found it annoying to remove the flies that had been blinded by the glint of their bosoms and had slipped and broken necks on the starchy glaciers of those Alpine precipices of dazzling shirting displayed at the annual dinners of the society. It is only natural that the market flies should want to attend, for they stick closer than a brother to the members of this brotherhood. Mr. Tescheron's sartorial perfection was only an exigency of his business, and if his armor was more striking than that of the ordinary man, I, for one, was ready to forgive him. The fact must remain that the best dressed men of New York are the wholesale fish dealers of Fulton Market—after business hours—when they transform to escape the torments of a perennial fly-time.

Gabrielle did confide in her mother, but her father was none the wiser. He listened to Smith, and concluded that Hosley had skipped, having learned in some way that the authorities were after him. If he should be found and brought back to New York, the coroner might begin his investigations at once and proceed with other witnesses. In that event the name of Tescheron would undoubtedly be dragged into the case, but if the family kept out of the State they could not be made to testify. In Mr. Tescheron's judgment, therefore, it was wise to spend a few weeks well out of the way until they were certain the affair had been forgotten.

"Mother, I think the change may do us good, if we don't take father too seriously," said Gabrielle, "and if you can find enough to occupy yourself until some favorable suggestion changes father's course, and he is seized by a desire to return home, I shall be happy. Aren't you getting tired of the company of these

stuffed birds, though? I shall send your parrot over to-morrow and have Bridget come to talk over the housekeeping affairs with you, shall I?"

"No, dear; we shall be happy enough with these silent birds for a while yet. Alas! if it is true that the officials want us—and it must be true, as Bridget and Mr. King have both written—"

"Don't worry about that, mother; you will be just as proud of Mr. Hosley some day as I am. Oh, he is so brave! Think how he rescued his companion, Ben Hopkins, and then fell blinded by the flames. What a terrible fall that was, mother! just twice the height of this building—you really cannot imagine it. Do rogues show such heroism? I tell you, mother, you'll find, one of these brighter days, that James Hosley is a great, big-hearted hero, as far above these petty attacks on his character, so readily believed by father, as the mountains are above the sea. He has nothing to fear. Remember, a cruel fate struck him down at the very moment he might have explained away every circumstance to which father attaches weight, merely by stating the truth. Mother, I have never doubted my hero!"

"Yes, my dear child, you are right. I feel that you are. Forgive me for expressing that shadow of doubt; it is now gone. I am thankful that God led your footsteps to his bedside, where you might help to rescue him and his companion. I am indeed proud of you, Gabrielle. How greatly I am blessed by you every minute!" And the dear old soul cried, her heart welling with love for her daughter, her confidante and support.

Then Gabrielle knelt at her mother's side and buried her face in her mother's lap, her tears flowing in sympathetic response to this declaration of maternal faith.

It is a good thing I was not there at that time, for at the sight of tears in the faces of those dear women I would have been driven to sheer madness. I believe I would have taken a club to the hard-hearted or stupid Tescheron and murdered him with mince-meat minuteness in the presence of the gossipers lolling around the fireplace in the living-room. At the time of the tearful scene between mother and daughter, a dramatic passage that has its counterpart in many homes invaded by a son-in-law, the cruel Tescheron, the obstacle in the path of true love, was listening to mine host, August Stuffer, three hundred and fifty-two pounds of Hoboken manhood seated in a Windsor chair built of wood and steel to resemble the Williamsburg Bridge about the legs, so stoutly was it trussed, braced and riveted to carry its enormous load. This wheezy spinner of yarns, in a tone of

apoplectic huskiness, was telling his guests about the peculiar stuffed cat, which advertised the hotel far and wide from its glass case near the main entrance.

It was my joke that introduced Mr. Tescheron to this cat. Mr. Stuffer's eloquence and the fire's hypnotic rays must have worked the consequent charm at which I have often marveled.

"Jersey Jerry was the name of that cat," said Stuffer, a gentle wheeze playing about his upper rigging, as he spread out into the open sea of truth. "And he was a most unfortunate cat, because he was born blind and had to learn the town by feeling his way. He went everywhere and had more friends than most cats with eyes—strange but true—and principally among cats. He was sociable because he had to work his friends. He knew us around here by our sounds" (it was an easy matter for him to sound the tale-teller), "and he used to rub his whiskers against a stranger's legs till he got to know the man. You'd 'a' thought he'd rub 'em all off, but not so; it seemed to make 'em grow twice as long—biggest whiskers for a cat of his size I ever see. Well, sir, I came down here to the back door one night to lock up, heard him scratching and let him in. He gave me an awful scare, for as he looked up two big blazing eyes shone brighter than the lantern I was carrying. From his squeal I knew it was Jerry, so I picked him up and brought him over here to get a good look at him. I could see at once that it was the work of those Stevens students. They had taken an ordinary pair of glass eyes such as are made for stuffed cats, and in the back of each eye had fitted a tiny electric light, such as you've probably seen attached to a button-hole bouquet, only they were smaller, of course. I noticed when his tail went up the lights were turned on and they blazed like he had gone mad, but when his tail went down it cut off the lights like you've seen 'em shut off in a trolley car when the pole falls—same principle, I guess, somehow. It all kind of puzzled me for a time, till I got to thinking about it."

"Nonsense! Where did the electricity come from?" asked a man who doubted.

"Electricity? A cat's full of electricity. Everybody knows that, and those Stevens students simply connected it up to run two lights with a cut-out at the back. Of course, when the cat died the natural electricity gave out, and so I had him connected with the company's wires and the tail fixed to run by works run by the current, to make 'em blaze and shut off and seem just as old Jerry used to. He was a great comfort to me with those eyes, and I think they helped him to see as well as feel, for he didn't rub any more, but flashed his eyes when he was inquisitive and wanted to save steps.

"But it killed him. Modern improvements on a cat brought up to going it blind in Hoboken were too much. A man got the delirium tremblings looking at Jerry one night and kicked him nine mortal blows before he could get his tail up."

"Well," said Mr. Tescheron, "those Stevens students must be wonders. I never supposed there was any good thing came out of Hoboken."

"The town suits me all right," replied Mr. Stuffer. "There's many a good thing passes through here." He winked at Emil.

"There ain't nothing a Stevens student can't do—nothing calling for brains," said Mr. Stuffer. "They get chock full of mathematics up there, so's they can engineer anything from a turbine plant to a pin where it's most needed, or a marriage factory. Anything that calls for brains is right in their line. If I ever get into any kind of trouble at all I'll get a Stevens engineer to rig me up some kind of a derrick to pull me out of it."

At his leisure, Mr. Tescheron now marvels at the great ability of Stevens men. He feels that he is a competent judge.

It was evident that the Stevens students who crowded the Stuffer House had duly impressed the present proprietor with their ability to overcome every obstacle in life's path with special machinery to fit each case.

"Why, one of those students told me some years ago," continued Mr. Stuffer, "that he once provided plans and specifications to supply a girl with beaus."

None of the company now seemed to doubt, so Mr. Stuffer proceeded to prove his proposition that a technical education at Stevens comprehends the repairing of difficult cases of side-stepped heart.

"Yes, I remember, now, it was the case of little Mary Schwarz," he continued. "And she never knew, doesn't to this day probably, how it all came about that suddenly she had more beaus than she could attend to. They fairly froze her in ice cream—"

Mrs. Tescheron had recovered and was ringing three times for hot water as per the card of instructions tacked near the push-button in her room.

"They are not remarkably prompt here," she murmured. "I wonder what can be the matter every evening."

Mr. Stuffer, who was supposed to be on duty at the annunciator, in his dual capacity of hall boy and host, heard not its alarm, for he was well under way with a yarn.

He continued:

"She got so she didn't care for Hoboken, Mary didn't. The beaus then took her to every theatre in New York. And they were a fine lot of chaps—Stevens students, bachelor professors, leading merchants' sons—all the best people in town. Before that Stevens student started up the necessary machinery to repair this case, she had no beaus at all; but he fixed things so's she had a regular monopoly because she controlled the raw material. They teach just enough of political economy on the side up there at the institute to bring that in; that you can't have a monopoly unless you control the raw material; so he figured to have her control it. But when she lost it the thing was off."

"What became of it?" asked Mr. Tescheron, who, I am informed, was fearful that the narrator might be interrupted by the ringing of the bell.

"She ate it up. You see, Brown, that smart Stevens man, who laid out this job, went around to where Mary kept her little lamb and sheared it every once so often. He gave the wool to our swellest tailor and had him make it up into an extra fancy line of trousering. The best people bought those trousers, and of course everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go. You can see why she had so much good company. The fellows simply couldn't stop going to Mary's till they shed 'em. It took a mechanical engineer to do it. But when the lamb got old her pa, who had not been told about this thing, thought he'd have to eat the pet to save its mutton."

"But she got married, of course, didn't she?" asked a stranger, who was en route to Europe on his wedding tour and was full of romance.

"Why, no. You see, she was having such fun fishing, she never stopped till they stopped biting—that is, the snappy bass that she liked to ketch. She landed a lot, but just kept throwing back, probably waiting for some whale in the shape of a Duke to land on one of the steamers, but those Dukes that pass through Hoboken are terribly long on trousers, and generally bring 'em over by the trunk-load. They all passed right through, at any rate. Instead of a whale coming along, the next to bite were a lot of old skates—a regular lot of tramps. They had come into the trousers second hand, usually got for the asking, when preparing to start into New York for the slumming season; but, of course, they had to make for Mary's

house just as soon as they put 'em on and the charm got to working. So she has been spending the balance of her life shooing away tramps. The chances are the pet lamb will never quite wear out—excuse me, gentlemen, I think I hear the bell ringing."

CHAPTER XIII

Gabrielle did not find it necessary to confide immediately in Hygeia, who cared for us both, but as Jim progressed more favorably than I, and was able to sit up in bed propped with pillows, he became talkative and inclined to drop remarks that might create suspicion in the mind of the nurse. Unless Hygeia became her confidante, Gabrielle feared Jim's identity might become known and his whereabouts learned by the officers of the law, who were now apparently searching for him on misleading clues.

"You will be my good friend, will you not?" asked Gabrielle, as she drew Hygeia closely to her one morning about a week after our entrance to the hospital. "I want you to help me, and I know you now so well that I feel I may safely ask you to. May I?"

"My dear Miss Marshall, there is nothing I will not do for you, believe me. I rejoice that your brother is showing such rapid improvement. How much more fortunate he is than the poor fellow in the next room—his friend, I believe you said?"

"Yes, Mr. Hopkins is his friend. But Mr. Marshall is not my brother, and—"

"Tut, tut! Didn't I know it, my dear! Have I not watched you both? I am already keeping your secret, never fear. Tell me only what you please, but you need not tell me to have your good-will, for my heart is with you, my dear."

"Oh, you are such a kind, good friend!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "It is your sympathy and care that will save the lives of these men. Let me tell you why I so promptly had him" (pointing to Jim, who was beyond hearing), "registered as George Marshall, my brother. My father accuses him of many things—many foolish things—but you know how it is with an impetuous father; these things have been enlarged in his eyes by wicked men, who are conspiring for gain. Detectives, they call themselves, and so long as my father hesitates to publicly expose his family, these men feed upon his fears. I have good reason to believe that Mr. Hopkins, so long friendly to him—whose real name is James Hosley—is now his bitter enemy, for he has given information concerning him to the authorities. And my real name is Gabrielle Tescheron, so you see—"

"Gracious! But this is a conspiracy," exclaimed Hygeia, deeply interested and ready to declare her loyalty to the lovers. "How can you account for the base treachery of that man?" (pointing toward my room, the quarters of the despicable villain in the case.) "What a miserable wretch he must be!"

"But, my dear," said Gabrielle, who now felt that she was established on a firm footing of intimacy with the nurse, "I am not positive as to that, although I have good reason to believe he has deserted his old chum; still I am not sure, for I have only heard so through my father, who is, of course, strongly prejudiced. There are many things I do not understand. I do know that a subpœna has been issued for my father on the complaint of Mr. Hopkins, and so, of course, he must have informed the officials concerning Mr. Hosley, probably accusing him directly as alleged by the detectives and outlined to me hastily by my father. Had Mr. Hopkins not done this we would not have been hurried out of the State to escape the unpleasant publicity of which my father has a horror. Oh, father is such a hot-head!"

"Your love is all you base your loyalty on," smiled Hygeia, and embracing Gabrielle, she kissed her desperately. "Indeed, no harm shall visit either of you," Hygeia tenderly assured Gabrielle.

"But to me this situation is very silly," added Gabrielle. "And were it not for my hasty father and this fire intervening, I know full well that Mr. Hopkins would have made an explanation which would have exonerated Jim. I feel so, but I shall take no risks—no risks whatever, mind you. While I do feel that perfidy in Mr. Hopkins is beyond belief, I shall be cautious, and with your help shall keep him in ignorance of Mr. Hosley's whereabouts. If he did tell a lie to my father about notifying the officials, then let him come forward with the denial. But we must not be too hard on the poor fellow; think how much more he has suffered than Jim. Let us divide the beautiful flowers. Half the time let poor Benny Hopkins gaze on these roses and orchids I send to Jim, and tell him, too, my dear, that they come from me. Let us hear what he says. Perhaps some day all will be clear to us again. Jim and Ben will again be friends, and you will be our new-found friend, whom we shall all rejoice in finding in our hour of need. How beautiful it will be then, and these days of sorrow will be turned into pleasant memories! Poor Mr. Hopkins, he does seem so low at times! Do you think he will get well?"

"I think he will," assured Hygeia. "Each day he rests a little better, but his head is not clear. He wanders a good deal. But Dr. Hanley says that condition will

improve—in fact, it shows signs of improvement as his temperature becomes more even."

"I do pray he will recover," said Gabrielle, sadly, shaking her head. "Jim has such faith in him—laughs at my fears and bids me let him be wheeled into Ben's room as soon as the doctors will allow us to go in there, for he knows he can cheer him. Jim says Ben is so given to sarcasm and joking that people who do not know him well misunderstand him. I shall not allow it, however, as there is too much at risk. Jim does not know all. If I am wrong in this, Ben Hopkins is responsible, for he deceived my father and drove us all over there to Hoboken. What a place for an exile! Jim laughs every time I tell him about it. Oh, such a state of affairs, just as we had planned to be married!"

"Isn't it too bad!" exclaimed Hygeia. "Never mind; we shall all laugh over it at the wedding, if I may be there."

"When everything comes out all right in our affairs, indeed you shall be there. You shall be my bridesmaid; Nellie Gibson is to be my maid of honor, and Benny Hopkins, Jim's best man. Won't it be grand! Let me tell you about my gowns. I have nearly all of them ready. First there is the—"

Here I shall leave them to talk of the trousseau. My notes on this branch of the subject were gathered from Hygeia and are full enough to give an adequate description. This I would do, but I am afraid I would get tangled in the trail, scalp the bride by tearing off her veil with a flying heel, and fall down on some of the fine lace flouncing around the box pleats hiding the chiffon and the crêpe de chine. Hygeia told me the style of the wedding gown was Princess, but there was a reception gown—I was told, but I forget now how many yards it contained; if the 8,643 tucks were taken out and the goods stretched, I understood there was enough to show that a silk mill and lace factory had been busy several days. As for the silkworms, I suppose they were all summer chewing up a row of mulberry bushes on this job. Weddings make a lot of work for everybody.

Hygeia did everything possible to make it pleasant for Gabrielle at the hospital. She tactfully left the sick man alone with his "sister" the greater part of every afternoon. With sorrow to knit more firmly the bonds of love, it would appear that no disturbing influence could enter there. They chatted quietly and laughed merrily, and when they were not doing either they were silently telling each other of their happiness by those glances that had partially betrayed their secret

to Hygeia before she learned it from Gabrielle's lips.

Gabrielle became such a motherly person at the hospital! With a dainty white dotted Swiss apron tied in sprightly bows about her waist, "in sweet perfection cast," she sat near the window sewing or embroidering some bit of finery that must be finished for the wedding, and by her hands alone. Jim was so full of joy he didn't care how long it took his broken leg to mend. The aches and twinges from that quarter were hardly felt by him after the first day of his confinement; his head was right, and he was eager for the daily coming of Gabrielle.

Well do I comprehend how Jim felt. He did not yearn with sickening hope deferred, for he had won the heart of the girl. Contentedly he rested in the sunshine of her smiles, and fell asleep beneath the shadow of her tresses, her small, cool hand on his fevered brow, her low words of sympathy lulling him to the land of rest and sweet dreams of her. I realize how it was with them, because it was so different with me. The chill of loneliness cast by suspicion compelled my silence on the things I was bursting to tell to sympathetic ears. My only visitor was the cheerful nurse, but she was a stranger to my woes, I thought, and could not help me.

Jim frequently asked Gabrielle concerning me. When he had been there three weeks, he manifested an unusual anxiety, for none of his inquiries had received satisfactory replies. Hygeia reported that I was slowly gaining—but very, very slowly, and could not be disturbed, not even by my brother who had called. None of Jim's folks had been down from the North to see him, as he had written them with his own hand that he would soon be out again. This made it clear to them that he was safe.

"Gabrielle, I must see Ben the minute the doctors say he is well enough," declared Jim. "Why, it is nonsense to suspect him. That fellow is my best friend; never mind what you think, you will find him loyal to me. I must see him. What will he think of me?"

"You are not well enough to manage your own affairs, Jim; believe me, you are not. I want you to give over everything into my hands and let me be your guide. Please do as I say."

She had early outlined to him the grounds for her father's suspicions, but said nothing concerning the Browning case. She emphasized my action which had frightened her father, but did not go into details, for Jim was too weak to stand the mental strain she feared might be imposed on him if he were to enter into a

discussion of the matters her father had told her were conclusive evidence that Jim was a notorious criminal. It was all too ridiculous for her to believe. Her father laid great stress on the fact that Hosley had left for parts unknown, fearing to face his accusers, as corroborative of the other evidence supplied by the detectives, including his long criminal record and photographs from the Rogues' Gallery. This made it seem all the more ridiculous. Not a suspicion concerning Jim had ever entered her mind. Her knowledge of her father's obstinacy, and the evil influences surrounding him, were all the protection Jim needed. His enemies counted for him.

"Well, I suppose I shall have to do as you say, Gabrielle," said Jim, "but Ben is a good friend of mine, and it may hurt him to find I am neglecting him."

"That will come out all right, Jim. If he is a friend we shall probably learn of it as soon as he regains control of himself. He may say something about you to the nurse. If he is friendly I will talk with him first, and then we shall learn just where he stands in this matter. Perhaps when we hear what he says we shall be glad we kept him in ignorance of you."

That day when my head appeared to be perfectly clear for the first time, and I began to ask questions, Hygeia hurried into the next room and breathlessly announced:

"Miss Tescheron, Mr. Hopkins has begun to ask questions at last. The first thing he asked almost was: 'Where is Hosley? Is he in jail? Hasn't he been here to see me? Was he hurt? Was he killed? Hasn't he written to me?' and I asked him why he should ask me. He also wanted to know who sent the flowers, and I told him, but he made no answer. He didn't seem to think it possible Miss Tescheron should send flowers to him. What do you make of it? I think he is perfectly friendly, don't you? He wants to know so much about Mr. Hosley."

"Certainly he's friendly; let me be wheeled right in to see him. Oh, please; just for a minute," begged Jim, who was now sitting up with his leg stretched out on a pillow.

"Why should he ask if you are in jail? I don't like that at all; not at all. I will not consent. He has not forgotten his treachery. I will not trust the fellow. Let us wait until he talks a little more." And so Gabrielle's caution intervened.

But I didn't ask any more questions about Hosley.

CHAPTER XIV

Circumstances usually arise along the path of folly to make it increasingly expensive. Emil Stuffer appeared to supply one important item. He had been attracted to Stevens Institute by the associations of his home. The students from this great school gathered around his father's hospitable fire and rested their brains when weary with the curves of analytical geometry and the stupid exactness of the differential calculus. Emil was clever at his profession—that of mechanical engineer—and for five years after his graduation from the Institute had devoted himself to that career. Then his father needed his assistance in running the hotel, for in his older years A. Stuffer found it difficult to move with alacrity, and unless more speed could be introduced in the management he saw that it might appear in the departure of the guests. Emil, therefore, had come home to fall heir in due time to the business, and prior to the ceremonies attending that event, he was to be his father's lieutenant, practicing his avocation as an ornithologist, whose specialty was rare birds, at leisure moments. Emil enjoyed also the work of the taxidermist, and loved dearly to cut and stuff. Jerry, the wonderful cat of the glass case in the office, gave only a hint of his skill and the remarkable perfection he achieved in improving the designs of nature. Under Emil's mechanical touch Jerry became far more interesting and a better advertisement for the business, when connected with his father's yarn regarding him as an electric phenomenon, than he had ever been during the days of his active existence on earth.

Mrs. Tescheron particularly admired the many specimens of birds shown in nearly every room in the house, and even Gabrielle found them interesting. Mr. Tescheron, who was something of an expert on fish, and had written a number of articles on rare specimens in the line of his specialty for the Fish Journal, was glad to take up the subject of rare birds and pursue it with similar interest. Birds and fish are allied in the student mind. Under the tutorship of Emil, he drank from the Hoboken source of bird wisdom. If Emil by some stroke of Fate had been thrown into Fulton Market for six weeks he might have become a student of fish, and Mr. Tescheron the enthusiastic teacher. If any stranger from the briny deep was hauled aboard a fishing smack and brought to our city, Mr. Tescheron was the expert who told the newspapers all about it. He told a straight, scientific story in popular language, and until it had been rewritten by local fish editors

and some twenty times more by as many other piscatorial experts, it was hardly cured to a point where it would pass in the domain of post-prandial fact. A very large whale was once brought into the market and placed on exhibition at an admission fee of one dime. The story of this whale, as interpreted by Mr. Tescheron, appeared throughout the country for many weeks afterward. A Western version of the New York interview, as it appeared in some stereotyped plate matter of a Western news association, I give here verbatim, to show how truth may be improved:

JONAH'S WHALE APARTMENT.

New York Fish Expert Proves the Bible Story True.

The Higher Criticism of the Market.

Nothing at all strange that a man should be very comfortable inside the roomy mammal with plenty of light and air and good wholesome food —Structure shows it was built for the purpose.

Albert Tescheron, the celebrated Fulton Market expert on rare fish, who is thoroughly familiar with the anatomy of whales, consented to give his opinion concerning Jonah this morning to the reporter of the Sporting Extra.

"Mr. Tescheron, please tell me," said the reporter, "in just what part of the whale Jonah lived for three days. My paper wants the true story, with such Biblical data as may bear upon it, interpreted by the higher criticism of the Fish Market. I want to get an interior view of the apartments he lived in by

flashlight or the X-ray, so as to print the Jonah story right up to date. There were none of our men present, you understand, when the thing happened."

"The belly of the whale is commodious, as you may see," replied Mr. Tescheron, pointing to the spot with his cane. "Here we have the probable position of Jonah, seated with a knee against each ear and his hands clasped over his ankles. Now this episode as narrated plainly tells us that Jonah was 'swallowed up;' he wasn't chewed up, but swallowed whole, and from such investigations as I have made, studying whales before and after meals, and from what I know of the layout of the interior occupied by Jonah, he sat, as I say, a solid chunk of a man which no whale could digest. Now you know the whale is a regular submarine vessel equipped the same as those divers of our navy, with a perfect outfit of air valves. You must remember reading that this fish was prepared for the special business of swallowing Jonah, and for no other purpose. The whale comes up at regular intervals and blows the water out of his air-tight compartments and sucks in a fresh air supply—enough to last him and two or three more passengers, so that Jonah, it may be seen, had no trouble at all to breathe, and agreed with the whale until the whale was beached, while asleep, at low water. The lack of all rolling motion in the land, and the fact that an uneven keel made Jonah claw around more than usual, made the whale land-sick. A whale can throw a stream from its snout for about five rods, but when it strikes land that way under heavy ballast it chucks all its load, water and solids, like a torpedo hitting a ship. I have experimented with small whales—say from ten to twenty feet over all, and never knew one to miss when he bumped land. The whale was prepared especially to do that—to release Jonah, and does it with wonderful automatic economy—the same that we scientific men note throughout nature. If the people who laugh at this story of Jonah would watch whales a little closer, especially at low tide, when stranded and taking a nap, they would be surprised to find how the whale wakes up and heaves ballast.

"Just see the inside arrangements here," and Mr. Tescheron outlined on the surface of the dead monster the exterior elevation of Jonah's home. "Just behind this outer covering is a splendid living-room, 6 feet by 4, lighted by the phosphorescent glow of the interior walls. A whale is full of phosphorus. The ceiling is a little low, but the ventilation is perfect, without draughts, and the temperature is about what you would find in Florida in January. The humidity is a little heavy, so that when the whale runs too far

> North he may chill inside and steam like a London fog or a Russian bath, but when Jonah entered and stayed for three days it was warm weather, and he was able to see plainly and be quite comfortable, although you may remember he referred to the place in strong terms when he was praying to get out. The two rooms adjoining the living-room are also cosy, you see—hot-water heating system and all—open plumbing. How far did the whale throw Jonah? About a hundred feet, I should say, and this lightened his ballast so that he floated again and was able to reverse his tail motion and back off into deep water."
>
> Through the courtesy of Mr. Tescheron the reporter was able to arrange with the whale owners to have it opened and the artists of the Sporting Extra peeked in, and viewed the three-room-and-bath apartment arranged in a kind of ham-shaped building with accordeon sides. The artist's recollection of the plan is as follows:
>
> We regret that space will not permit us to present the picture taken by our imaginative artist showing Jonah in his disguise as a prophet, reading one of his own sermons at a phosphorescent chandelier. But the following picture,[A] indicating the camera-like arrangement of the whale's Jonah suite in the dry-land collapse, with Jonah seated on a wad of compressed air shooting upstairs and through the vestibule, presents the Tescheron theory with greater vividness.

Emil Stuffer's father was very proud of his accomplished son. "That boy of mine," he used to say to Mr. Tescheron, "thinks nothing of starting out any time, day or night, for a rare bird. He'll just leave a note here saying he's started, and like as not the next time I hear from him he's caught a new kind of sand-piper, a god-wit or killyloo bird in a Florida swamp, or one of them glossy ibises he hankers so for. That extra pale bubo up there (pointing to a case above the office desk), he picked up in Northeast Labrador."

Mr. Tescheron was greatly impressed with all this. He liked Emil, the student, and found much in common with him. He questioned Emil frequently, and was always glad to hear that enthusiast talk on his hobby.

When Mr. Tescheron's enthusiasm had attained the proper pitch, he was admitted by Emil to view his private collection of the Rare Birds of Eastern North America, attractively displayed in glass cases around three attic rooms. Collectors from far and near had seen this collection and had praised it in letters

which Emil showed in an off-hand way to the eager fish expert. One of these letters contained an offer of $15,000 for the collection.

"I wouldn't take $25,000 for that lot of birds," said Emil to the amazed Tescheron at the first interview.

"Do you suppose you'll ever get that much?" asked the unbelieving guest, making full allowance for the high opinion a collector has of his own wares. "Who'd give it?"

"Any museum that wants the finest collection of Rare Birds of Eastern North America will give it readily. A friend of mine who has been collecting postage stamps, values his collection at that, and he hasn't begun to put the time and money into it I have put in this work. Here are over one hundred of the rarest birds to be found from Florida to Labrador—any bird expert can tell that."

Mr. Tescheron became deeply interested. He consulted his friend Smith, the great detective, who recommended a bird expert he knew to appraise the collection and get a price from its fond owner. For a consideration of fifty dollars, the bird expert spent an hour in Hoboken viewing the Emil Stuffer collection without letting it be known whom he represented. At least that was the agreement he made with Mr. Tescheron. He reported that the collection would be a bargain at five thousand dollars, and he believed it might be bought for that, as he understood Mr. Stuffer was in need of money and was beginning to hint he might sacrifice it among people in the trade; but of course he gave no sign of anxiety to possible purchasers.

A man makes his pile in the fish business, but it is not monumental; it will not live after him in memorial grandeur, and the business itself is far from imposing—the phosphate of ammonia and its volatile allies passing even from the recollection of reminiscent contemporaries. The people with rare collections to sell work among that class of trade represented by Tescheron, a man with money seeking to benefit mankind in some way that will insure the perpetuation of his name carved in stone or cast in bronze, with the cost of maintenance shouldered by contract on the impersonal taxpayer, for whom glory pro rata is reserved to be enjoyed by reflection from the monumented name of the philanthropist. Thus the good a taxpayer does is interred with his bones, if he has been careful to pay up and not be sold out beforehand for arrears. But the good the philanthropist does is resolved into fame founded on one of the surest things known—taxes.

It is not ethical for a man engaged in supplying rare collections to advertise, but

like the most fashionable jewelers, whose correspondence with ladies is in copper-plate long-hand, penned on delicate note-paper, by a clerical force of slender-fingered young gentlemen—refined, polite, indirect and apparently disinterested appeals must be made. Emil Stuffer comprehended the art of the sales department.

Some day I hope to get enough out of the public to give a set of my writings on political economy to every town that will firmly bind itself, as the party of the second part, to keep them dusted.

The town authorities of Stukeville, N. Y., a village of three thousand inhabitants, were already the proud possessors of the Tescheron collection of rare fish, comprising some three hundred prepared specimens, displayed in rooms set apart in the library building. They were glad to furnish the additional rooms needed for the accommodation of the celebrated Stuffer Collection of the Rare Birds of Eastern North America, and also to provide, according to the deed of gift: "for the proper maintenance of the same, with the understanding that the gift is absolute to the citizens of Stukeville without further conditions or reservations, whatsoever," etc.

The dealer, acting as Mr. Tescheron's agent, secretly, made the purchase about a week before the Tescheron family departed, and the outfit was shipped to Stukeville, where it was set up by Miss Griggs, the librarian (who kept two canaries and understood birds), assisted by three men, who did the carting. There it stands to-day, a monument to the benefactor of Stukeville. The smile on the elongated face of the pelican, who is scratching his left ear with a broad web flipper, reflects in mummied perpetuity the gratitude hidden behind the quiet exterior of the studious Emil Stuffer, ornithologist and mechanical engineer—but principally the latter, when he received word from the expert that the sale had been made.

In Hoboken they now tell of the sale of this collection as a joke, but in Stukeville it is a serious matter. Up there it is in the domain of natural history.

Afterward, when I started out to visit the places involved in the wages of my unlucky interference, I ran up to Stukeville and looked over the birds. I could see that a stretched neck or lengthened legs and fancy tail feathers, with a few minor alterations in the bill and wings, were all that was necessary to make a rare wild bird out of a tame duck. Hoboken-built birds seemed to answer every purpose, however, in Stukeville.

When it was all over except spending the money, A. Stuffer used to ask his scholarly son:

"Say, Emil, which was the hardest to make—Jerry, or one of them Stukeville pets?"

CHAPTER XV

A man who writes his friend's love-letters is twice a fool if he admires his work. Burns, Byron, Morris and the others who contributed toward these high crimes and misdemeanors were dead, and so escaped the wrath of the angry gods, who switch triflers in Love's domain. I got all the punishment due for the guilt of writing the compositions, and piled on top of that came another turn on the hard road of the transgressor for issuing them again. I did not intend to put them into general circulation, of course; but my carelessness in leaving one of the letters in the sun parlor really amounted to the same thing. The fellow who carelessly hits a can of dynamite with an axe gets the same perfect results as if he had planned to do it for several months. The worst, however, was the swelling pride which led to the discussion of the letters with Hygeia. It snatched her forcibly from my life at a time when sustaining hope was most needed. The hypnotizing poets were to blame. As I read the letters, I got the notion that I was responsible for the inspired as well as the uninspired portions, and so became topheavy and foolhardy in handling a kind of fire I did not understand. Many another has been burned the same way.

Before letters of this character are passed out for general reading, it must be understood that the audience shall not include the man who sent them to a woman he afterwards killed, for the simple purpose of marrying an accomplished lady of means, who is also a listener with him at the recital. It is one of the rules in reading aloud second-hand love-letters, never to have these conditions present, for they are apt to induce distress in both parties. Had I been consulted with full details presented for my consideration, I know I should have advised against it.

Gabrielle and Jim listened to the reading of the letter left in the sun parlor. It seemed to be public property, as there was no name attached to it, and so it went the rounds of the hospital. Hygeia had intended to read it for my entertainment first, but before doing so she chanced to read it in the next room; perhaps because she thought the audience would know more than I did of such matters, and would be more appreciative. In this she was not mistaken. Jim's interest was there in cold shivers, which made the springs hum and the slat gables whistle. Gabrielle laughed and giggled like a schoolgirl.

"It's the funniest letter you ever heard," declared Hygeia, who seemed to lose sight of its serious character. "I am sure you will both think it so."

"If it's a love-letter, ought we to trifle with it?" asked Gabrielle. "The man or woman to whom it belongs might not regard it as a joke."

"There are no names on it, and it will never be claimed now," said Hygeia, hesitatingly.

"Read it, by all means, then, to cheer us," said Gabrielle.

Hygeia proceeded to read this collaboration of R. Burns and B. Hopkins:

> "'My Darling Margaret: During your visits to the country your letters cheer me as I fondly dwell upon the sweet suggestive thought that you are ever thinking of me, as I am thinking of you, every waking and dreaming moment. I fade away into dreamland, hand in hand with you, and joyously together like innocent children we walk across the broad meadows and through the woods to some hidden bower by the brook; there as I look up into your eyes, the pebbly streamlet flashing a glint of wayward sunshine, the wooing songbirds and the reposeful harmonies of Nature soothe me like your tender glances when they fall upon me alone. Aye, quite alone I would have them fall, to produce that magic sensation of a dream's delight. Then when I awake in the morning and realize that you are far, far away, and read your latest letter again with pangs of the bitterest remorse, I dwell only upon those passages which hint of other joys quite apart from your interest in me. My desolation is that of a storm-tossed soul, seized by every breath of fear and tortured by every agony known to the forsaken. Have you no pity for me, Margaret? Drive no more shafts of anguish through my bruised and shattered heart, but gently administer in words of endearment the potency of your enthralling glances.
>
> "'Forlorn, my love, no comfort near,
> Far, far from thee, I wander here;
> Far, far from thee, the fate severe,
> At which I most repine, love.
>
> "O, wert thou, love, but near me;
> But near, near, near me;
> How kindly thou wouldst cheer me,

And mingle sighs with mine, love!

"Around me scowls a wintry sky,
That blasts each bud of hope and joy,
And shelter, shade nor home have I,
Save in those arms of thine, love.'"

"Oh, my! How gushy!" exclaimed Gabrielle, as she laughed, and looked at Jim to see if he were enjoying it as thoroughly.

"Yes, but how jolly it is to read," said Hygeia. "Listen to this:

"'There comes a faint ray of sunshine and hope when I read just a word of your possible home-coming in a fortnight. Would that I might keep that single thought in mind to illumine the dreary prospect! There are times when it blazes brightly, and with the tripping footsteps of joy I think of you as here at my side. How sweet the fancy—

"'We'll gently walk, and sweetly talk,
Till the silent moon shine clearly;
I'll grasp thy waist, and, fondly prest,
Swear how I love thee dearly;
Not vernal showers to budding flow'rs,
Not autumn to the farmer,
So dear can be as thou to me,
My fair, my lovely charmer!'"

"My, but wouldn't it be fine to have such letters to treasure!" laughed Gabrielle, teasingly. "Jim, don't you think it splendid?"

But Jim looked glum and tried to dodge under the quilts.

"'It is not every night I *can* dream, believe me, darling,'" continued Hygeia, her face in smiles, for she felt that her audience was now in sympathy with the reading. "'Many and many a night I pace the floor of my dark room or idly sit by the window gazing out at the flickering stars and the pale moon until they fade away in the dawn, and then I rush out into the turmoil of the unheeding, jostling world, with nothing to live for but your return. On those nights one soft word from your fair lips would summon me to peaceful dreams. Alas! to realize that you are far, far from me, and the agony of the

thought that you may never return seizes and holds me fast. Then it is—

"'O, thou pale orb, that silent shines,
While care-untroubled mortals sleep!
Thou seest a wretch who inly pines,
And wanders here to wail and weep!
With woe I nightly vigils keep,
Beneath thy wan, unwarming beam,
And mourn in lamentation deep
How life and love are all a dream.

"'Encircled in her clasping arms,
How have the raptured moments flown!
How have I wished for fortune's charms,
For her dear sake and hers alone!
And must I think it!—is she gone,
My secret heart's exulting boast?
And does she heedless hear my groan?
And is she ever, ever lost?

"'Oh! can she bear so base a heart,
So lost to honor, lost to truth,
As from the fondest lover part,
The plighted husband of her youth!'"

"Jim, why didn't you learn how to write letters, so that you could send some to me like that? Don't you think it lovely? Please don't stop. Pardon my interruptions," said Gabrielle.

"Never mind the interruptions. Let us get all the fun out of it we can," replied Hygeia, who continued to read with frequent interruptions from Gabrielle, but none whatever from Jim—the livelier the comments and laughter, the greater he was inclined to silence and disappearance beneath the covers.

"Jim, why don't you laugh?" Gabrielle would say, turning to the poor fellow, who was as meek as any beggar could be. The partition wall was too thick for me to hear what was going on, although by direct line I was probably not two feet away from Jim, for our beds stood head to head.

The idea of entertaining Miss Tescheron and her ill companion in this way was

pleasing to Hygeia. Of course, she knew there was nothing in those letters that could make a woman cry, so on she read, and as she proceeded the fun for Gabrielle and the interest from Jim's standpoint became intensified. I don't suppose I did anything except snore.

> "'I have tried hard, my sweetheart,'" continued Hygeia, "'to find distraction by visiting the places of amusement alone, but the music of the orchestras became jarring discord in my ears; the plays, either dull, or if interesting in plot with lovers happily united, they but added to my anguish. There is no escape for a heart crushed as mine has been. How I long for the wilderness; to be alone with my sorrow since heaven calling for your companionship cannot be mine!

"'Had I a cave on some wild distant shore,
Where the winds howl to the waves' dashing roar;
There would I weep my woes,
There seek my lost repose,
Till grief my eyes should close,
Ne'er to wake more.

"'Every time you mention a birdie in one of your letters, Margaret, I am driven to desperation. Why have I not the charms of the woodland warblers to pierce with dulcet note the inmost fortresses of your heart buttressed to strong resistance against my awkward protestations of undying love? Nature has taught these creatures of the wild to woo with a finer art. Man is but a clod—too sordid to rise on wings of song into that vast expanse of heaven, a woman's heart. Let me learn of the birds:

"'O, stay, sweet warbling woodlark, stay!
Nor quit for me the trembling spray;
A hapless lover courts thy lay,
Thy soothing, fond complaining.

"'Again, again, that tender part,
That I may catch thy melting art,
For surely that would touch her heart,
Wha kills me wi' disdaining.'"

"Why, how apt those quotations are and how full!" laughed Gabrielle. "You don't suppose the writer could have been so cruel as to deliberately copy them, and yet he must have done so, of course. Just think of it: some man sitting there wildly in love, seeking counsel of the inspired poets to plead his cause. His great devotion leads him to select the tenderest passages; only those verses that speak the deep sentiments of his flaming heart does he see, and with them he presents his case. Why, really, I find that I am arguing myself into a friendly attitude toward this poor soul. Perhaps it is not right for us to laugh at that which is so real to this earnest pleader. Still, it is funny to stand aside and see two people in love, isn't it, Jim? Really one can't help laughing, and as we don't know whose letters these are, why shouldn't we laugh? Then think of the poor girl, up there in the country, writing long letters in return, proud of her lover's ardor, yet shy in penning words of devotion. Isn't it an attractive picture, Jim?—full of that 'soothing, fond

complaining' for them, and comedy for the rest of us? Go on, my dear, and let us hear more of this poetic woe; although Jim doesn't say anything, I can see that he is listening.

Does it make you tired, Jim?"

"Oh, no. No, no, Gabrielle—not at all!" Jim managed to spruce up enough to deny the intimation.

"Then please continue," urged Gabrielle.

Hygeia was delighted to find her entertainment so successful, and proceeded, not noting, of course, the inward groans which spread through the quaking man in the bed. Jim could see that unless a great stroke of luck turned up there would be another fire, and he would take a fall that would probably kill him next time.

It is dangerous to leave waste paper like those letters lying around close to such highly inflammable material.

Poor Hygeia! She played with the fire like a child. What did she know about the rules of the Board of Underwriters! Neither had she ever heard of the Bureau of Combustibles!

It's a mighty lucky thing for my nerves that I was dreaming an easier plot.

If Jim had been able to reach over the back of his bed and slit me with a cleaver into rosette ribbons, one-quarter inch wide, I believe he would have done it and been proud of the job.

Hygeia continuing, with Gabrielle expectant and Jim well muffled, must have presented a picture I would give anything to have preserved in oil paint.

> "'How dearly I cherish the lock of hair I stole from you the evening we parted! You are not angry with me, are you, Margaret?'" read Hygeia.
>
> "'Her hair is like the curling mist
> That climbs the mountain sides at e'en,
> When flow'r-reviving rains are past.
>
> "'Really I do not wonder at the volumes of poetry that have been written on the beautiful tresses of the fair enshrined in lovers' hearts. Sweet dreams hover near this soft remembrance and I only regret that I did not snip off

enough to have a jeweler braid it for my watch-charm locket. Enclosed please find some of mine in return.'"

"Here it is," exclaimed Hygeia, and she produced the small allotment of Jim's, tied with a cotton thread in the middle. Fortunately the original quantity had dwindled in fondling or transit, so that with an exhibit of only eighteen strands, as per my inventory, there was not enough to bulk and show the same depth of shade as the original on the neighboring pillow. Gabrielle took the fragmentary token and held it up, playfully remarking:

"Why, the dear fellow was a blond; almost your color, Jim, I should imagine; perhaps a little lighter. He probably had eyes like yours, Jimmy. Now, what a fortunate girl she was! Oh, my! Some men are so tender and thoughtful about these little matters. Jim, you never teased me by stealing a lock of my hair, did you? and so of course I never asked for yours. What a slow old chap you are! These letters will teach you a lesson, which I hope you will heed. Put the lock back with that poetry to preserve it, and do let us hear the rest of it."

"Listen, then," said Hygeia, continuing:

"'How the fresh breezes must be painting their ruddy hues on those cheeks of yours, Margaret, for you write me that you are spending most of your time in the open these beautiful days. How I long to be with you and behold, for as the poet would sing of you—

"'Her cheeks are like yon crimson gem,
The pride of all the flow'ry scene,
Just opening on its thorny stem.

"'Aye, and then—

"'Her lips are like yon cherries ripe,
That sunny walls from Boreas screen—
They tempt the taste and charm the sight;
An' she has twa sparkling roguish een.'"

At this point I awoke, sat up in bed and reached out for the suspended electric button, which I pushed for two long rings and a short one, my private signal. I was thirsty for grape-juice. Hygeia seldom traveled beyond range of my bell. As soon as she heard it, she stopped reading and asked to be excused for a few minutes, until she could attend to my wants.

It was now my eighth week at the hospital, and it found me with little to do. I pined silently. The nurse flitting in and out cheered and then distracted me; she was too busy elsewhere most of the time to suit me. I dared not think too much of my troubles, for I found it discouraging and weakening. The letters from Obreeon furnished the material I needed to sustain a happy train of thought. Sitting up in bed with this precious poetic patchwork piled over my lap, I had many a good sneeze. I am sure I got some of my money back by reading them over and over again, with the memory of the original spirit in which they were slapped together. For a time the happy days of the fifth flat came back to me, and I smiled and chuckled over the wildest specimens in suppressed glee. Robert Burns, of Scotland, and I were responsible for many of these lone lover's laments. I must say that Burns held up his end fairly well, because I knew just where to place his underpinning to make it support my magnificent prose. The Byron and Shakespeare-built letters were also good. Scott rumbled a little too hard; his stride was too firm to answer the purpose, except for short fillers now and then. All the big licks were put in with Byron and Burns, and Morris occasionally as a substitute. Those fellows warmed up to the subject in a way that pleased me; they took right hold of a girl with as little timidity as a dancing professor and poured their song into her inclining ear, happy in the understanding that they were delivering the goods she wanted. Early in the business I had come to the conclusion that it was useless to fool with the cold-blooded wooers if results were wanted. Shakespeare, of course, was a leader, but his best stuff was getting to be so common in the language I found it impossible to quote him and maintain an air of dignified originality, so as to make it appear that the gems fell naturally by suggestion from Jim's well-stocked poem reservoir. If the maiden should get the idea that the prose was written around the poetry the scenic effect would be destroyed. The great thing was to make a hit by getting the sincerity in the prose boiled down so thick that the following poetry would seem to be only a breath of steam arising from the solid mass of seething sentiment. It was assumed that the lady would know who the poet was, but give Jim credit for selecting the verses the same as if he had written them; she would not doubt him on the prose, for occasionally I brought that down to the style of a plain business letter to destroy suspicion.

The more I read those letters over at the hospital, the prouder I became. My calm judgment was that they were well worth the price and any woman might be proud to have them sent to her. Perhaps I would copy them off again some time when I needed help that way myself; at any rate, I was so proud of them I decided I would always keep them for their literary value.

When Hygeia entered, I was deeply interested in this documentary mass. I had forgotten about my thirst, imbibing from this fount of poetic inspiration. She asked me what it was that pleased me so much, but I dodged that question politely.

Soon I began to regret my evasive answer. When a man gets to be real proud of his work of art, he wants somebody to admire it with him and tell him how nice it is. I had believed I should be close-mouthed about those letters, but when I had taken off the few at the top signed with Jim's name I noticed there was nothing in them to tell who wrote them. Why shouldn't Hygeia enjoy them with me? If a few seemed to affect her, a clue to her heart's entrance would appear, and then I could undertake the composition of more with greater earnestness than ever. A man can do better in such business for himself. Just a few would do no harm, at any rate. She would not know who "Devoted Darling" and "Jamie" and "My Dearest Own" might be, with no envelopes and addresses to give the thing away, and if she did, what would it matter? She would soon forget me as well as the letters. Why not brighten the dull moments?

There is no limit to the persuasive questions a fool can put to himself.

"I thought you rang for something," she said.

"Why, I remember—I was thirsty. Please let me have some grape-juice off the ice."

While she was gone I thought it all out carefully and decided not to show the letters. It would be better to be a little cagy for a while. When Hygeia returned, I again changed my mind and passed over to her a dozen or so choice specimens.

"Please sit right down and read these and tell me what you think of them," said I.

She went over to the window and presently began to laugh a little louder than the regulations would permit. That suited me, because it proved the style would melt if addressed to her; taken second-hand and cold that way, she was bound to laugh at them. Letters in divorce cases referring to the defendant woman as "a

dream in curves" were no joke to the fair one who had sighed over them. Buckwheat cakes and love-letters must be done to order and served hot, or the steam dews on them and soggy fermentation ensues, giving off laughing-gas.

"Why, who in the world could have written this nonsense?" laughed Hygeia. "It sounds exactly like that letter one of the nurses found in the sun parlor the other day—the same in many respects as that letter—which has been passed around for the entertainment of the nurses and the doctors. That also must belong to you. Shall I get it for you?"

"Perhaps I dropped some carelessly, but it's no matter," said I. "Let me see it some time and I can tell you. What do you think of them?"

"WHY, WHO IN THE WORLD COULD HAVE WRITTEN THIS NONSENSE?" LAUGHED HYGEIA—Page 214

"Think of them!" And she smiled as if she was pleased, as she continued to turn page after page. "Surely you could not have written them, did you, Mr. Hopkins?"

"I? A friend of mine—you showed him in the other day—thought they would keep my mind occupied, so he brought them here."

"Well, I'm glad he did and that you let me read them. I think the other nurses would enjoy them. May I not read a few to them?"

"Certainly, take all you want and read all you please; only return them in order."

"But did your friend say who wrote them? If they concerned you personally at all, or your friend, Mr. Hosley, of course I should not want to take such liberties with them. Do they?"

"Why, my friend who brought them to me thought of publishing those letters," said I, "just before he brought them to me, but I persuaded him not to. Both the woman and her husband—"

"Why, did he really win her heart with them, and did they get married?"

"Certainly. Letters like that are written to win," I answered, with quiet

satisfaction, even though murder had been the outcome of my art. "The lady and her husband dead and gone (honesty would have made me say 'or gone'), the letters fell into the possession of my friend, who in a way deals in such curios. I bought them from him for a song (some songs are worth one thousand dollars), although he was not over-anxious to sell them."

"Well, if you bought them from a dealer in letters, then they must have belonged to strangers. Really, are you fooling? Are you telling me the truth?"

"I have not, since I have known you, told you a single thing which is not true. But tell me, why do you doubt my sincerity? Why do you care if they concern me?" I wondered if I could have smitten her slightly, and my shoulders began to broaden against the pillow and a sensation of feeling handsome passed over me, although I had not been to a barber in weeks.

"Well, it would seem cruel to take your love-letters, you know, Mr. Hopkins, and read them to the other nurses to laugh over, now wouldn't it?"

"As you state it, perhaps it would," said I. "But what do you care about Hosley? Why do you ask if they concern him? Has Miss Tescheron spoken to you about him?" I was getting suspicious again, for she had refused, on one excuse or another, to let me see Mr. Marshall. It had flashed on me several times again that there was a bare chance of Marshall being Hosley under another name given to him by a person mistaken in identifying him, or that he was trying to hide from me under an alias so easy for him to assume, and had induced Miss Tescheron, perhaps, to avoid meeting me. The flowers, perhaps, were only to mislead me.

"Did I really ask if they concerned Mr. Hosley?" And she looked at me with such a teasing air.

"You surely did."

"Well, you used to have so much to say about him I thought perhaps you might have heard from him, you know, through this gentleman who called, and if you are still friendly to him you would not want to have his letters read around the hospital to furnish entertainment. Still, these letters were written by a married man, and I understand you and Mr. Hosley are bachelors. Mr. Hosley might have written these letters as a bachelor, I feared, and might not be proud to hear them now. He—"

"Tell me, if you thought of reading them to Mr. Hosley, where is he? It might

interest me to know. You sometimes talk strangely, as if you know where he is, and yet you will not tell me. Has Miss Tescheron confided his whereabouts to you? If so, please tell me, for I would, indeed, like to confront that gentleman mighty well."

"Then you are really friendly to Mr. Hosley, and may look for him when you leave here?" She spoke as if I were about to confirm her impression that I knew only good of Hosley.

"I shall certainly find him, never fear. But my friendship for that man is dead—slain by his own hand," said I, bitterly.

This seemed to shock her rudely, but she quickly recovered and asked:

"Why look for a man in whom you have no interest? Has he committed some crime that you would track him down?"

"I will track that man down to his very grave," said I, solemnly, shaking my forefinger at her as she rested one hand on the foot of the bed and looked at me with breathless interest. "Miss Tescheron shall know all that I learn. If she should ever happen to call here to see you, be sure to tell her that, if you please; but you need not say I told you to tell her. Only, I shall be willing to have her know that I am on the trail of that scoundrel. There—I did not mean to burden you with my opinion of Hosley. I had intended to leave here quietly without saying a word about him. The secret has clawed at my heart so that I have not been able to keep it. And what matters it? You do not know him. I am satisfied that he has skipped to parts unknown, because he fears that officers are watching for him here. My, but it is terrible! Terrible! How can such villains achieve their dastardly ends with women and escape detection! Some mysterious influence seems to cover them, in all their devilish ways, from the suspicion of innocent people. Perhaps their victims in many cases shrink from exposing them. Oh, forgive me for burdening you with this awful mystery! It almost drives me mad!"

"Mystery! What has he done? In heaven's name, tell me!" And she almost screamed as she clenched the bed with both hands and leaned far toward me, those wonderful eyes staring in horror. The effect of my eloquence was greater than I suspected, but I continued to expand with commensurate pride.

"He murdered a woman but two days before he sought to marry Miss Tescheron"; and as I said it, I sank upon my pillow with a hand across my eyes

to stay the tears which a more vivid presentation of the crimes of Hosley brought to my eyes. When I looked up, the nurse, pale but calm, was looking at me.

How wide I was of the mark! Instantly she had conceived the idea that the letter she had been reading to furnish diverting comedy in the next room was burdened with tragedy for the young woman to whom she had become deeply attached. Her training had taught her to maintain self-control in the emergency. Another woman, brought face to face with a murderer fondling his next victim with gory hands, might have swooned or excitedly rushed to the rescue of the fair prey with wild denunciations of the criminal.

"My! but you seem pale," I said anxiously.

"Your ghost story frightened me, Mr. Hopkins. Please don't tell me any more like that. It is now time for your luncheon."

There were so many things on my schedule of routine that it was always time for some cruel requirement to steal her away from me.

As she passed out I noticed a strange expression of care upon her beautiful face. I could not account for it, unless my earnestness had impressed her. Her point of view made the serious letters comedy for her at first; perhaps this was the reaction. There could be no reason for her agitation, based on her transient interest in Miss Tescheron, I imagined, for she had only met her for a few minutes at a time. It must have been my eloquence, the power of my dramatic art to so vividly portray the hideous Hosley that she became quite as much affected as if she had intimately known the criminal, and had followed his creeping, serpentine ways for bringing the next creature into his power. It rather pleased me to find that I could exercise this wonderful influence—a force so long latent in a superior intellectual equipment, obscured by a disenchanting personal appearance, especially unconvincing then, for I never looked particularly well in bed.

A nurse I had not seen before brought my luncheon, and with it the letter, which I quickly recognized belonged to my thousand-dollar collection.

"Your nurse sends this letter, which I am told is yours," said my new guardian. "She is ill and the doctor has ordered her to rest."

"Ill? Why, I am very, very sorry to hear that," said I. "Tell me, please, how seriously ill she is. Only a moment ago she left here looking very pale. Do tell

me about her."

"Why, that is all I know."

The next day I learned that Hygeia had gone to her home in Connecticut for a brief vacation. Something had happened; I did not know what. The doctor, it appears, advised that a vacation would be the thing. I could learn no more. I was able to get her address, and wrote a long letter to her, but no reply came. I began to doubt the strength of my magnetic power over her, so encouragingly demonstrated, and was utterly miserable again. Every other worldly interest became dim; the last ray of hope had gone and through the dark valley of despair I stumbled alone.

Marshall, I learned, had left the same day Hygeia departed, but I did not care. I should not have spoken to him. I was in no humor to talk with him over that tame experience passed through while I was unconscious. When burning over a slow fire, a man is not fit for reminiscence. Two weeks later, after an illness of ten weeks, I was discharged from the hospital with all wounds healed except the one I received there, and perhaps that other—the maddening effect of Hosley's infidelity.

CHAPTER XVI

It was an unfortunate day for Mr. Tescheron and his family when I isolated him among the scheming natives of Hoboken, that seat of wonderful mechanical learning. When the birds had been shipped to Stukeville, Mrs. Tescheron insisted that the family return home at once, and, if necessary, take the consequences of a terrible publicity. Life without her friends had become unbearable. She must have the comforts of her home. Daily she begged, implored, teased and pined. Gabrielle, too, urged her father to consider her mother's health, for Hoboken had gotten upon Mrs. Tescheron's nerves to a dangerous degree.

"I care nothing now for the publicity," said Mrs. Tescheron. "It cannot be worse than this sort of privacy. Albert, I hope you will see the folly of remaining longer."

"Mr. Smith tells me it would not be safe to return yet, Marie. Be patient; in a little while everything will have blown over. Remember, we are paying Mr. Smith, who is experienced in these matters, and it is good business to take his advice."

Gabrielle remained silent during the conversation between her father and mother. She had, as usual, spent the best part of the day attending her hero at the hospital, protecting him from the consequences of her foolish father's acts and from his traitorous chum. Her plans were carrying well, and were it not for her mother's fretfulness Hoboken or any spot within a reasonable distance from the hospital would be a satisfactory abiding place for her.

Gabrielle's disinterestedness had already aroused her father's suspicion.

"You seem to be satisfied here, Gabrielle," said he, turning to his daughter, whose air of contentment seemed to him to be based on something more than a sustaining faith in Jim Hosley; it must, he thought, include a full knowledge of Jim's retreat. That night she seemed to be most aggravatingly self-satisfied, although she had really never been otherwise from the moment of his first denunciation of Jim, closely followed by the family's flight. This must be something more than stoicism. She had outgeneraled him in some way.

"Yes, I am perfectly satisfied, father," replied Gabrielle. "Mother, however, needs

her home. The days drag heavily here. A few weeks' change was well enough, and I believe it might have helped her; but you can see that she is worrying a great deal now. Is it worth while, do you think, to sacrifice mother's comfort, perhaps her health?"

"These rooms are not to my liking so well as those in Ninety-sixth Street, but Mr. King wrote to me again the other day that the same fellow was around again to serve me with that subpœna. Hoboken may not be so desirable as home, but I think you would both be sorry to return and undergo the ordeal we have been delivered from by coming here. I am trying a little plan now which, if it works, may bring us home soon. I think it is the safe way out. Mr. Smith and I are now at work on it. If all goes well, Marie, you will be happily returned to your home very soon, so please be as patient as you can a few days longer. This miserable incident will then be closed forever, and we may walk abroad again among our friends, with our reputations unsullied and no one the wiser for our leaving as we did. Ah! it will please me, mother, to have it so."

"Indeed, it will please us all, Albert," Mrs. Tescheron assured him sadly, although it seemed to her there could be nothing more disappointing than an indefinite postponement of her heart's desire.

What those plans were Gabrielle would have given Smith a retainer to know, for if they involved the arrest of her Jim and his extradition to another State. She wondered how her father could believe they would get away safely in a week. If the detectives had lost track of the fugitive during the time he was in the hospital she did not believe they would find him now in the hiding-place she had in mind. The moment the hospital physicians consented, Jim Hosley would be removed to a spot where he might convalesce without fear of molestation. Not a soul, not even her mother, should know of that place, for if the pursuit was to be renewed in earnest, her vigilance must be all the greater.

Gabrielle's fears, as is usually the case with lovers whose wisdom is intuitional, were not well founded. The detectives had long ago ceased to do any actual work in following clues to determine the whereabouts of the bad man. Why should they? Their idea was to keep him mysteriously at large, with the district attorney and police always just around the corner. Suspended interest pays well, for the service was charged at so much per week with occasionally a bonus for an "extra."

Mr. Tescheron did not have in mind a further pursuit of Hosley after he had paid

the detective bureau for weeks of service, which brought no results other than rumors. To have the disturber of his peace in hiding where no man could find him would have pleased Mr. Tescheron; but from the reports of Smith it seemed certain that a crisis was about to be reached. Hosley had been located in South Dakota, claiming a residence antedating our fire by several weeks. A man who has had trouble with his wives generally goes there. The officials were about to send men on to arrest him, and then await his extradition. There was enough evidence, Mr. Smith said, in the Browning case alone to warrant the belief that the authorities would readily secure the transfer of their man to New York; but long before that time, all the horrible details would appear in the papers.

"We have staved this thing off for five weeks, Mr. Tescheron," said Mr. Smith, in one of his private interviews with his client at the Stuffer House. They sat that afternoon in a corner of the writing-room adjoining the large living-room.

"Yes, I think you have done well," replied Mr. Tescheron. "But how much have I paid you altogether? About one thousand eight hundred dollars, isn't it?"

"Yes, or a trifle more or less, one way or the other. I can't remember just now. It has involved me in heavy expense, this case has, Mr. Tescheron. If I had it to do over again, I could not possibly quote such favorable terms for our facilities—I could not possibly. No, sir, I could not possibly think of doing so." Mr. Smith's emphasis took the form of dwindling repetition so common to men of business, who have hold of the best end of the bargain, and have decided to keep their hold.

"Well, in the fish business, one thousand eight hundred dollars stands for enough to feed ten thousand people," remarked Mr. Tescheron, glumly. "I feel as if it ought to pay for a lot of detective work. I am sorry you think you are so underpaid."

There was a trace of a sneer that Mr. Smith did not like, and as he held the upper hand in the detective business he did not need to tolerate such conduct in his client.

"Perhaps we'd better call the thing off," said Mr. Smith. "You and your family remain here—or you might go down to Lakewood. In that way you will escape much of the disagreeable notoriety—quite a good deal of it, at any rate. Yes, sir, a considerable amount of it."

Mr. Smith snapped some documentary-looking papers, and as he drew his lips

together and nervously twisted his head, he thrust the papers deep in an inside pocket. They contained a memorandum of the estimated price for engineering the return of the Tescheron family to New York under an iron-clad guarantee of protection.

But the sarcasm was more of an irritant than the client could stand.

"See here, Smith, you talk to me in a way I don't like"; and Mr. Tescheron glared as he became more combative than he had ever been in his dealings with this prosperous leech. "I don't care to have you threaten me in this underhanded manner. Perhaps I have been a fool to have placed so much confidence in you from the start. You have kept me scared and away from my home for five weeks, and now you hint that the end is not in sight. We are all sick and tired of this place. Hoboken is no paradise, let me tell you. I am bored to death here. For the money paid to you to date, you have produced nothing but discomfort. I am thinking of packing up and starting back to-morrow, let the consequences be what they may. I think I have been a victim quite long enough, and have paid just about all a fool ought to pay for a vacation of five weeks."

"Well, you know your own business best, of course, Mr. Tescheron. If you really don't fear the publicity, why did you engage me at all? Why did you go to any expense whatever? Of course, it is foolish, as you say, to spend money to avoid that which you do not fear. Go back and take your medicine; let your wife and daughter take theirs. Go back by all means; start to-morrow. Don't delay."

That fellow Smith certainly knew enough about fishing for men to fill a volume with pointers on the best lines, rods, and bait—artificial, worms or minnows. He knew just what he could do with a man restrained by fear, and filled with the idea that his money and superior business judgment would enable him to gain his ends in every emergency. A poor man is protected against many parasites by his lean purse. It gets back to the saying, "A fool and his money are soon parted"; but what impresses me at this turn of our narrative is the fact that the fool is only interesting up to the point of the parting. After that he is dropped from the plans of his pursuers. Notice of the failure of Mr. Tescheron's business in the reports of the day would have removed him from the realm of mystery to sure footing on the hard-pan of tough luck.

Mr. Tescheron had in his haste begun to find fault before he knew just what move to make. He realized that Smith read that fact in his manner and peevish complaining. He felt the hook in his gills. Smith felt the tug on the line. Perhaps

at that interview he thought how like my advice this sarcastic statement from Smith seemed. At times he felt like a coward, and then encouraged himself to believe he was really a brave man, *saving* his loved ones from the blasting breath of scandal more awful than any calamity that might overtake them.

Smith's shrewd little brain turned on cash. Gold dollars were the ball bearings that eased its frictionless revolutions. Pine forests have their charms, no doubt, for those misguided creatures who enjoy the bracing ozone of the balsam-laden air. To Smith the pungent sap of the evergreen tree was a poor substitute for the stimulating essence of greenback, the cologne of greasy bills, and it would take a big pile of them to make the room "stuffy" enough to have him raise the window. When it came to drawing nigh to money, Mr. Smith was the pink of propinquity.

Noting that Mr. Tescheron had been subdued, Mr. Smith started to go. He bade his patron to be of good cheer, and promised him the outlook would surely brighten in time.

"Keep your seat a minute, Smith," urged Mr. Tescheron, whose ideas had been strengthened by the tonic of Smith's stimulating rejoinder, and I may add that the turn was about what Smith had planned to happen. "What are those papers you put back in your pocket?" The observing, gullible man of business was trying to swim where the current was a little too swift for him.

"Why, I had here a memorandum of what it would cost to have you go back and have the whole business hushed up forever."

"How much?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"Whew! That's a scorcher."

"Flanagan wanted six, but I got next to him myself and I think—I'm not sure—but I think he would take three."

"I can't think of it. I'll give a thousand, but not a cent more. And say—how much do you keep out of it, Smith?"

Mr. Tescheron cast a suspicious eye on the detective, who proceeded to apply his formula for suspicion.

"That is an insult, Mr. Tescheron," exclaimed Mr. Smith. "You may not have

intended it as such, but really that is too much for me to bear. I have served you untiringly and faithfully, and really you should give me better treatment. I cannot allow you to insinuate that I would be guilty of—"

"There, there, Smith, forget it. I shouldn't have accused you of that. But this expense is too heavy. I'll stay here a while longer. As there seems to be no danger of the case being revived, I think we may return in a week or so without paying the hush money."

"Just as you say, but I confess the newspaper reports have scared me, even though you—"

"The reports!" Tescheron colored and blanched in turn. "The reports! Where?"

"You saw them."

"Certainly I did not. Where did they appear? When? Why have you not told me?"

"But you read the papers, and I understood you did not fear them while over here."

"Fear them! What am I here for except to escape the scandal that would attach to my family? Smith, are you lying to me? There were no reports. Had there been I could not have missed them; my man King or some one would have called my attention to them."

Mr. Smith handed a carefully folded newspaper clipping, with ragged edges, to Mr. Tescheron. It had the appearance of being hastily torn from a paper. Mr. Tescheron read it slowly, and as he did so Smith watched the victim writhe as the prepared venom paralyzed it for the death-blow. I have seen this clipping. It read as follows:

MURDER HIDDEN BY THE POLICE.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A WOMAN NOT REPORTED FOR SIX WEEKS.

> The mysterious death of a woman, supposed to have been murdered in an apartment house in this city by her husband, two days prior to an incendiary fire that took place six weeks ago and destroyed all traces of the crime, was considered by the Grand Jury to-day, with Coroner Flanagan as one of the

witnesses. The names of the parties concerned in the tragedy could not be learned at the Central Office, and Coroner Flanagan refused to give any details concerning the autopsy. He admitted, however, that the matter had been called to his attention anonymously, and his subsequent investigations had led him to report the matter to the Central Office. The police say that publicity at this time might make it impossible for them to secure the presence of the murderer, who has been found in a Western State. As the case has reached the Grand Jury, an indictment may follow at any time.

A well-known merchant who has been absent from the city since the date of the fire is in some way said to be involved as an important witness.

On the back of the clipping, Mr. Tescheron's dazed eyes noted a market report dated at Chicago, but he did not scan the paper more closely. Nervously he handed it to Smith. When he had pondered a moment he said:

"I'll pay it."

CHAPTER XVII

What should I do with myself? That was my problem, when I went out into the world again. No boarding-house could satisfy me, so I determined to set up in light housekeeping, which is a city imitation of Robinson Crusoe in two rooms. There I could be melancholy without interruption; it would not be necessary to chatter with the other boarders either to keep them from observing my absent-mindedness or to divert my own attention from the dull routine of cannery products, synthetic meats, and "laid down eggs"—laid only a little way down by the hen and away down in a barrel by a man under water-glass for eight months and eight cents more per dozen. Besides, if you keep house in the city an arrangement may be made with your milkman so that you may irrigate your milk to suit yourself. You simply request him to deliver the water he usually blends with the milk in a separate vessel, which, of course, you are glad to provide. Then if you get only a pint of cow's milk for the price of a quart, you are satisfied, because you have the privilege of seasoning it by superior home-methods of irrigation to suit yourself. I was too much of a farmer to ever board comfortably in the city.

Jim always agreed with me in those days before nervousness induced by woman drove us through fire and over the bumpy paths of error, that housekeeping was the ideal life. Knowledge of what the people will stand is power, and it has packed some powerful doses in cans. They used to throw away half the hog until they got knowledge. Some epicure who lived on rats and bats' eyes, announced that the black spot in the oyster is the best part. What he had to say was published in a bulletin or a report—let me see, was it from the Department of Agriculture? I've read a good many of their bulletins, but I can't be sure if they did that for the country or not. At any rate, the report went into oysters from away back, quoted authorities from Egypt and Persia, who were fond of dogs, and gave the needed impetus to the captains of the canning industry, who are always on the lookout for pointers—or pugs. Since then all the black spots have been saved on the farm, whether in hogs or apples, done up at some factory in neat glass jars, with a chemist's certificate that they do not contain boracic acid or turpentine, and will not eat the enamel off a stew-kettle; sterilized, gold-labeled and rechristened "Meadfern" crab apples, mince-meat, gelatine, invalid's food and what not, until it is hard to tell where the economy will stop. The latest

thing in this line is the current information that it pays to feed the stimulating prickers from the wild gooseberries to make the hens lay.

I once asked a fellow who ran a cannery why he used such expensive labels.

"To please the goats," he answered.

And so his business is largely human nature, too. We laugh at the foolish goats for eating the label off a can—we eat the same thing ourselves. When I come to drink the bitter hemlock, I pray it may be labeled so as to take the pucker out of it.

I would rather starve than board, so I started out to find my desert island.

"You advertise rooms for light housekeeping," said I to a sad-faced, middle-aged woman, who answered my ringing of the bell of a three-story brownstone house in East Thirty-eighth Street. Some prosperous merchant had probably lived there twenty years before, but it had been converted into a nest for workers.

"YOU ADVERTISE ROOMS FOR LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING."

"Yes, sir," she replied. "Two back rooms."

"What floor?" I asked, having in mind the force of gravity.

"Second floor. How many in your family?"

"Only me."

"You keep house alone?"

"Certainly. I know how."

"Don't you find it lonesome?"

"I hope so. I want to be lonesome."

"Well, I don't know." She hesitated and looked me over with great care. "Have you anybody to recommend you?"

"I see that you doubt my sanity, madam. My nerves are a little out of line; I have just left the hospital and must be quiet. Do you see? If you must have references, I work for the Department of Health."

"Oh, that's all right, then, if you work for the Department of Health."

The rooms suited me. The small hall-room was the kitchen, and the larger room was the living-room, equipped with one of those furniture alligators and diabolical economizers of space, a folding bed, and a few chairs bravely presenting a polished but brittle front, under the bracing influence of the gluepot, as I afterward learned. Every time one of those chairs broke down under me, my heart also went out to the poor soul, Mrs. Dewey, the landlady, who made her living by pinching a profit out of every penny. She was a generous creature, so far as she could be; but a hard world's exactions squeezed her to a meanness she herself detested, but must practice or starve. When I think long of poor Mrs. Dewey, whom I knew for only a few weeks, I want to begin life over again as a reformer. I'd take an axe to Mr. Dewey, and begin my reforms on him as a typical subject in need of annihilation, and get as far as a man a few centuries ahead of his time might expect to.

Old Dewey—the Mr. Dewey herein before referred to—was the black background and cellar of the institution. Like a rat, he came from the coal heap or a hidden corner unawares and was gone into further darkness before you could turn to learn the cause of the noise he made. His shadowy participation in home management contributed to the family's progress as a millstone about the neck of its mistress, and did not follow over-stimulation, the common cause of chronic depression in husbands of boarding-house keepers and women who rent furnished rooms. Bone-laziness filling the marrow and changing its natural pink to a Roquefort verdigris of decay, was my diagnosis of old Dewey's ailment. He moved with a premeditation which nine times out of ten amounted to standing still; rest resulted from two opposing forces, Mrs. Dewey's beseeching and threats colliding with his will traveling against her purpose with counter-balancing velocity and mass. A hired man would have left her long ago under such tongue-lashing, but old Dewey could not leave, because to leave is an act. There were no verbs in his vocabulary comprehending possibilities of usefulness within range of the present tense. What an irony in names! I often thought.

A man who is employed in the Department of Health has a pass to the good wishes of a woman who rents a house in New York. Mrs. Dewey regarded me as a person of influence with the governing powers, one who could probably get her landlord to "do something with the old-fashioned bathtub" by prying him through the official lever of departmental requirements. It was far from my purpose to deceive her, but nothing I could say in denial was strong enough to change her conviction. My presence under her roof induced in Mrs. Dewey a state of expectancy over a new enameled bathtub that carried with it at first more

deference than she paid to the other tenants. When my milk-bottle fell off the back window-sill into the yard below, she swept up what the cat left without complaining.

A few short weeks before I was a man with some confidence in my fellows; life had its charms, hope sustained me. Rosy views are for those whose faith has not been shattered. Optimism could find no support in my bitter experiences. Hermits may find seclusion in crowds, thought I. No one could find me at my new address, and it was my intention to seek no new friends, and to avoid every one I knew. I did not want to answer questions about Jim, and I did not want to hear anything more of him. I had read all the published accounts of the fire and was glad to note that the secret had not been revealed. As for Miss Tescheron, she had probably lost faith in him and suspected me by this time. As I could not explain to her my change of heart toward Jim without implicating myself, I proposed to wash my hands of the whole affair and go it alone in future—for a time at any rate. Should I not write to her and thank her for sending flowers to me when I was ill? Was it not the grateful thing to do? I had written Hygeia and no reply came. I had quite a bunch of Jim's letters on hand also to demonstrate my powers as a letter-writer. Writing, I concluded, was not fortunate for me. It would be better to have Miss Tescheron regard me as an ungrateful wretch, a fit associate of the scoundrel who had toyed with her affections.

Robinson Crusoe started his island home with about as many clothes as I had when I left the hospital. It was fortunate that the city was such a kind employer; that my pay went on while I was ill, and that my connection with the Health Department secured the best hospital service at a nominal charge. I ordered a new trunk and a new outfit of clothing the day after my arrival, and when the clothes came I proceeded to try them on, but there was no fun in it without Jim to guy me. I fought hard to keep that fellow out of my mind, but he was with me day and night. I could not get away from him and my sorrow. Was it his ghost hovering near, longing to return to its earthly habitation, and propose a housekeeping merger with me? My fried onions might have penetrated the other world and recalled him with such longings, for there are worse places than home at dinner-time.

Mrs. Dewey entered one day and found me with my feet on the window-trim and the rest of me crouched in the most substantial rocker. I was smoking and cogitating. It was so quiet and I was so far out of sight that she did not know I was there until she started to dust the chair. The smoke had not suggested my presence, for old Dewey was always doing that—he had learned how when

young, and so it was no trouble.

"Oh, excuse me, I didn't know you were in the room. You're always so quiet," she said.

"Sorrow makes a man quiet."

"Sorrow? Yes, you're right; but what have you—"

"Yes, I have much," I answered. "I know your tragedy, but you can't guess mine. You have my sympathy, and if I could help you I would; but you can't help me."

"Some woman, Mr. Hopkins—I did not think you were married. You must be—"

"No," said I, and I spoke slowly, with some choking. "I have been wronged by a man, a friend in whom I had faith; with whom I lived for ten years. We were closer than brothers. He deserted me in my hour of need—but go on with your dusting; what matters it? I tell you so that you may understand why I feel so badly. Heaviness grows upon me, so that I doubt if I shall ever see the bright side of things again."

Mrs. Dewey wiped away the tears from her careworn face.

"Ten weeks ago," I continued, "we parted, and he has fled, branded as a criminal in my eyes, by evidence which no one can doubt. I am alone, despondent, and insanity or hard work must be my escape. As I cannot get my mind on my business, I fear the worst. The blow is more than I can bear."

"Pshaw! You're only a young man. You don't know what sorrow is. When you spoke so sad, you brought a tear to my eye, but I never let the tears get the best of me. I think you are weak in body yet. You need better food. You don't eat right. You ought to go out to some good restaurant and get three square meals a day. You have the money to pay for them, and you ought to do it."

"Eat! Don't speak of eating. My appetite is all gone. Some day I may get over this dismal feeling and take your kind advice, but not now."

"Men have no grit. It takes a woman, I'm thinking, to carry a heart-load. If it was a woman you were worrying about, I'd coddle you a little; but I never knew a man who ran away from his friends who was worth a tear. You'll soon see the folly of it."

"I don't blame you for hating all men," said I, knowingly. "You judge the sex by

the specimen you have at home. All women do the same at your age."

"You're crazy, now, Mr. Hopkins," blurted the woman, her anger quickly rising. "Two days in my house and you undertake to advise me against my husband with whom I have lived in peace for twenty-five years. Have I given you license to interfere in my affairs? You astonish me with your impertinence! You amaze me! No man has ever dared to offer me such an insult! I will have you understand, sir, that Mr. Dewey is my husband, and I will allow no one to slightingly refer to him in my presence." She was heaving and grasping the broom pretty firmly. I crawled into a farther chair.

"Why, madam, I overheard you in the hall this morning berating him as the laziest vagabond that ever breathed, and you prayed—"

"Never mind. He's my husband. When I want some one to interfere, I'll go to a lawyer, who's in that business. I won't peddle my troubles to strangers. If you haven't any more sense than to interfere in our affairs, you must be crazy now, and if I were you I wouldn't worry about getting crazy."

Mrs. Dewey passed out and slammed the door.

I wanted to go right down and jump off the dock when this counter-irritant blistered me and her tonic bitters were poured into my lethargic circulation. Stimulation brought a reaction of brighter views, however. Mrs. Dewey's old-fashioned drubbing held the mirror so that I could behold a life-sized burro every time I looked into it. There never can be any use for a middleman, before or after the marriage contract, thought I. Shame took the place of conceit; my pride was humbled and fear was swept away. I mended with amazing rapidity under the earnest eloquence of that short sermon, delivered by a woman with a broom.

CHAPTER XVIII

Four of the happiest weeks of their lives, Gabrielle and Jim spent with the Gibsons in their Produce Exchange tower, far out of the way of enemies, if any there might be in pursuit. Gabrielle had confided in Mrs. Gibson, and was urged by her to bring Jim there to convalesce, as the doctor said he ought not to walk much for two or three months. The lovers were delighted to transfer their trysting place to those romantic quarters—a castle tower in the heart of New York, surrounded by a harbor moat, and an elevator which served well the purpose of a bridge leading to the portcullis of the upper floors. Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, and their daughter, the winsome Nellie, were delighted to have them as visitors, and entered into their defense against the cruel father and his co-conspirators, the faithless chum and the unfeeling world in general, with hearty warmth, cheering Gabrielle and filling the soul of Jim with heavenly contentment. There he had met his darling and the spot would be sacred to him always; it was doubly blessed when her sweet voice sounded near him within its walls, and her tender glances drew fond response from his eyes. On the floors below they sold grain and bulletined the price of tallow at "five and one-half cents for city"; but in the far-away tower the din of the wheat pit was not heard. From the round windows the ships of commerce appeared to ride the tide care-free as the darting gulls that dived for their prey or swung on resting wings in broad circles from shore to shore. Dreams fairer than those lovers pictured in quiet ecstasy have never been outlined by brush or melodious line. Just a little cube of heaven had been caught from the realms of bliss, and they dwelt together there for four weeks.

Now, four weeks in heaven is a very brief period. Whole eternities pass there in what seems to be an interval too brief to record on Cupid's chronometer. Joy in my lady's tower, traveling with swift, winged feet, marks not the hour like Terror in the castle dungeon, where the outcast prisoner lies upon the damp stones writhing in feverish despair. While they were up in heaven together, I was down in—the hospital or at Mrs. Dewey's. Mr. and Mrs. Tescheron were at home in Ninety-sixth Street. The bill of folly had been paid and Mr. Tescheron hoped the episode had closed, although Gabrielle's manner continued to indicate that she had not suffered so deeply as the strength of her attachment to the outlaw had led him to believe she would. What was the secret? He did not ask her, for having

paid nearly $5,000 (more, but he didn't know it), working along his own lines, he did not care to admit that his daughter had outgeneraled him. A premonition that she had done so prepared him in moments of reflection to hear the truth. He fought against the concept every time it flashed before him, but with weakening strength, as the outclassed fighter staggers groggily to the ropes. What match was he, what adversary I, for Cupid, lacking the inspiration the god gave to his faithful adherents? If you ask me why I am so familiar with Mr. Tescheron's fears and numerous other matters recorded here, I make reply that I have investigated all the sources of information in any way connected with these events, and have drawn out the persons who were involved in Hosley's career by many conversations. If this statement does not satisfy, then I have one that will. I quote that great authority, William Makepeace Thackeray, who tells us in Vanity Fair that a novelist is supposed to know everything, and am I not treating the subject as a novelist, using for the most part fictitious names and places to shield from public ridicule the good people whose judgment may seem weak, and actions exaggerated, in the temperature of cold type scanned by prudent, judicial-minded readers? Icebergs will boil under certain conditions. Human beings, I find, have their solid, liquid and gaseous states. Be not surprised, therefore, if Tescheron, frigid when surrounded by his cracked ice and cold-storage products at the fish market, becomes pliable or volatile material in Hoboken under the heat of fear and temper, and, before cooling, is wrought into strange shapes by the artisan, Smith. Poor Tescheron! Innocently I made him pay a pretty penny! But he needed a good hammering.

"Gabrielle, are you really to be married against your father's wishes, my dear?" asked Mrs. Gibson, sadly, drawing Gabrielle to her. "Could we not win him over to our view of Jim? Should we not try?"

Mrs. Gibson, Gabrielle, Nellie and Jim were in the large tower sitting-room at the time of this questioning. "No, Mrs. Gibson"; and Gabrielle was most serious as she spoke. "My father will in time come to admire Jim as you do; I know father so well. Mother and I understand him. He jumps at conclusions regarding people for whom he has a dislike, and time and again has acknowledged to me how he regretted his haste. In good time father will ask my forgiveness. Not before the wedding, though, I fear; but I hope on. It is my intention to proceed, with mother's approval."

"Almost an elopement," laughed Nellie, ready for a wedding as eagerly as an opposed bride.

"Not quite, though, for mother will be there," smiled Gabrielle.

"I'll be there without these crutches," said Jim, dropping his supports to the floor, while he made an effort to stump across the room and demonstrate that he could creep to the tune of a wedding march.

"You'll do, Jim," said Nellie, as she took him by the arm to support him, and aired the Lohengrin selection. "You are just speedy enough to-day. In three weeks you will be able to run."

"Only three weeks off!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson. "How the time passes! We must hurry. Nellie, go at once to the dressmaker's and get her positive assurance that our gowns will be ready. And you, too, have so much to do, Gabrielle."

"The more time the more there is to do always," said Gabrielle. "A bride is never quite ready, but in three weeks I am sure I shall be, if I am not disappointed by all the people I have engaged to help me. But let us think no more of our worries. You have not told me what impression those two gowns made that came last night. Didn't you see them? Let me show them to you."

Gabrielle brought out the gowns, and the critics went into tucks, trimmings, opalescent spangles, Malines lace, China-ribbed embroidery and many other bewildering technicalities. One of the dresses was all white, fashioned out of net, and was ribbon-sashed, girdled, looped, shirred, tucked, tuck-shirred, shirr-tucked, fulled, grilled, padded, scrolled, rolled, appliquéd, tasseled, rosetted, knotted, banded, edged, picot-edged, ruffled, plaited, bowed, buckled, buckle-bowed, yoked and choked with ribbon. It was a pretty gown, and a hat and muff built on the same style went with it. The hat was to be held in place by long streamer ribbons—I think eighteen inches wide—tied in a bow to be knotted over the left ear, and ramify from the chin-dimple to the crest of the hair-wave. Eiderdown, lightly packed in a hollow cylinder about the size of a pint preserving jar, covered with ten-inch frills of chiffon, pieced out with ribbon, wadded negligé, were points that made the muff more dainty than warm. The combination was designed to be worn without the muff on an ocean boardwalk about sunset, when the wind dies down. Cosy comfort was to be supplied by the muff on a windy day, for only a real mermaid could wear a plain fish net in all kinds of weather.

"It's a most stunning affair!" exclaimed Nellie, admiring with close scrutiny all the fine points in the shirring, hemstitching and accordeon plaiting.

"Very airy, but pretty," was Mrs. Gibson's view. "What is it to be worn over? Oh, I see; this beautiful soft white taffeta. Well, Gabrielle, you will look a bride with that gown, I am sure."

"That is one of the fine things I have gained by delay. If we had been married five weeks ago, I would not have thought of this gem." And the girls laughed, while Jim looked on in surprised delight. The details of dressmaking he was not competent to discuss.

"Why does it take so many clothes to get married?" asked Jim, evidently not understanding that every event in a woman's life is a peg for more clothes.

"What a strange question! How foolish, Jim!" exclaimed the women.

"Don't you know that a wedding is a ceremonial affair, where all the grand formalities must be observed?" asked Nellie. "You wouldn't have us scuffle through it in old shoes and walking skirts, would you?"

"Jim's notion of getting married," said Gabrielle, "is extremely primitive. For my part, I like nice things. I'm so sorry they do not appeal to Jim." Gabrielle feigned disappointment.

"I should say they did appeal to me," Jim hastily assured the critics. "They are so surprising!"

"Surprising! How so?" asked Nellie.

"Like a sunrise, I suppose," answered Jim. "I've never seen many, but those who have rave over them. What a pity the styles change so often! Next year the net in that dress will all have to be taken off and put in place of the bead trimming on the lamp shades; the bead trimming must then be sent to Staten Island and dyed green to make it proper for hat ornamentation, a necklace or—"

"Amber is the proper color for a necklace," laughed Mrs. Gibson. "Nellie cut her teeth on amber beads."

Then they all laughed, and Jim saw that it was good policy to admire without attempting to suggest reforms.

"And this silk gauze affair, what is this?" asked Nellie. "My! it is so light you could mail it for a cent."

"That is just a cobweb I fancied," said Gabrielle, proudly, as she gently shook

out the folds of a light creation. "How beautifully it fits and yet it affords such freedom!"

"It's an Empire modification," remarked Nellie, who discerned the basic neck-waisted feature of the cobweb's architecture. "Lovely short sleeves—"

"Bad for mosquitoes," said Jim.

"Hush!" admonished Gabrielle. "We can't restrict art to such limitations."

"If it really is a cobweb, the mosquitoes won't go near it," said Jim. "Perhaps the designer had that in mind when he cut down the sleeves."

"What a heavy lace insertion—Valenciennes, a good part of it, isn't it, Gabrielle?" asked Mrs. Gibson. "Why, it's simply beyond words, I think."

"Three deep embroidered flounces, and such frills and frills of lace! My! It's grand!" So Nellie believed and declared.

Jim's imagination was not fired. "I hope I never step on it," he said.

"Don't you dare!" commanded Nellie. "This cobweb is meant to catch the eye only—not a whole man."

While Jim was laughing and attempting to thrust his opinions still farther upon the critics, they restored the art treasures to the boxes and placed them in the store-room, where the bride's purchases were gathering day by day as they arrived from the shopping district. Fortunately, the tower was larger than it appears from Broadway, or it would not have held all the packages and allowed the Gibsons room to live.

Nellie had forgotten the dressmaker, but now started, and Mrs. Gibson resumed her household duties in another room.

"Gabrielle, you are making altogether too much preparation," said Jim. "You have undertaken too much. With your regular duties I can see that it is wearing on you. Could you not be satisfied with less shopping and less dressmaking?"

"No, Jim, it is not this preparation that burdens me," she replied, seating herself at the side of her lame hero.

"Tell me what it is, then—is it that miserable fancied conspiracy against me? I thought your father had forgotten that now."

"He believes that you are gone, and yet I can see that he knows what I am about to do; at least I fear so. Mother may have told him, for I have confided in her everything but telling her where you are. Naturally, Jim, I feel sad not to have my father's support in this matter. But we shall have his good-will later on, I am sure. In the meantime I am made unhappy by his present attitude—how can I help it? I know he is wrong—"

"Gabrielle, you have firmly refused to tell me just what it is your father has against me. Time and again I have asked, but I cannot learn, and of course I cannot imagine what his flight to Hoboken was for. He charges me with some crime—but in heaven's name, what crime? Come, Gabrielle, do tell me now, won't you?"

"Jim, have I not always told you in reply to your questioning that the charges made against you by my poor, misguided father and Mr. Hopkins are too absurd to repeat? If I should tell you now, it would only prove my father to be a hot-headed man, one who is so easily misled by those who arouse his fears. Let it all rest with my statement that his position is taken because of those absurd conclusions. Then it will not be necessary for me to make my dear father appear ridiculous."

"I shan't think that," said Jim, softly. It appeared that he could say or do nothing to extricate himself from the work of the plotters, whose shadows disappeared as he drew nigh. "But if you would only give me, the accused, a chance to make a defense, I could incidentally prove Hopkins innocent and have him at our wedding. That I should like to do. It pains me more than I can tell to ignore that poor chap. I often wonder where he is, and think myself a coward and an inhuman scoundrel not to make an effort to find him."

"Why do you bother about him, Jim? Didn't the nurse hurry us from the hospital that day because she said Mr. Hopkins had told her you were a rogue? Don't you see that both father and he have been impressed by the story of those villainous detectives, who would do anything for money?"

"Well, Gabrielle, tell me what those detectives have told your father about me. He has told you, has he not? Have these charges raised no suspicion in your mind against me? Are you not anxious to question me? How proud, then, I am to have won the heart of such a grand little woman!"

Before he could wait for replies to his questions the burly invalid clutched his chair, rose to his feet and stretching out his arms gathered up his treasure of

loyalty and fondly caressed her. "How fortunate for me," he continued, "that your heart has not been poisoned against me! How priceless this love of yours! for without it I should not be saved. Let the whole world forsake me, and you remain true, what care I? Gabrielle, you have guarded me like an angel."

Jim could say no more. He choked and could not go on. Was sincerity to be doubted when so emphasized? Could there be aught of guile in that embrace?

"Jim, I have never doubted you—I never could doubt you, for do I not know your heart as you know mine?" assured Gabrielle, meeting his frank eyes steadily with hers. "You are my plain hero, untrumpeted, except by all your friends who have known you here for years. Never ask me again of the base charges father has listened to. I trust my love, which I see answered in those boyish eyes—in every kind word and act. Jim, I love you and we shall be married; we shall plan our own life in the light of this love, and doing that we have naught to fear. We shall welcome true friends, who will be loyal to us because we are loyal to our own ideals, and so father shall be won to us, and Mr. Hopkins may turn toward us again. Our troubles are largely our fears, Mr. MacDonald says, and I believe him. How foolish to fear when we may enjoy repose through faith and love!"

"Gabrielle, my darling, you will never again be questioned by me. So long as you have faith, let the rest of the world go hang! Poor Ben Hopkins, I would like to see him, though."

I give no notice here as to when the embrace released. It is quite possible that it continued until late in the afternoon, with hand-holding modifications, when Nellie returned and sang loudly in another room for warning and company. The fleeting hours that the happy pair looked out from one of those magic windows are not to be recorded in detail. A lover's log-book is unknown. The fears and conspiracies that might have harassed them found no leverage of doubt to pry an entrance into Gabrielle's heart. Every wave of the higher air wafted from Trinity's steeple, brought them the joy of marriage bells. Even without a lame leg, Jim would never have thought of running away from that place.

The wedding was to take place in the afternoon of Wednesday, only three weeks off. Mr. Tescheron was to be notified in due time that it would be held at the Episcopal church to which the family belonged. That part of the ceremony calling for the giving away of the bride would be omitted. Only a few relatives and dear friends would be present, and they would understand Gabrielle's

purpose to marry the man of her choice. The affair would be clouded with sadness, they all believed (except Jim); but Gabrielle was determined not to hide the opposition of her father. She was determined to have her wedding about as she had planned from childhood in the little church she loved, and up to the very minute of the fixed hour she would hope and pray to have her father there full of repentance and forgiveness. Mr. Tescheron was to be told by her one week prior to the wedding. Thus he was to be given one week alone with his conscience to settle the question whether he should accept an invitation to his daughter's wedding. More than a week's notice, Gabrielle believed, would inflict unnecessary cruelty and less than a week grant hardly enough time for him to retrace his steps.

Mrs. Tescheron, poor soul, spent many hours in tears, her faith and pride in her daughter sustaining her through the hours of preparation. The day of the wedding she dreaded, and she doubted if she would bear up when the climax of the strain came. Firmness prompted by kindness, the wife and mother understood to be necessary in dealing with the irascible head of the family, and she therefore quietly acquiesced in this policy when administered by their only child. She had never been able to successfully make her will dominant in the household on that principle, perhaps because she had begun by surrendering to him the first few times he was mastered by his temper in the early days of married life, like most wives do surrender. The baby is generally much better brought up in the family than the father. My observation as a bachelor teaches me that every wife should take a husband in hand like a child—coddle him, keep him in after dark, put him to bed very early full of hot gruel when he sneezes or falls asleep after dinner; if he complains of a draught give him a steaming foot-bath and one or two mustard plasters, those gentle love-taps of family life, that lingeringly long tell of devotion; and when he has any inclination to do anything except smile, pounce upon him and trundle him into some sort of medicated misery, tenderly but firmly.

I could name a dozen good husbands, men of eagle eye in the market place, who stand pat in good nature at home, because their wives make little or no discrimination between the babies and their papa. Mrs. Tescheron was fortunate in her daughter, however, and in later years was relieved as the child grew to lead them. The mother determined with as much strength of purpose as she could summon, to rely upon Gabrielle to find the way out in this emergency, as the daughter had in all others.

CHAPTER XIX

The day Mr. Tescheron was to receive notification of the wedding in his immediate family came so quickly the announcement could not be made in the morning. Gabrielle needed the day to prepare, for while she was brave, the meeting with her father must bring tears of disappointment. Perhaps the glowering skies made postponement easy. Better the night for sorrow, thought she, and then hurried down-town, her hands full of small packages containing bits of finery not available to enter into the ornamentation of the dressmaker's conceptions in silk and lace. These must be exchanged for other shades, and the light of a cloudy day was not suitable for matching colors; her feminine mind turned to the more important details of preparation.

As she entered the office her thoughts were wholly away from the law of her country and its business operations. The gowns that were to be fitted and the untrimmed hats loomed larger than the intricate questions in various states of litigation that came under her supervision. In a week she was to pass from this realm of worldly detail, and would assume the larger rôle of wife, better equipped by freedom and the good uses she had made of its opportunities. Still the hats and gowns must not be ignored by any high-flown philosophy. She was about to hitch her wagon to a star, to be a whole woman, the head of a home and all that; but what would we think even of the president of Sorosis if she appeared in last year's sleeves?

Among her letters that morning, Gabrielle found one from Hygeia, and regretted that she must place it with her packages as soon as she glanced at the name, for there was no time to read it then; perhaps in a car she would find the time. Letters written at leisure in the country and read in the crowded city cars lose their native sweetness. Such as I have ever received from there must be opened tenderly and read slowly far from the throng.

By one o'clock the mills of Justice ceased to claim the attention of Gabrielle. Two hours were spent in the stores, every minute consumed in the closest study of fabrics, miles of floor-walking and volumes of questioning—all composing the art and science of shopping, the one sphere in which woman can carry the weight of a fur cloak and do a hundred-yard dash or a mile run to the most distant department, while her man companion takes his coat off and worms his

way twenty feet to the necktie counter, which is always found opposite the main entrance. Ten feet farther in, it would fail. Gabrielle shopped with system, to save time, and then used the time she saved to shop some more.

Not long after three o'clock on that memorable Wednesday, Mrs. Gibson, Nellie and Gabrielle gathered around the enthroned Jim in his castle retreat to talk it all over again for the thousandth time.

"The wedding ring fitted the first time we tried it, and so do all my clothes, ties, gloves and hats," said Jim, with a smile intended to aggravate argument. "It is no trouble at all for me to get married."

"You're not original, though," laughed Nellie. "Originality, you know, takes time, thought and effort. Gabrielle will outshine you."

"Of course, she will," said Jim—"if there is anything left of the poor girl to wear these things."

"Oh, don't fear that, Jim," Gabrielle advised. "This is great fun."

"The stores always seem to be filled with women," remarked Jim. "Are they all about to get married, I wonder?"

"Those who go the earliest and stay the longest are women who are getting ready for the fourth trip," said Mr. Gibson, the jolly father, whose grim face belied his heart. He had entered in time to catch Jim's query. "It's a case of accelerated motion," he added.

The girls laughed and chided him for his wantonly cruel words. They chatted along merrily for an hour, first about this trifle and then that, completely under the influence of the glorious event, without one thought being given to the cloud, as big as a postman's hand, among Gabrielle's packages, for they did not see it there.

The happy prospective bridegroom, who had escaped the dire fate the letters threatened to throw across his path by dodging beneath the quilts at the hospital, was now full of the heroism that thrives in peace. The calamity which seemed prepared to fall upon him in the hour of his greatest happiness, Fate had tossed aside, and his star combination proved to be intact and in good working order. Trouble had gathered near in murky concentration for a few minutes that anxious day, but when Hygeia passed out of the door of his room to answer my bell, the knight stood forth with visor up, resumed his normal color, and gradually his

power of speech. Those old breadcrumbs cast upon the waters of love years before had washed ashore at a most untimely moment, thought he; but the audience had not reached the end to ponder on the writer's name. A miss was as good as a mile in slipping between the cup and the lip.

But the course of true love is a rugged path to the close of the ceremony; beyond, it is still more rugged, and the surrounding country, they say, is often wild and desolate, and quite unlike the park gardening and its beckoning vistas to be seen along Lovers' Lane before the turn in the road at the altar.

A cloud no larger than the tiny mist from the whistle of one of those tooting tugs familiar in the harbor scene was gathering while the sun shone so brightly in the tower apartment. An electric shock will gather and burst a cloud large enough to bring midnight and deluge at noonday. Mr. Gibson understood the importance of lightning arresters, but was not prepared to apply them in his home. The women could do nothing; and, of course, I, the only person in the world who might have transformed the current to a harmless voltage, had been shunned as an enemy.

Then came the lull before the hurricane—the soft whispering of the wind in the tree-tops. Jim alone could see the havoc it raised along the mountain ridge, foretelling by a few minutes the arrival of the twisting and wrenching blast.

"Oh, Nellie, you remember my telling about the gushy love-letters the nurse read to us at the hospital, for our entertainment. Well, here, please take this; she has sent another, which I see by a glance is quite as good as the rest. Would you mind reading it aloud? and then I ask you all to excuse me while I snatch a moment to read her long letter."

In this way, Gabrielle believed she would solve the problem of time, that had been so limited that busy day.

"Why, certainly; let us have the pleasure, and go ahead with your reading." Nellie was always ready to entertain the company.

But Gabrielle did not advance more than a few lines with Hygeia's accompanying letter. The Gibson family were so delighted with Nellie's reading of my celebrated collaboration with Lord Byron, constructed by the drip of my pen welding some of the choicest gems of the inspired poet to bring together the hearts of Jim and that fair Margaret, it was quite out of the question for Gabrielle to withdraw from the fun. She became as attentive as the other auditors and added her applause to sustain the clever elocutionist. Comment flowed freely

from all except Jim at nearly every interruption.

"Father, this is supposed to be the proper way to make love," said Nellie, and she began to read:

"'My Darling Margaret:

"'Your letter of this morning bids me with many playful thrusts to be more hopeful during your absence, which you say will be brief in one paragraph and in another that it will be "about three months." How is it possible for me to reconcile these statements? Three months may be an eternity. The criminal bound and held beneath the spigot, from which water, drop by drop, pounds with thundering impact upon his hot head, and the idlers in sylvan dells, view time differently. Your advice, though, shall be taken and followed with such will as I am able to command. Weakness, backsliding from my purpose to be as cheerful as you wish, you must forgive. If you would have me display an even interest in life, undisturbed by the moaning which creeps into these letters, you know the sure, swift course to take—the fastest express train to New York, and a telegram summoning me to the depot—that is all.

"'For the past two nights my sleep has been blessed with visions more lovely and hope inspiring. Fear has been driven away, to give place to fairer thoughts of you. Not to dream of you crowded the hours of absence too heavily upon me. Henceforth I am determined that you shall be with me in my thoughts, tenderly ministering to me with those eyes whose soft light I would have my steady beacons. Darling Margaret, their flickering, or the fear that they will flicker, sets me almost crazy.

"'Thy form appears through night, through day:
Awake, with it my fancy teems;
In sleep, it smiles in fleeting dreams—
The vision charms the hours away,
And bids me curse Aurora's ray,
For breaking slumbers of delight,
Which make me wish for endless night;
Since, oh! whate'er my future fate,
Shall joy or woe my steps await,
Tempted by love, by storms beset,
Thine image I can ne'er forget.'"

"He pursued her hard," interrupted Mr. Gibson. "I can remember when I used to feel that way about girls, but I couldn't put it on paper."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson. "What you put on paper would never compromise you. The name of the man who wrote the letter, you understand, father, is not known, and neither do we know the woman. Still, I hardly think it can be one of yours, so I shan't worry. Go on, Nellie."

Nellie had observed as she paused in her reading and glanced upward, that Jim seemed much disturbed. He was very red and his eyes seemed to be afire. But Gabrielle did not give any of her attention to Jim, and Nellie was too busy with her task of deciphering my wretched manuscript to interject a gay remark at Jim's expense. Jim moistened his lips, wiped his beading brow, and nerved himself for the worst. There were now no quilts for him to dodge under, and no acute pain to serve as a standing account against which he might charge these evidences of the anguish he could not conceal.

Nellie continued, and Gabrielle forgot all about Hygeia's letter. This I think flattering to my style.

"Listen!" commanded Nellie, and again she read:

> "'Yes, my darling, dreaming always of you, night and day, surely, surely, hope should inspire me. This is the place and now the time to wander in love's enchanted realm. I shall not put off till your home-coming the joys I would experience. Let my "heart be a spirit," and then I may be wafted to your side this minute and sit beside you from early morn till twilight and the even-song of birds softly and sweetly hint the flight of time. Yes—
>
> "'He who hath loved not, here would learn that love,
> And make his heart a spirit; he who knows
> That tender mystery, will love the more:
> For this is Love's recess, where vain men's woes,
> And the world's waste, have driven him far from those—
> For 'tis his nature to advance or die;
> He stands not still, but or decays, or grows
> Into a boundless blessing, which may vie
> With the immortal lights in its eternity!'
>
> "'And now, my darling, I must not forget to remind you that you have quite

> overlooked my request for a lock of your golden hair. You acknowledged the receipt of mine, and asked why I did not tie it in a pretty ribbon instead of a piece of cotton thread.'"

"There is the lock of hair again!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "I saw it in the other letter when Jim was at the hospital. It was a trifle lighter than his. The poor girl—I suppose she thought it more precious than strands of pure gold."

"Hair has a lot to do with love, Gabrielle," whispered Mr. Gibson. "Think what an uphill job it would have been for Jim with a bald head."

"Never could have done it," said Jim, huskily, determined to break in somewhere on a long chance that the letter would blow out to sea or the Produce Exchange tower topple over.

> "'Haste, my sweetheart,'" continued Nellie, "'is my excuse—haste which wholly disregards the trifling detail; but I see my error now and enclose a yard of blue ribbon to be converted by your deft hands into a tight bow-knot where the unpoetic cotton now binds the clipped token of my love. I pray there may be enough left to gather a generous lock of the golden tresses for which I yearn. You will not withhold them, will you, Margaret? What sweet thoughts proceed from memory's strongholds:

"'Can I forget—canst thou forget,
When playing with thy golden hair,
How quickly thy fluttering heart did move?
Oh, by my soul, I see thee yet,
With eyes so languid, breast so fair,
And lips, though silent, breathing love.

"'When thus reclining on my breast,
Those eyes threw back a glance so sweet,
As half reproached, yet raised desire,
And still we near and nearer prest,
And still our glowing lips would meet,
As if in kisses to expire.

"'And then those pensive eyes would close,
And bid their lids each other seek,
Veiling the azure orbs below,

While their long lashes' darken'd gloss
Seemed stealing o'er thy brilliant cheek,
Like raven's plumage smoothed on snow.'

"'While it may be true that absence makes the heart grow fonder, there are limitations, believe me, to man's endurance. Three months will find me worn to a scant shadow, a mere tissue, so sharp that the dial at noonday cannot point with finer finger the passage of the sun under the meridian wire. Only the first month is now waning, and I dare not look a weighing machine in the face, for fear I might fall in the slot. I am not facetious, believe me, Margaret.

"'Fear underlies my woe. Annoying images, at first vague, gather strength of outline and haunt me like evil prophecies. Of course, there is naught but fear to account for these distressing delusions, but is it not as real when it wounds as the dagger's point? How shall we banish the terrors that arise in lonely hours? In writing to you these thoughts as they flow from the deep reservoirs of my soul, through the conduit of pen, in inky tracings on this fair page, my sweetest hours are spent. Here is an outlet that reduces in some measure the roaring flood-waters, as strength abides to perform the necessary physical evolutions till repose comes o'er me; then I slip into the Land of Nod through a lane of sweet magnolias, and approach the rose-bedecked gates garlanded as if for the entry of a prince and his bride. You are with me then, and as the cheering populace greets us, a herald stands forth and addresses you thus:

"'She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes,
Thus mellowed to the tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

"'And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.'"

"My! but he puts it on thick," gasped Nellie, pausing for breath.

"Oh, pshaw!" said her father; "impossible to mix it too thick."

"What would he have done without Lord Byron?" asked Mrs. Gibson, who gave me scant credit, apparently.

"Well, Byron wouldn't mind," said Gabrielle, smiling. "He would be glad to help the cause along. The lover is strengthening his persuasion with good poetry."

Nellie read more rapidly now, for she had learned many of my pen oddities:

> "'What a worldly fellow I was till your eyes met mine and brought me far, far up from the depths to the heights of contemplation. My philosophy was naught. I saw not the beauty of life, for I was lost in a wilderness of its petty distractions. Remembering our happy days together, why should their inspiration not sustain me now? At the time of parting—
>
> "'I saw thee weep—the big bright tear
> Came o'er that eye of blue,
> And then methought it did appear
> A violet dropping dew;
> I saw thee smile—the sapphire blaze
> Beside thee ceased to shine;
> It could not match the living rays
> That filled that glance of thine.'
>
> "'The feeling so tenderly expressed in that tear preceding the smile holds me in thrall when I bid fear depart and wake no more the ogres of its dread. Let me rather fondle that cherished smile,
>
> "'As clouds from yonder sun receive
> A deep and mellow dye,
> Which scarce the shade of coming eve
> Can banish from the sky;
> Those smiles, into the moodiest mind,
> Their own pure joys impart;
> Their sunshine leaves a glow behind
> That lightens o'er the heart.'"

Would luck ever come? Would it ever come? What would be the outcome? Jim

tried to plan for the approaching emergency, but the best he could do was to struggle to conceal the acute case of chills and fever then torturing his weak body and adding confusion to his dazed mind. The reader proceeded:

"'All the deep feelings of the lover have been experienced by the poets, and to them we must turn to find words attuned to the harmonies surging within, clamoring for expression, where passion has just been born. These gifted singers have searched the human heart as only genius can and have given their songs as a universal heritage to all who feel the melting murmurs. If there is aught of inspiration in their words, it belongs to me as the harper's music belonged to Byron when he craved it:

"'My soul is dark—oh! quickly string
The harp I yet can brook to hear;
And let thy gentle fingers fling
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.
If in this heart a hope be dear,
That sound shall charm it forth again;
If in those eyes there lurk a tear,
'Twill flow and cease to burn my brain.'

"'And how natural, Margaret, it is for the man steeped in love as I am to search out consolation amid the sweet concord of poetry. And so seeking the thought attuned to mine, I also say:

"'But let the strain be wild and deep,
Nor let the notes of joy be first;
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
Or else this heavy heart will burst;
For it hath been by sorrow nursed,
And ached in sleepless silence long;
And now 'tis doomed to know the worst
And break at once—or yield to song.'

"'My writing is usually over at midnight, and when I have returned from the corner, where I post the letter, I sit me down in the darkness to ponder on what I have composed. How dull it seems to me then; how poorly expressed these sentiments too deep for words of mine, and not always within range of such poetry as I can find! Moods are so fleeting, too; some tender

thought passes over me and for a moment I am lost in the rare atmosphere of mountain-tops to which it summons me. When I come to tell of this magic wrought by your innocent witchery, I find it quite impossible to explain, as the essence of my heavenly flight is all so poetic and strange a mere mortal like myself cannot interpret the feeling. It surely cannot be that all men who love are so entranced. It must be that within the circle of your enchanting power a superior charm prevails:

"'There be none of Beauty's daughters
With a magic like thee;
And like music on the waters,
Is thy sweet voice to me;
When, as if its sound were causing
The charmed ocean's pausing,
The waves lie still and gleaming,
And the lull'd winds seem dreaming.

"'The moon is your partner in this mysterious midnight revel, Margaret:

"'And the midnight moon is weaving
Her bright chain o'er the deep,
Whose breast is gently heaving,
As an infant's asleep;
So the spirit bows before thee,
To listen and adore thee,
With a full but soft emotion,
Like the swell of Summer's ocean.'

"'How wise, after all, your advice to be hopeful! The sweetest moments of our lives are passing now while we are wrapped in our devotion to each other. All sounds are sweet—

""'Tis sweet to hear
At midnight on the blue moonlit deep,
The song and oar of Adria's gondolier,
By distance mellowed o'er the water's sweep.
'Tis sweet to see the evening star appear;
'Tis sweet to listen to the night winds creep
From leaf to leaf; 'tis sweet to view on high

The rainbow, based on ocean, span the sky.'"

Gabrielle now took up Hygeia's letter again. The rainbow of hope based on ocean seemed to Jim to be disappearing beneath its watery foundation. If Obreeon had appeared and offered to remove those letters at that point, he might have doubled the price, and Jim would have paid it gladly.

But the reader did not stop.

"'Of course, I am interested,'" read Nellie, "'in your daily doings in the country, so do not chide me for not asking more questions. I should like to know the number of cows your Uncle Reuben keeps, and if the cheese factory is running on full time. These items savor of rural thrift, and as the farmer is the backbone of the country, I would not eliminate him—scratch him as it were—from our worldly calculations. The cows, the cheese factory and Uncle Reuben, however, stand in the dim background fading into the hazy purple of the tree-lined brook, as I think of you, my May Queen, laughing, in the center of the picture. When I correspond with Uncle Reuben it will be by telegram at my end of the line.

"'Before I close to-night I must again assure you that a happier view of the outlook for the coming two months will be taken. Your happiness must be mine:

"'Well! thou art happy, and I feel
That I should thus be happy, too;
For still my heart regards thy weal
Warmly—'"

"Stop, Nellie! James Hosley, you wrote that letter! Do you deny it?"

Gabrielle Tescheron crumpled Hygeia's note in her clenched hand as she said that, and arose, fastening her steady eyes on the crouching form of the cripple, who appeared to cringe under the blast of the storm. He had tried to be prepared, but he failed utterly when he attempted to speak. He was seen to raise his hand and elevate his eyebrows, but now words were impossible; a low murmur and heavy breathing, an effort to stand and a surrender in despair to the hopelessness of his fate, were all that marked Jim Hosley's resistance to this accusation.

"You wrote this letter—you wrote the others—do you deny it?"

This came quickly after the first question from her lips; her manner completely changed, betraying the nervous strain under which she suppressed her emotions, as she bravely faced the man for whom the world had seemed a small sacrifice. Jealousy might have waged its battle in privacy; but the revelation of a detestable crime so convincingly corroborated by this letter from the nurse, whose pricking conscience had at last reported my version of Hosley with her view of the ownership and purpose of the damaging poetic documents, outlined to Gabrielle's quick intelligence the method of a deep, patiently pursued course of crime. Her father's claims, to which her deaf ears had been turned in the ardor of youth, came now with terrible force to win instant conviction. She would not falter in the crisis. The man should be given a hearing—brief, to be sure—but he should have it.

"Speak!" The command brought the Gibsons to their feet, but Jim was paralyzed and dumb. After a long pause, he took all the responsibility for my folly and pleaded:

"I wrote it, Gabrielle—and forgive me."

"Then you must leave this house at once. You go your way and I shall see you no more. I know it all now. This letter from the nurse—Mr. Hopkins—my father—they were right. I have been blind. You have deceived me, just as you deceived this poor woman, whose awful fate I know. Mr. and Mrs. Gibson and Nellie"—she turned, grasping her chair—"you have been kind friends. If I have imposed on your hospitality, you will forgive me—"

Unstrung and in tears, she threw herself into Mrs. Gibson's outstretched arms, and Nellie and her mother, overcome with surprise and grief, supported her as she walked into another room.

"Hosley, I demand that you tell me what this means," said Mr. Gibson, advancing, the lines of his stern face tightly drawn. He had such faith in Gabrielle he could not doubt her words—and yet he had loved Jim Hosley these many years, and he could not, dared not, believe that his faith in Jim was founded on a cleverly contrived imitation of the finest qualities of manhood. "What does this all mean—this opposition of Tescheron, this sudden action of Gabrielle?"

"I WROTE IT, GABRIELLE—AND FORGIVE ME."—Page 286.

Jim could only feebly remonstrate against the pursuing evil which had clung close to his heels since the very day he had asked Mr. Tescheron for his daughter's hand, he told Mr. Gibson; since the very night of the fire; since the very night of my connection with the problem when it began to develop as a simple affair of the heart.

"Mr. Gibson, I wrote those letters years ago, foolishly, to be sure, but innocently, believe me. They now appear to ruin me," he huskily proceeded. "But Gabrielle would be fair and forgive me that. No, it is not that I wrote the letters—there is something hidden. She will not tell me what it is. I have begged her to tell me, but she will not. She would only tell me she loved me when I entreated her to confide in me the cause of her father's hatred. Now in a flash she infers something, and I can see she believes her father, and joins him against me. Mr. Gibson, bear with me a moment. Let me see her now—"

Mr. Gibson went to the door and called her softly.

His wife's voice was heard in reply:

"Gabrielle has gone."

CHAPTER XX

A shambling step along the floor of my hall one evening, long past nine o'clock, aroused me from thoughts of Hosley, the man whose image filled my home hours with a creeping shame and dread. A knock on my door, the first since I had been living there, startled me.

Before I could advance, Jim Hosley stumbled in and braced his worn body against the wall. He reached for my hand and I took it, and forgave him everything I had suspected he had done, and every crime he might have committed. The look on Jim Hosley's face that night would have won the pardon of a cannibal chief; it would have halted a Spanish inquisition, stayed the commune of Paris and wrung unadulterated, anonymous pity from the heart of an Irish landlord or a monopolist. A minute before I was for hanging Jim Hosley (provided my connection with the case was not revealed). Now, when I saw him and felt his hand once more in the grasp of comradeship, I was with him heart and soul, and scoundrel though he might be, a lineal descendant of old Bluebeard, perhaps, I stood ready to sharpen and pass his knives to him and assist in any humble way a willing and obliging servant could to make the business a success.

"Ben, I have searched for you for three hours. Thank Heaven, I am near you at last! I lay in the next room at the hospital, but Gabrielle would not let me see you," were his first words.

"In the hospital? With me in the next room? And Gabrielle—"

"Yes, Ben; we can talk all night, and then we shan't understand. How did those letters written to the girl—"

He flung himself into a chair. He was exhausted and ten years older. Pain in his leg prompted him to ask me to remove his shoe. I helped him into my dressing-gown, gave him a pipe, plenty of pillows in an easy chair and fondled him like a prodigal son. I was never so glad to see a mortal since I peeped into the world. The fatted calf's substitute, a dish of pork and beans, was put to heat in a pan of water on the gas stove. The coffee-pot was "rastled" under the tap to remove the early morning aroma which clung to the grounds always left to await my attention the following morning. The egg poacher, the toaster, the slab of bacon,

and a mince pie, bought an hour before to produce sleep, were brought out and displayed to make a scene like the old days when joy was unconfined, when women were mere theories and courtship a pastime.

Jim in his despair warmed up and actually smiled. That heart-ache which had overwhelmed him and made life so unbearable when he entered, gave way, and hope, with the smell of bacon and fried eggs, mounted higher. Grief, powerful dynamo though it be, may be tickled by a smaller one—a square meal often brings its victim into line.

"Jim, we'll take the night to talk this thing over. It will take all that time for me to tell you that I am so mighty glad to see you again, and besides, it will take time to eat as well, for you look to me as if food was the one supply you had failed to connect with since that fire. Tell me, Jim, how Gabrielle could keep you away? How could you allow a woman to separate you from your old pal? Does it seem reasonable? And yet you always were so innocently plausible I could never doubt you. How did that happen? Tell me now, before I give you anything to eat. I would like to feel a little more sure on that point."

I whistled and rattled on, perfectly charmed to be again under the influence of that wife-slayer's magic smile or his potent frown—it was all the same to me.

"I simply don't know," answered Jim. "I can't tell you. I don't know, Ben. I am easily led by Gabrielle. I was weak. Had I insisted upon seeing you from the first, no matter what happened—but there, let it pass. I asked your help with her father. There I made a bad mistake. You did something—I don't know what it was exactly, but you put your foot 'way down in—you upset me from the first. But let it pass. I'll take all you can give me to eat and then we'll go at the thing again; not where we left off the night we parted at the flat, but where we stand now. Gabrielle, too, has forsaken me, Ben." He looked at me with his mouth drawn down, his pinched face betraying surrender, his heavy eyes burdened with care.

"Forsaken you! How so? Was she not with you at the hospital?"

"Those letters to the Brown girl, in Thirty-eighth Street, are at the bottom of it, Ben. I told you they would come back, if you wrote so much. Those letters have ruined me—ruined me with the one woman I have loved. The other women—those to whom you wrote, you induced me to fool. Don't you see you did, Ben? Those letters you signed my name to, and gushed your poetry into like a stream from a fire-hose, swept me off; all the women you wrote to thought they were

crazy letters, Ben. I never dared tell you that; but they all put me down for a fool, and as I had no particular interest in them I took the blame, Ben. I never supposed the letters could reach Gabrielle. I had them all in my bureau drawer when the fire started. I forgot to burn them—just chucked them in there when I got them back from Miss Brown. There must have been over a hundred. And, blowed if you didn't work in a lot of my hair! Egad, you must have clipped it when I fell asleep listening to you read them. I have heard them read since, too, at the hospital. Our nurse read one very prettily, and then I thought my hour had come—"

"Our nurse read them! My nurse in your room, too?"

"Yes. We had the same nurse."

"Sit up and have some pork and beans and a cup of coffee, Jim," said I. I could see then that there was no need to go into too many particulars. I did not care to go much further till I had collected some definite thoughts and arranged to conceal the amount of cash my wisdom had seen fit to call forth from my bank account for a lot of old junk that had been stored in Jim Hosley's bureau, and had fallen down to the next floor when the fire took place—just the spot the detectives wanted it to land precisely, in order to connect me with the case. It would not have surprised me to learn that Smith and Obreeon, his partner (for I could plainly see he was), had started that fire with full knowledge of the location of those letters and the exact spot they would fall if a match were touched to our abode at the proper time. My handwriting in the Tescheron messages had given me away.

"What do you think of those beans, Jim?"

"I think they taste more like home than anything I have met since I took that bath."

"There, don't say another word, Jim. I won't accuse you of anything. You had your bath, and both of us have enjoyed the sweat it produced. When we come out of this thing we'll be the purest mortals that ever took a course in practical morality over a hot stove as a starter. I told you about that quilt. So, that is the way it was, eh? Well, Jim, you certainly do know how to set a house afire, although I never believed you would set the world afire. I take it you will clip the ends pretty short when you start in to make quilts again for that purpose. But never mind, old boy, try another cup of this coffee."

"Why is it they can't make coffee in a hospital?" asked Jim.

"They do make it," I answered; "but the doctors and nurses never let any of it get away from them. They find it too strong for boarders. It's bad for their nerves. The only thing that's good for a sick man is something you can sterilize, and then they may charge double prices for it. Jim, did you ever feel so hungry before when you settled down there?"

I was trying to divert his attention from the trouble I had put him through, for I realized there was no hope for his case unless I yet took a hand in and patched up the chasm which separated him from an imagined paradise.

It is surprising what a relation there is between the digestion and heart.

"We were to have been married a week from to-day, Ben," said Jim.

My knife and fork clattered to the floor!

"That's so; and now we are parted forever."

I was struck dumb—only one week to make good, to save the wreck from total loss! Something must be done quickly. In the past everything I had undertaken had been a failure, but I must persist. It was close to ten o'clock—a bad time to begin, for my midnight correspondence had never been correctly construed.

"When did you leave Gabrielle?" I asked, with an idea ranging in my fancy. It was an intangible idea, but I thought it promised relief.

"About five o'clock to-day; we separated at the Gibsons'."

"You stay here till I come back, and go on eating, Jim," I directed, and grabbing my hat I rushed for the door.

"Stop, Ben! Don't you do a thing to-night," commanded Jim. "What can you do now? Don't you know you made a bad break the last time?"

But I kept right on and sent one more message from the nearest messenger office. It was directed to Miss Tescheron at her home and read:

"Don't recall those wedding invitations till you see me to-morrow.

"BENJAMIN HOPKINS."

There was just enough of the indefinite in that, I imagined, to suspend operations; it would be a straw for the woman to clutch. She would not risk the unpleasant notoriety of a wedding postponement, if there could be a chance that she had acted impulsively at least, and had been misled by circumstantial evidence she had ignored till there came into the case the other-woman element. I did not fear the wound in her heart, unless the gangrene of jealousy entered to prevent the successful issue of my hastily arranged plan.

When I returned to the house, Jim was greatly disturbed.

"Ben, you have rushed out and sent another message; I can see it in your face," he said. "What can you be thinking of? Why did you not wait till to-morrow and talk this thing over?"

"You leave this matter to me," said I.

"Yes—I did that before."

"But you took a bath contrary to my advice." Tinkering middlemen and ferrets can squeeze through small holes.

I determined to stop proceedings in Ninety-sixth Street, if such a thing were possible. It seemed nervy for me to interfere now, but it was a long shot and I determined to take it. What I would do to cement the break I really knew not, but trusted to luck.

Jim did not yet know about the Browning woman and the interest he was supposed to have in her. I tapped him gently and so indirectly on the subject that I could see he knew nothing about her. The undertaker's card he had found in the hall and brought in and laid on the table, where I chanced to pick it up, little thinking I would take it as corroborative of anything that might be said against him. He declared he had not left the house that night. Smith's men had simply lied when they said he left with the undertaker. I had a plan for testing his statement, however.

When he told me how I had driven the Tescheron family to Hoboken for six weeks, and hinted his suspicions gathered from Gabrielle that the old gentleman had been forced to settle with some official before returning, I was almost struck dumb. As he gave me the details of his wretched experience of that afternoon at the Gibsons', I became desperate.

"Jim, if that wedding comes off next Wednesday, will you forgive me?" I asked.

"It's impossible."

"What—to forgive me?"

"For me to ever achieve such happiness." From the depths of his despair, he looked at me entreatingly as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXI

During the night—we turned in about two A. M.—it occurred to me that I had heard or read that no person could be legally convicted of murder till the body of the victim had been found dead. This little matter had been overlooked about long enough, I thought. The lawyers might have asked concerning the *corpus delicti*, but no one had sought their advice. It struck me that the common-sense thing to do now was to begin at the bottom and see Collins, the undertaker, before I went too far in exonerating Hosley, even though I could never hope to escape the spell of his innocent, wholehearted manner.

The morning following the arrival of Jim, with his burden of woe, seeking release through the middleman of yore, I started out early, determined to do the biggest day's work as an intermediary ever recorded on Cupid's card index. I found Mr. Collins busy keeping his professional Prince Albert coat wide open, with both hands in his trousers pockets, at his quiet "establishment"—so described on the gold sign. I explained that I wanted some information. He recalled the Browning case very well, and tried hard to smile when I asked for the name of the cemetery and its location, that I might visit the grave. I thought that might stagger him, but it did not.

"You see, this sort of burial was out of my line altogether, but I did it to please Browning, an old friend of mine, and the children, as much as anything," he answered with complete self-possession.

Out of his line, of course, thought I, because his specialty was cremations, and this was a burial—much to my surprise.

"The lady was very kind to us when we lived there, Mr. Collins," I said, lying impressively. "I have been laid up in the hospital so long I have not had a chance to make the inquiry before. I want to take some flowers to lay on her grave as a token of our respect—my partner and I, you know—Mr. Hosley. We always found Mrs. Browning very accommodating" (she never bothered me, for I did not know that she existed until she ceased to do so). "We propose to take a whole day off and make a trip up there now to attend to this duty which has been uppermost in our minds."

Mr. Collins being a member of the Undertakers' Association, had been operated

on for the removal of his diaphragm to prevent laughing, and he therefore took a serious professional interest in my request. He retired to the neighborhood of his safe, looked into some large books and returned with the name of the cemetery and a few directions written on a slip of paper.

"You'll find it just back of Mount Vernon, about two miles from the trolley crossing I have given you there. Take a hack when you leave the car; there's a livery right across the street. And say, don't forget to come back and tell me about it."

I thanked him for his kindness and assured him I would return to tell him the result of my search.

The proper thing to do with a murderer is to subject him to the third degree. Very often he will quake when taken to the grave of his victim. So I decided to take Jim up there with me; we could do it and get back easily by noon, and maybe before. If he quaked, I would not need to be hasty in defending him, and if he did not quake, the air would do him good, poor chap, for he was badly unstrung and needed a ride in the country.

"Come, Jim," I shouted, rushing into the house. "I am not going down to the office to-day. I shall take a day off to straighten out your tangled affairs. Get your things on and come with me."

He seemed to doubt my prowess, but slowly worked his way into his coat. Before boarding the elevated train going north, I bought a handsome bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, tuberoses, asparagus fern and enough forget-me-nots to appropriately light up the center. This indicated to Jim that I was preparing a peace offering to tender Gabrielle. He wanted to know if he hadn't better wait on the corner while I went in and did the talking.

"In where?" I asked, for I had given no particulars.

"Why, you are going up to Ninety-sixth Street, aren't you?"

"Not I," said I. "At least not yet. We are going beyond that, Jim; up to Mount Vernon and beyond by trolley when we leave the elevated." I looked him square in the eye, and I could see no quaking. If he was suspicious, he knew how to dissemble. Could that be possible? I wondered, but only for a second.

"What are you going there for, Ben?"

"Can't you imagine, Jim?" I asked, having that midnight journey in mind that he might have taken with the man Collins, or his representatives, the night I was at the hotel. But I could not understand how he could have had time to make the trip.

"Never was up this way in my life," he answered, "and don't see where it comes in now, hanged if I do."

"Well, it's a little notion of mine," I assured him. "I don't want to proceed on this matter with Gabrielle until I have been to Mount Vernon and two miles beyond. The air will do you good, and so I brought you for that purpose."

I thought I would appear benevolent in his eyes, if I could not startle him. To tell the truth, I did not expect to startle him. He could not plot, and I was a knave, I thought then, ever to have doubted him. But I must go on and give him the third degree, for common-sense compelled caution.

"Ben, let's cut out Mount Vernon, get off and go up to Ninety-sixth Street. I'll go in alone and see if Gabrielle will not meet me this morning. I think she may, if you did not spoil everything by some crazy message."

"Why, Miss Tescheron will be down-town by this time; it is after nine o'clock."

"That's so. I don't suppose any one but her mother would be home." He seemed perfectly satisfied to go with me after that.

It was a dismal ride across the little stretch of country, and when the hack drew up in front of a tall, red building, I looked at my bouquet and then at the driver, asking him if he understood me to call for a brewery, the only object that seemed to lie before us. The man with the reins thereupon directed us to make a detour of the building and its fringe of beer garden, to a point where we would behold the spot we sought. I took Jim's arm and helped him to struggle toward the place. An old man in his shirt-sleeves was digging in a prospective vegetable patch with much lubrication of the horny hands of toil, in which he grasped a potato fork.

"Getting ready to plant?" I asked, my farming blood beginning to rise. "Why don't you use a spade and get somewhere?" There I was, as usual, ready to give advice.

"'Tain't necessary; we don't plant very deep, only 'bout a foot or two; expect we'll have to later on, though, if the business keeps on like it has been goin'. Say,

mister, what time is it?" A man who digs for day's wages frequently wants to know the time, so I accommodated him and lost track of the direction of his remarks.

"Can you tell me where I'll find the grave noted on this slip of paper?" I asked, handing Collins' memorandum to him.

"Yes," said he, "that's one of mine. Browning—that's right. I kin show it to you. Step this way."

When he said it was one of his, I took it to mean that he had been the digger for the occasion. So we followed through a little rustic gate—Hamlet Hopkins and Horatio Hosley—into a fenced lot comprising about two acres of level ground, laid out in the smallest graves I had ever seen. Most of them were about the size of my floral tribute. The tiny marble slabs reared above many of the little knolls seemed like foot-stones, and appeared to indicate that the perpendicular system of the Irish pagans had been adopted.

"Here's your'n," said our guide, pointing to a very small exhibit in his peculiar collection. I laid the flowers on it and glanced at the headstone. The simple inscription read:

"TOOTSEY."

The foot-stone bore this epitaph:

"RATS!"

CHAPTER XXII

On the way home in the hack and the trolley, Jim wanted to know why I had gone so far out of my way. Was it part of my work for the city? Did I think I could manage his affairs with so much lost time? He was as restless and nervous as a hungry dog shivering before a meat-shop. As for myself, I never yielded a point in my dignity, but tried hard to add to my supply of superiority, assuring him the hour would soon be at hand when I could report a complete victory in his cause, and my own vindication as a middleman in the sort of business that had run me through the tortures specially prepared for those who flatter themselves they are better able to manage other people's business than their own. I had gone in so deep I determined to wade through to the finish, no matter if I did botch it. A craftsman such as I was could not be balked.

I left Jim at home and hurried down to Miss Tescheron's office, reaching there about two o'clock. I sent in my card by the boy, and it was returned, with the information that Miss Tescheron was too busy to see me.

I took the card and wrote on it:

> "To the very last day of your life you will regret this act of folly. I have great good news for you. HOPKINS."

The boy did not return for ten minutes. I knew then that my message was working its leaven, and in time the moment of victory would arrive. At the end of ten minutes the boy returned and requested that I follow him into Miss Tescheron's office. There I found that charming young lady struggling to maintain an air of disinterested dignity behind a desk which I could not approach within three feet, because a railing had been planted as an outpost to guard against the bore emergency. But three feet was near enough for me that day. I could have done the work anywhere within range of my voice or pen, it was such an easy matter; at least, I thought so when I gained admission to the judge who was to be moved by my plea in behalf of the defendant, Hosley.

As I drew near, making my most dignified bow, I beheld the form of a gray-haired man, who was advancing in years beyond the middle period of life. He was seated near Miss Tescheron, whom I now faced for the first time. I knew he

must be John MacDonald, the famous lawyer. Miss Tescheron, I imagined, had called him in to be a witness to all I might have to say. Two judges, therefore, were to hear the presentation I was about to make in behalf of the outcast. In my capacity as middleman, I had always relied on the pen; but it was up to me now to make good the claims of my client with a verbal argument before two of the most discriminating lawyers.

I relied more, however, on the woman's heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

How fortunate I was in my judges or my jury of two—a fond woman and a plain man of common-sense! As our lives have been so bound with theirs, I must reveal the man more fully here.

Mr. MacDonald was widely known among that class of corporations that sought knowledge of the law and not opinions as to how it might be corrupted. They came to him to carry their cases through the courts, and not through the legislatures via the lobby. Therefore, he was not what is commonly called a corporation lawyer. He never drew bills designed to conceal franchise grabs or tax evasions, or crooked contracts with dummies in subsidiary corporations organized to bleed a mother concern of its profits. Some laws not on the books governed him in such matters, so that he never became an accomplice in these forms of thievery. He did more than pray "lead us not into temptation"; he kept both of his keen eyes open to make sure that he did not fall into it, and when he found that he had fallen, he quickly made every effort to extricate himself. This meant that he turned away volumes of business which would have brought large returns, but he would not have his office fouled by this stream of corruption any more than he would seek health in a sewer. When these degenerate concerns were admitted to his office, they came as penitents seeking reformation. His regular clients were the corporations who had come to take his view, that a big business must be laid on broad and deep foundations of integrity all-around; that all compromises with blackmailing legislatures are but makeshifts; that the thing to seek is justice, not only for themselves, but with a greater zeal for the people whose resources they use. The whole solution of our economic problems, in the mind of this simple student of the law—including its ninety per cent. of human nature—lay in the corporations training their lawyers upon themselves as their most unmerciful critics—as conscience, the censor, lays down the laws which every strong individual must follow or meet his doom in ruin. The underlying principles of the thing involving millions were as simple in his mind as the obligation to pay his washerwoman, if he were to maintain his self-respect. The officers and directors of a corporation, he believed, could no more successfully cheat the State of its just taxes, or rob the stockholders by paying them a small profit on their holdings while draining the earnings of the concern with their subsidiary National Packing & Transportation Companies, United States

Terminal Companies and American Warehouse & Bonding Corporations, without in the end reaping the reward of their crimes. Mr. MacDonald would no more give his consent to the swindling of innocent stockholders by their trustees, than he would rob an apple-stand. He had that rare discernment so seldom found now among big business men and their lawyer followers—he could see the wrong involved in the stealing of a million dollars and would gladly have aided in a movement to amend the penal code so as to prevent it, for he believed it possible for law to bring within the scope of its crushing penalties the audacity of these modern Captain Kidds. When he read the formal advertisement of a great industrial monopoly declaring a dividend of a few per cent, per annum basis on a lake of water owned by "outsiders," he thought of the beautifully worded contracts made between the officers of the concern, the "insiders," and their dummies, in the dozen or so parasitic companies whose stock was nearly all in their own hands, and paid from twenty to forty and even a hundred per cent, on the investment in unadvertised dividends. He thought of this and hundreds of other forms of legalized theft practiced by these men of church standing, who made it a point never to engage in petit larceny. They preferred to steal millions and keep on the safe side. They divided up the "swag" in the office of the American Transportation and Terminal Company, organized solely for that respectable purpose. It had a fine name, but the Bowery thieves would recognize it as a "fence." John MacDonald used to say: "A corporation is not known by the companies it keeps."

For five years Gabrielle Tescheron had advanced under the guidance of this simple, wise and good man, so that at the time of our story she had been well grounded in her profession, in its philosophy, in the routine of its office practice, and to some extent in the knowledge of human nature its successful followers must command. The long rows of sheepskin-bound books in the office library were less formidable; the grind of detail was no longer an obstacle to her ambition, which nerved her onward to the higher slopes of professional occupation, for she now had reliable subordinates trained according to the MacDonald system of thoroughness to complete for her the irksome tasks. Mixed up as the business was in corporation matters, it had much to look after that had fallen to it through legal processes, but which, of itself was pure business management and far away from the law. There were receiverships, and fortunate was the weak-kneed concern that fell into John MacDonald's hands; it generally meant new life and success for a dying venture. He worked no magic, but he applied a lot of common-sense where it had been scarce before, so that the results seemed much as if a fairy in finance had touched the difficult problems

with a mystic wand. It was, however, the effect of truth entering where promotors had held sway before, or where addle-pated sons of constructive fathers, now departed, had been trying to make the business go on what they knew of actresses and automobiles. These concerns did so well under the receivership that when they began business anew, John MacDonald was generally engaged to remain in control of the management. If he found the right man in the shop—the fellow who might have saved it—or could put his finger on such a man elsewhere, he would assume the task with that man in charge under him. Concerns that were tottering to a fall through bad management naturally drifted into his office before the worst happened, and engaged him to save their corporate lives by his superior executive ability. This he would do also if he could find his man. As a lawyer, he had less regard for the law's power to effect transformations than a layman, and a higher conception of the value of good men. While the ignoramuses at the head of the capital and labor trusts were for leveling all the men in our big business concerns, MacDonald continued to have faith in strong individuals.

The effect of close relationship with this man was to gain strength. Gabrielle had studied his methods until they became her own. As I stood there before them, I did not know them as I do now. MacDonald's fame I knew, and that tended to frighten me. It should have given me confidence, for John MacDonald was what I call an "elemental man." He kept close to the earth—the simples of the world, he dealt in. It may appear from what I have said that he was loaded down with responsibilities and care; then I have not made it clear that the exercise of these executive gifts was chiefly to secure leisure and the opportunity for relaxation—a most important thing in the MacDonald philosophy. He and his staff worked hard that they might have time to play, and with short hours and good pay they came near to having the right proportions of labor and leisure to keep men and women sound in health and contented with the world. Therefore, there were not many employed in his office. Why, down in one of the city departments so familiar to Jim and me, the same volume of business would have required ten times as many employes, and at least thirty different systems.

During his leisure, which John MacDonald planned to maintain against all comers, and the on-rush of business, he practiced the art of relaxation; he had formed a habit of returning to the simple from confusing contact with the complex, and he practiced it largely in his home, with his wife and children. Lincoln is the best-known master of this art, necessary to maintain the equilibrium of a busy man, and keep him fresh, sane, sociable and interestingly

boyish.

MacDonald had gone into the thick of the world's strife, and through the ordeal had shielded himself from its poisoned arrows of ambition. At a board meeting, it was said of John MacDonald, that when the three minutes of real business were over and his associates then began to discuss matters in the domain of irrelevancies, he resolved into smiles and found somebody to crack a joke with. He figured that about a third of his available time was given to actual work, and the rest to play, because his colleagues had so much ground to cover without reaching anywhere. There were days when he worked a full sixteen hours, but they were few, and he was always alone. On the days he had to associate with talking business men, he made up for these busy days by relaxing at a more rapid pace in a revel of bracing fun. I never knew a man who understood so thoroughly how to live and succeed, because it seemed to me he knew how to discount everything unnecessary, so that he might take the time others gave to straining their nerves to save his.

I suppose the character of Gabrielle Tescheron might have yielded to the unstable influences of her home, where her impulsive and irascible father sought to be an influential factor, were it not for the counteracting effect of the day's associations in that calm realm of business activity, where so much of the brain-work of vast industrial enterprises was conducted as noiselessly as the movements of one of those powerful machines that run in an oil bath. I do not say that she would not have been superior to her home environment without her fortunate associations down-town. I give the business small credit, for our superior jewels are intrinsically precious before the artisan gives the polish by which we more often make our comparisons. But there can be no question that she worked among associations which strengthened and emphasized all her admirable qualities and placed her above the petty things that annoyed her fretful father and seemed like mountains to his magnifying eyes.

These, then, were Hosley's judges.

"Miss Tescheron, I come to right a great wrong, for which I am wholly responsible; will you hear me?" I asked as softly and politely as the meekest penitent ever tutored for the book agent's business.

"I have no desire to hear you," she answered firmly, but with a slight nervousness betraying the deep interest she denied.

"I trust you will be persuaded to at least hear me, and then—"

"But there is nothing you can say, as the subject I know you wish to allude to is closed. Please do not refer to it." It was a woman's "No."

Mr. MacDonald tilted back his chair and eyed me closely, but not discouragingly.

"You are supposed to deal in justice here, are you not, Miss Tescheron?" I continued, not heeding her frigid, uninviting air. I had planned to deal tenderly with her wound, but soon realized that my sympathetic beginning had proved more irritating than bluntness; accordingly I introduced the spice of severity in tone in equivalent degree as an experiment, and as I proceeded I noted the interest of John MacDonald increasingly reflected in the features of his pupil.

"Justice demands that I be heard. Unfortunately, I deserve nothing here, for I have done about all a fool could reasonably be expected to do to upset my own and others' plans. And now I demand but a few minutes of your time to square the account. My point is that every dog has his day. I shall have had mine as a meddler in the affairs of my friend when I am through here. James Hosley, for whom I appear, is charged with something by somebody, he doesn't know what or by whom, and he was convicted by your father, and the conviction has finally been sustained on appeal to you. As you alone exercise the pardoning power, I come before you to-day to have the case reopened for the presentation of new evidence. Would it not seem ridiculous to blast your lives or even to upset the plans of the caterer now forming for the great event next Wednesday, if on the morning following that date we should read in the papers the true story of this affair in place of the usual formal wedding notice? Would it not seem cruel to have it published that jealousy, founded on love-letters the man never wrote, turned the woman from him at the very altar? Yes, he never wrote a line of that gush—that silly drivel—it was a joke; but it was as nothing to the culmination of the villainy of those detectives who have swindled your father, for it now threatens to ruin two lives."

Briefly I ran over the account of our trip to farther Mount Vernon, and of the effect of the third degree's pressure on Jim.

Mr. MacDonald relaxed control of his dignity, and burst into a hearty laugh. Gabrielle blushed deeply and faltered until I proceeded a few sentences farther.

"Yes, Jim's old love-letters that I wrote for literary exercise years ago, failed to impress the girls, who returned them. At the fire they proved to be fireproof, and fell through the floor. The sneaking detectives found them and brought them to me. Jim is now at my room, completely ignorant of the charges against him, poor

abandoned wretch!"

I then subsided and reviewed carefully all the particulars, concluding with the statement:

"I submit to your honors that there is no getting around my proposition that every dog has his day."

As I closed, Gabrielle hastily withdrew. Her face told the story. She passed out, my card tightly held in her hand. I knew I had won the verdict.

Mr. MacDonald chatted with me for a few minutes, and thanked me for my promptness in sending that telegram the night before, for without it the postponement of the wedding would have revealed an absurd situation and held us all up to public ridicule.

"I liked the way you put this thing," said he, as we parted. "Let me see you again."

I now figure that the cash I paid Obreeon I would have won back at that interview a good hundredfold, in view of what MacDonald has done for me since, had there been no other developments.

CHAPTER XXIV

I was not satisfied with my partial victory before the lawyers. I hastened to Fulton Market and there found Mr. Tescheron surrounded by the slippery remnants of a big day's business in cold-storage and fresh merchandise. Here the art of making a three-cent Casco Bay lobster worth two thousand per cent. more on the New York City restaurant table is largely developed. The middleman who stands between the inhabitants of the sea and those of the land is indeed a fisher of men as well as fish. As an Inspector of Offensive Trades, I am ready to testify that the odor of the market is generally an index of the strength of the bank balance. The richness of the atmosphere around Tescheron's office convinced me that Jim could not afford to alienate the affections of such a father-in-law. As I advanced toward the small box in which Mr. Tescheron sat wrapped in his scaly ulster, I caught a glimpse of a live flounder, who appealed to me in whispers, as he made an effort to turn over and find some cooler ice. I did not interrupt him. He spoke as follows:

THE MARKET FLOUNDER'S ICY REMARKS

For Friday morn is hangman's day;
Fast in the noose I dangle.
At four A. M. the clam I seek,
And get into a tangle.
Alas! my wish—a one-eyed fish[B]—
To find a juicy ration;
The clam on high began to die—
A sweet anticipation!
Beware the scent, tho' hunger groan!
My gentle kiss (a fishing smack)
Shot far amiss and with a hiss
I landed pretty well for'ard.
A smack I smote with a fearful thwack,
A stunning whack across the back,
On the upper deck of the Judy Peck.
At noon to-day, the fishermen say,
We ornament the table—

O, wretched deed!—or chicken feed,
Two rods behind the stable.

My purpose was to be serious with Mr. Tescheron. I had fooled him quite enough. He recognized me, and as he was so cool, surrounded by his cracked ice, I did not give him the chance to refuse a hand-shake.

"I came to apologize to you, Mr. Tescheron," I began. "It seems that you can't take a joke and that you flew to Hoboken—"

He reached into a drawer and brought forth a small photograph of Hosley, which he handed to me.

"Yes, I know you seemed to think it was all a joke," he said. "But what do you think of that picture, taken from the Rogues' Gallery?—look on the back."

Sure enough, it was a familiar photograph of Hosley, and I knew the photographer who took it. But this picture was on a small card with no photographer's name on it. It might have been cut down from a larger photograph. At any rate, it was the usual size of the Rogues' Gallery police portraits, and was stamped and written upon the back like the official pictures of criminals. It made Jim look like a thief, and the plate must have been carefully retouched to order. You can buy anything in New York, thought I.

"I CAME TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU, MR. TESCHERON."—Page 322.

"Do you believe that is a real Rogues' Gallery picture?" I asked.

"Certainly. Here's a dozen of 'em from as many different cities. If you'd gone to the expense I did to get them, you would think they were genuine. Oh, there's no question about it. Strange, how you could be fooled like that! Lived with him for ten years, didn't you, and all the while he was married to that woman down-stairs and was kiting around the country for months at a time, raising hell in Michigan and Arizona along the Mexican border. I think he was planning to do away with you the same as he did with her. It's lucky I broke in when I did and knocked his little plans in the head, so far as my family was concerned." The murder of myself, of course, was a small matter.

"All of these pictures are forgeries," I interrupted. "The photographer where

Hosley had his picture taken probably has his price."

"What? You still doubt? Well, you are a crazy man. That fellow Hosley was a great hypnotizer of women and weak men."

I did not become angry at this sneer. No, I was resolved to be patient. I wanted to get him in a frame of mind where he would turn on himself and say, "There's no fool like an old fool."

"This thing was about to come out through the coroner's office, but I settled as soon as I read the first newspaper item—here it is." He handed to me a clipping which Smith had used to clinch the payment of what he (Smith) called bribe money.

"Anybody could make one of those on a small printing-press as easy as they can make a camera lie or lie themselves. That clipping was manufactured, just as that woman in the flat below ours was made to order." I didn't lose my temper as I made this statement.

"But the death notice was in the papers giving the name and proper address. See, here it is, Browning, and your number. Oh, you are hypnotized yet!"

I was indeed surprised at the cleverness with which the Smith conspirators, including Obreeon, had planned to land this big fish—for such he truly was. He never sold a bigger one than himself. They had worked in the dark and could fool him every time by clouding his judgment with fear.

"You spoke of expense, Mr. Tescheron. Would you mind telling me, to satisfy my curiosity, just how much this thing has cost you?"

"Why, you are not thinking of paying it, are you?"

"No, I am sorry to say I cannot, although partly guilty, because I haven't so much money. But really I would like to know. I am amazed at your gullibility—simply amazed."

"Amazed, eh? Just look at these figures and you'll get some idea of the work we have been doing in this Hosley matter." He handed his neatly kept memorandum, which I scanned in wonder, and as we went over it, item by item, I could see the work of craftsmen shaping their clay. It all figured up, including board for his family at the Stuffer House, the payments for Smith's expenses and services, and the "settlement with Flanagan," to about $5,000.

"Mr. Tescheron," said I, "take the advice of one who wishes you well. Do a little investigating for yourself. I did not notify the coroner—I was only joking. Here is the address of Collins; see him, and get the particulars concerning the party at our old home, and then take a run up to this place and see what you think of it."

I handed to him the memorandum from Collins and left, saying:

"This is Wednesday. Think it over for a week and I'll arrange to see you next Wednesday. Then I shall expect to hear, if you are not convinced, that the sharks swallowed you like a porgy."

CHAPTER XXV

When I got away from Mr. Tescheron that afternoon, it was after three o'clock, and I had to see Flanagan.

Luckily I found the coroner at his office and was received by him with that warmth of greeting and cordiality which springs from a political genius, said to be derived by contact with the Blarney Stone. At any rate, it makes its successful appeal to human nature and constitutes the capital of Tammany leaders holding their own against all reformers who fail to take into account the hearts of the poor. There wasn't anything in the world he wouldn't do for me. You may be sure that Jim and I had long ago changed our politics enough to vote for Flanagan, and he knew it. His handshaking, sympathetic attention and practical philanthropy kept him in power, and his record for square dealing in and out of office placed him apart from some of the crew he trained with. As another Irishman, Mr. Burke, has remarked you can't indict a nation, this countryman of his proved to me that it would not be possible to indict an entire political organization outside the broad scope of campaign oratory.

I laid the whole case before honest Tim Flanagan.

"And they were to have been married a week from to-day, you say? Whew! You come with me to see Tom Martin; he'll do anything I say."

It is wonderful how a Tammany Hall leader can help pull a case of complicated love out of the mire of despair, if the villainy runs counter to the law.

Tom Martin was the captain in charge of the detective bureau at police headquarters. If anybody had suggested concerning him that it was possible for a Tammany district leader to obtain a favor in that office involving what might technically be called the compounding of a crime, Martin's icy official rejoinder would wither his antagonist; but this ice could be cut by certain men. Tim Flanagan was one of them. When he and Tom Martin got together on this thing wheels within wheels began to work.

"Certainly, Tim," said Captain Martin. "We'll give Smith a shake-down right here. I know him well. He is rich and will cough it all up when we put on the screws. You and your friend take seats. I'll have him here in a few minutes. Say,

that's a lot of money, though—over five thousand dollars, you say?"

I handed Tescheron's exact figures to Captain Martin. We waited about twenty minutes, as I recollect, when a Potsdam giant from County Kildare, the site of extensive greenhouses for the raising of New York cops, brought in the trembling Smith. The startled little rascal looked at me, but did not appear to recognize me. He had been scared to a point I could see where he would give up his last cent for freedom.

"You're at the old game again, Smithy," said Captain Martin. "How much did you get out of Tescheron? I have the figures here; just look it up and tell me—see if we agree."

Smith did not dodge.

"About ten thousand dollars, Stuffer and all," he said.

Stuffer! Five thousand more than Tescheron had admitted to me!

"How much does the interest amount to at six per cent.? Just figure that up on all the payments, and put in Stuffer," directed Captain Martin, not in the least surprised at the admission of another five thousand.

"You'll square me against him?" asked Smith.

"Yes; you bring him here to-morrow, and I'll tell him—see?"

Captain Martin had never heard of Stuffer, but he played his meagre hand with a winning bluff. The boundary line between detectivism and poker is shadowy.

"I meant to pay Stuffer to-day," said Smith, "but I guess he got tired waiting and came to you and squealed."

Smith figured for a few minutes with a small notebook in his left hand, and then wrote on a slip of paper the following summary:

Services and expenses	$2,040.00
Stuffer's fake bird collection	5,000.00
Fee to my man for appraisement of birds	50.00
Payment for safe return	3,000.00
Interest on above for two months at six per cent	100.90

$10,190.90

Captain Martin did not approve the summary.

"Smith, don't try to dodge me," said he, sternly. "Put that Obreeon $1,000 item on there, and add the board bill of the Tescheron family in Hoboken for six weeks at $63 per week, making $378—add interest—your subpœna servers kept them over there as your guests, remember."

Smith did not whimper. He took the paper and in a few minutes added $1,391.78, making the total $11,582.68.

I was astounded beyond measure. Flanagan's eyes bulged. Captain Martin was unruffled. He dealt with that sort of deviltry every day, and read the mind of Smith as if it were a child's primer. He gave the impression of knowing all about the mysterious Stuffer feature of the case. If the hotel proprietor had robbed Mr. Tescheron, I was surprised he had not mentioned the matter to me. He said nothing of birds. He couldn't have eaten them, thought I. My curiosity was greatly aroused.

"Mr. Smith, alias Mr. Van Riper, alias Mr. Stewart, what name have you your bank account under, these days?" asked Captain Martin.

"Under the name of William P. Smith, at the Lincoln Bank." He answered without hesitating, being duly impressed by the official atmosphere of the place, whereas I wouldn't have had the thing made public by a regular complaint for all the world.

"Got no blank checks with you, I suppose?" asked the captain.

"No, sir."

"How much of a balance have you there?"

"About fifteen thousand dollars."

"It's past banking hours now, Smithy, so I tell you what you'll have to do. Take these blank checks here and make out one to—"

"Albert Tescheron," said I.

"One to Albert Tescheron for—let me see—for $10,572.68, and one to Benjamin Hopkins for $1,010. You will then have to bunk in here to-night with me until I

learn that these parties have collected the money. Then you can go, but you'll have to pack out of town and stay out."

"How would the cash do, captain?" eagerly asked Smith.

"Got it with you?"

"I can telephone for it and have it here in twenty minutes."

"Take this 'phone and do it. We'll wait."

Enough greenbacks and change to make $10,572.68 fell into Mr. Tescheron's hands with a long letter of explanation from me, as he entered his home that night, and I grasped $1,010.

As to Flanagan and Tom Martin—did I treat? Well, I guess so! Do you blame me?

CHAPTER XXVI

The address on my card brought Gabrielle directly to my rooms, and when I returned I found the lovers blissfully united, after only one day of direst wretchedness. They rushed toward me as I entered and doubly embraced me. I was the crowned hero—crowned with more praise than I could well carry.

"How happy you have made us!" cried Gabrielle. "You cruel joker; but we forgive you. Oh, you do not know—you can never know the service you have performed this day. Our lives would have been ruined had you not been here to manage this affair."

"Ben, I forgive you for writing those letters, now. You are the greatest man that ever lived. George Washington couldn't class with you," said Jim.

"Probably not," said I. "I certainly told many a good lie when I wrote those letters. You set me on fire and saved me. I have done the same for you."

Jim was radiant and rosy as in the old days. Gabrielle never looked more beautiful. Wasn't I happy!

We talked it all over, and I laid a wager with them both that Mr. Tescheron would repent that night to Gabrielle before she could tell him of her definite plans. I did not tell them why I thought I was betting on a sure thing.

I carried out telegrams of joy and summonses to the Gibsons and Hygeia.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Hosley-Tescheron wedding was the happiest society event in my life. Hygeia, as bridesmaid, dazzled me into forgetfulness; but I stood up and did my part, nevertheless, with a fair degree of precision, but might have done better had I practiced trying to find a ring in my pocket while wearing a glove. Mr. Tescheron behaved admirably. He and his lordly son-in-law on that day really began to get acquainted. The sheepish look he gave me at the wedding betrayed that my letter with the money had happily convinced him, and also his trip to the little cemetery.

Concerning Gabrielle and Nellie Gibson, her maid of honor, I would need to shower the technicalities of a fashion journal's vocabulary to present a picture of the loveliness wrought by milliners and dressmakers from the choicest fabrics to grace the slender figures of those pretty girls. Mrs. Tescheron's tears were those of joy. My joy was without tears, for the occasion brought a hearty welcome to Hygeia's Connecticut home.

Jim Hosley and I are associated to-day in the management of one of the largest industries rehabilitated by that great executive, John MacDonald, with whom we are on terms of close intimacy. We are surprised at the changes that have come in a few years, and as we look back, we often wonder if the folly of those bachelor days was not after all profitable. Mr. Tescheron has lived long enough to believe it was. To-day he is a charming father-in-law and grandpa, with an improved sense of humor which has robbed him of his keen interest in ornithology, for I heard him say he wished the Stukeville collection would burn up.

As for myself, I am not willing to intrude my family affairs here beyond the statement that my days of gloom are over. I ceased to try, and—but as I wanted to add, Gabrielle is clever at housekeeping along the most approved scientific lines. Cooking she regards as a form of chemistry, and she keeps scales in her kitchen to save good dishes from disaster due to the reckless "pinch of this and pinch of that" system. What a contrast with Jim's system of frying eggs! And the marvel of it is, that, in spite of this hospital-like regularity and method, her little dinners at her beautiful home in our model industrial community are amazingly gratifying—solid in breadth and foundation, and alluringly decorated with the ornamental bisque congealments founded on the froth and frosting of beaten egg

and whipped cream. My experience as a housekeeper helps me to appreciate fine work in this department of life. I should say that an epicure would make no mistake in marrying a woman lawyer.

The one hundred and sixty-two letters and fitments I have preserved in a leather-bound scrap-book. I have not the slightest idea what they would be worth in the literary market, but I do know they brought us much joy and sorrow, and I would not part with these flowery souvenirs of the days of youth when all jokes seemed legitimate. They contained more poetry than truth, I fear; but like good fiction, they brought me face to face with some of the most interesting phases of life.

Oh, I forgot to add that Gabrielle's beautiful home was the father's gift to the bride, estimated to cost just $10,572.68, but I know there were many "extras." Was Gabrielle surprised at this? Why, she thinks I am a wonderfully fine fellow, and so does Jim.

What does Hygeia think?

Well—ahem!

THE END

FOOTNOTES:

[A] These cuts were too blurred to reproduce.

[B] Acting under Section 1519 of the Poetic License Act, I have deducted one eye from the flounder. He is about to lose both, anyway.

works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.net

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or

distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.net), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by

your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's

goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.net

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.