FOUND YET LOST

E. P. Roe

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CHAPTER I. LOVE IN THE WILDERNESS

Hopeless indeed must that region be which May cannot clothe with some degree of beauty and embroider with flowers. On the 5th day of the month the early dawn revealed much that would charm the eyes of all true lovers of nature even in that section of Virginia whose characteristics so grimly correspond with its name The Wilderness. The low pines and cedars, which abound everywhere, had taken a fresh green; the deciduous trees, the tangled thickets, impenetrable in many places by horse or man, were putting forth a new, tender foliage, tinted with a delicate semblance of autumn hues. Flowers bloomed everywhere, humbly in the grass close to the soil as well as on the flaunting sprays of shrubbery and vines, filling the air with fragrance as the light touched and expanded the petals. Wood−thrushes and other birds sang as melodiously and contentedly as if they had selected some breezy upland forest for their nesting−place instead of a region which has become a synonym for gloom, horror, and death.

Lonely and uninhabited in its normal condition, this forbidding wilderness had become peopled with thousands of men. The Army of the Potomac was penetrating and seeking to pass through it. Vigilant General Lee had observed the movement, and with characteristic boldness and skill ordered his troops from their strong intrenchments on Mine Run toward the Union flank. On this memorable morning the van of his columns wakened from their brief repose but a short distance from the Federal bivouac. Both parties were unconscious of their nearness, for with the exception of a few clearings the dense growth restricted vision to a narrow range. The Union forces were directed in their movements by the compass, as if they were sailors on a fog−enshrouded sea; but they well knew that they were seeking their old antagonist, the Army of Northern Virginia, and that the stubborn tug−of−war might begin at any moment.

When Captain Nichol shook off the lethargy of a brief troubled sleep, he found that the light did not banish his gloomy impressions. Those immediately around him were still slumbering, wrapped in their blankets. Few sounds

other than the voices of the awakening birds broke the silence. After a little thought he drew his notebook from his pocket and wrote as follows:

"MY DARLING HELEN I obey an impulse to write to you this morning. It is scarcely light enough to see as yet; but very soon we shall be on the move again to meet we known not what, certainly heavy, desperate fighting. I do not know why I am so sad. I have faced the prospect of battles many times before, and have passed through them unharmed, but now I am depressed by an unusual foreboding. Naturally my thoughts turn to you. There was no formal engagement between us when I said those words (so hard to speak) of farewell, nor have I sought to bind you since. Every month has made more clear the uncertainty of life in my calling; and I felt that I had no right to lay upon you any restraint other than that of your own feelings. If the worst happened you would be free as far as I was concerned, and few would know that we had told each other of our love. I wish to tell you of mine once more not for the last time, I hope, but I don't know. I do love you with my whole heart and soul; and if I am to die in this horrible wilderness, where so many of my comrades died a year ago, my last thoughts will be of you and of the love of God, which your love has made more real to me. I love you too well to wish my death, should it occur, to spoil your young life. I do not ask you to forget me that would be worse than death, but I ask you to try to be happy and to make others happy as the years pass on. This bloody war will come to an end, will become a memory, and those who perish hope to be remembered; but I do not wish my memory to hang like a cloud over the happy days of peace. I close, my darling, in hope, not fear hope for you, hope for me, whatever may happen to−day or on coming days of strife. It only remains for me to do my duty. I trust that you will also do yours, which may be even harder. Do not give way to despairing grief if I cannot come back to you in this world. Let your faith in God and hope of a future life inspire and strengthen you in your battles, which may require more courage and unselfishness than mine.

"Yours, either in life or death, ALBERT NICHOL."

He made another copy of this letter, put both in envelopes, and addressed them, then sought two men of his company who came from his native village. They were awake now and boiling their coffee. The officer and the privates had grown up as boys together with little difference of social standing in the democratic town. When off duty, there still existed much of the old familiarity and friendly converse, but when Captain Nichol gave an order, his townsmen immediately became conscious that they were separated from him by the iron wall of military discipline. This characteristic did not alienate his old associates. One of the men hit the truth fairly in saying: "When Cap speaks as Cap, he's as hard and sharp as a bayonet−point; but when a feller is sick and worn out 'tween times you'd think your granny was coddlin' yer."

It was as friend and old neighbor that Nichol approached Sam and Jim Wetherby, two stalwart brothers who had enlisted in his company. "Boys," he said, "I have a favor to ask of you. The Lord only knows how the day will end for any of us. We will take our chances and do our duty, as usual. I hope we may all boil coffee again to−night; but who knows? Here are two letters. If I should fall, and either or both of you come out all right, as I trust you will, please forward them. If I am with you again to−night, return them to me."

"Come, Captain," said Jim, heartily, "the bullet isn't molded that can harm you. You'll lead us into Richmond yet."

"It will not be from lack of goodwill if I don't. I like your spirit; and I believe the army will get there this time whether I'm with it or not. Do as I ask. There is no harm in providing against what may happen. Make your breakfast quickly, for orders may come at any moment;" and he strode away to look after the general readiness of his men.

The two brothers compared the address on the letters and laughed a little grimly. "Cap is a−providing, sure enough," Sam Wetherby remarked. "They are both written to the pretty Helen Kemble that he used to make eyes at in the singing−school. I guess he thinks that you might stop a bullet as well as himself, Jim."

"It's clear he thinks your chances for taking in lead are just as good," replied Jim. "But come, I'm one of them fellows that's never hit till I am hit. One thing at a time, and now it's breakast."

"Well, hanged if I want to charge under the lead of any other captain!" remarked Sam, meditatively sipping his coffee. "If that girl up yonder knows Cap's worth, she'll cry her eyes out if anything happens to him."

A few moments later the birds fled to the closest cover, startled by the innumerable bugles sounding the note of preparation. Soon the different corps, divisions, and brigades were upon their prescribed lines of march. No movement could be made without revealing the close proximity of the enemy. Rifle−reports from skirmish lines and reconnoitring parties speedily followed. A Confederate force was developed on the turnpike leading southwest from the old Wilderness Tavern; and the fighting began. At about eight o'clock Grant and Meade came up and made their headquarters beneath some pine−trees near the tavern. General Grant could scarcely believe at first that Lee had left his strong intrenchments to give battle in a region little better than a jungle; but he soon had ample and awful proof of the fact. Practically unseen by each other, the two armies grappled like giants in the dark. So thick were the trees and undergrowth that a soldier on a battle line could rarely see a thousand men on either side of him, yet nearly two hundred thousand men matched their deadly strength that day. Hundreds fell, died, and were hidden forever from human eyes.

Thinking to sweep away the rear−guard of Lee's retreating army, Grant ordered a strong advance on the pike in the afternoon. At first it was eminently successful, and if it had been followed up vigorously and steadily, as it undoubtedly would have been if the commander had known what was afterward revealed, it might have resulted in severe disaster to the Confederates. The enemy was pressed back rapidly; and the advancing Union forces were filled with enthusiasm. Before this early success culminated, genuine sorrow saddened every one in Captain Nichol's company. With his face toward the enemy, impetuously leading his men, he suddenly dropped his sword and fell senseless. Sam and Jim Wetherby heard a shell shrieking toward them, and saw it explode directly over their beloved leader. They rushed to his side; blood was pouring over his face, and it also seemed to them that a fragment of the shell had fatally wounded him in the forehead.

"Poor Cap, poor, brave Cap!" ejaculated Sam. "He didn't give us those letters for nothing."

"A bad job, an awfully bad job for us all! curse the eyes that aimed that shell!" growled practical Jim. "Here, take hold. We'll put him in that little dry ditch we just passed, and bury him after the fight, if still on our pins. We can't leave him here to be tramped on."

This they did, then hastily rejoined their company, which had swept on with the battle line. Alas! that battle line and others also were driven back with terrible slaughter before the day closed. Captain Nichol was left in the ditch where he had been placed, and poor Sam Wetherby lay on his back, staring with eyes that saw not at a shattered bird's nest in the bushes above his head. The letter in his pocket mouldered with him.

Jim's begrimed and impassive face disguised an aching heart as he boiled his coffee alone that night. Then, although wearied almost to exhaustion, he gave himself no rest until he had found what promised to be the safest means of forwarding the letter in his pocket.

CHAPTER II. LOVE AT HOME

Long years before the war, happy children were growing in the village of Alton. They studied the history of wars much as they conned their lessons in geography. Scenes of strife belonged to the past, or were enacted among people wholly unlike any who dwelt in their peaceful community. That Americans should ever fight each other was as undreamed of as that the minister should have a pitched battle in the street with his Sunday−school superintendent. They rejoiced mildly when in their progress through the United States history they came to pages

descriptive of Indian wars and the Revolutionary struggle, since they found their lessons then more easily remembered than the wordy disputes and little understood decisions of statesmen. The first skating on the pond was an event which far transcended in importance anything related between the green covers of the old history book, while to Albert Nichol the privilege of strapping skates on the feet of little Helen Kemble, and gliding away with her over the smooth ice, was a triumph unknown by any general. He was the son of a plain farmer, and she the daughter of the village banker. Thus, even in childhood, there was thrown around her the glamour of position and reputed wealth advantages which have their value among the most democratic folk, although slight outward deference may be paid to their possessors. It was the charming little face itself, with its piquant smiles and still more piquant pouts, which won Albert's boyish admiration. The fact that she was the banker's daughter only fired his ambition to be and to do something to make her proud of him.

Hobart Martine, another boy of the village, shared all his schoolmate's admiration for pretty Nellie, as she was usually called. He had been lame from birth, and could not skate. He could only shiver on the bank or stamp around to keep himself warm, while the athletic Al and the graceful little girl passed and repassed, quite forgetting him. There was one thing he could do; and this pleasure he waited for till often numb with cold. He could draw the child on his sled to her home, which adjoined his own.

When it came his turn to do this, and he limped patiently through the snow, tugging at the rope, his heart grew warm as well as his chilled body. She was a rather imperious little belle with the other boys, but was usually gentle with him because he was lame and quiet. When she thanked him kindly and pleasantly at her gate, he was so happy that he could scarcely eat his supper. Then his mother would laugh and say, "You've been with your little sweetheart." He would flush and make no reply.

How little did those children dream of war, even when studying their history lessons! Yet Albert Nichol now lay in the Wilderness jungle. He had done much to make his little playmate proud of him. The sturdy boy developed into a manly man. When he responded to his country's call and raised a company among his old friends and neighbors, Helen Kemble exulted over him tearfully. She gave him the highest tribute within her power and dearest possession her heart. She made every campaign with him, following him with love's untiring solicitude through the scenes he described, until at last the morning paper turned the morning sunshine into mockery and the songs of the birds into dirges. Captain Nichol's name was on the list of the killed.

With something of the same jealousy, developed and intensified, which he had experienced while watching Albert glide away on the ice with the child adored in a dumb, boyish way, Hobart had seen his old schoolmate depart for the front. Then his rival took the girl from him; now he took her heart. Martine's lameness kept him from being a soldier. He again virtually stood chilled on the bank, with a cold, dreary, hopeless feeling which he believed would benumb his life. He did not know, he was not sure that he had lost Helen beyond hope, until those lurid days when men on both sides were arming and drilling for mutual slaughter. She was always so kind to him, and her tones so gentle when she spoke, that in love's fond blindness he had dared to hope. He eventually learned that she was only sorry for him. He did not, could not, blame her, for he needed but to glance at Nichol's stalwart form, and recall the young soldier's record, in order to know that it would be strange indeed if the girl had chosen otherwise. He would have been more than human if there had not been some bitterness in his heart; but he fought it down honestly, and while pursuing his peaceful avocations engaged in what he believed would be a lifelong battle. He smiled at the girl across the garden fence and called out his cheery "Good−morning." He was her frequent companion by the fireside or on the piazza, according to the season; and he alone of the young men was welcome, for she had little sympathy for those who remained at home without his excuse. He was so bravely her friend, keeping his great love so sternly repressed that she only felt it like a genial warmth in his tones and manner, and believed that he was becoming in truth what he seemed, merely a friend.

On that terrible May morning he was out in the garden and heard her wild, despairing cry as she read the fatal words. He knew that a heavy battle had been begun, and was going down to the gate for his paper, which the newsboy had just left. There was no need of opening it, for the bitter cry he had heard made known to him the one

item of intelligence compared with which all else for the time became insignificant. Was it the Devil that inspired a great throb of hope in his heart? At any rate he thought it was, and ground his heel into the gravel as if the serpent's head was beneath it, then limped to Mr. Kemble's door.

The old banker came out to meet him, shaking his gray head and holding the paper in his trembling hand. "Ah!" he groaned, "I've feared it, I've feared it all along, but hoped that it would not be. You've seen Nichol's name " but he could not finish the sentence.

"No, I have seen nothing; I only heard Helen's cry. That told the whole story."

"Yes. Well, her mother's with her. Poor girl! poor girl! God grant it isn't her death−blow too. She has suffered too much under this long strain of anxiety."

A generous resolve was forming in Martine's mind, and he said earnestly, "We must tide her through this terrible shock. There may be some mistake; he may be only wounded. Do not let her give up hope absolutely. I'll drop everything and go to the battlefield at once. If the worst has in truth happened, I can bring home his remains, and that would be a comfort to her. A newspaper report, made up hastily in the field, is not final. Let this hope break the cruel force of the blow, for it is hard to live without hope."

"Well, Hobart, you ARE a true friend. God bless and reward you! If nothing comes of it for poor Nichol, as I fear nothing will, your journey and effort will give a faint hope to Nellie, and, as you say, break the force of the blow. I'll go and tell her."

Martine went into the parlor, which Helen had decorated with mementoes of her soldier lover. He was alone but a few moments before he heard hasty steps. Helen entered with hot, tearless eyes and an agonized, imploring expression.

"What!" she cried, "is it true that you'll go?"

"Yes, Helen, immediately. I do not think there's reason for despair."

"Oh, God bless you! friend, friend! I never knew what the word meant before. Oh, Hobart, no sister ever lavished love on a brother as I will love you if you bring back my Albert;" and in the impulse of her overwhelming gratitude she buried her face on his shoulder and sobbed aloud. Hope already brought the relief of tears.

He stroked the bowed head gently, saying, "God is my witness, Helen, that I will spare no pains and shrink from no danger in trying to find Captain Nichol. I have known of many instances where the first reports of battles proved incorrect;" and he led her to a chair.

"It is asking so much of you," she faltered.

"You have asked nothing, Helen. I have offered to go, and I AM going. It is a little thing for me to do. You know that my lameness only kept me from joining Captain Nichol's company. Now try to control your natural feelings like a brave girl, while I explain my plans as far as I have formed them."

"Yes, yes! Wait a few moments. Oh, this pain at my heart! I think it would have broken if you hadn't come. I couldn't breathe; I just felt as if sinking under a weight."

"Take courage, Helen. Remember Albert is a soldier."

"IS, IS! Oh, thanks for that little word! You do not believe that he is gone and lost to me?"

"I cannot believe it yet. We will not believe it. Now listen patiently, for you will have your part to do."

"Yes, yes; if I could only do something! That would help me so much. Oh, if I could only go with you!"

"That would not be best or wise, and might defeat my efforts. I must be free to go where you could not to visit places unsafe for you. My first step must be to get letters to our State Senator. Your father can write one, and I'll get one or two others. The Senator will give me a letter to the Governor, who in turn will accredit me to the authorities at Washington and the officer in command on the battlefield. You know I shall need passes. Those who go to the extreme front must be able to account for themselves. I will keep in telegraphic communication with you, and you may receive additional tidings which will aid me in my search. Mr. Kemble!" he concluded, calling her father from his perturbed pacing up and down the hall.

"Ah!" said the banker, entering, "this is a hundred−fold better than despairing, useless grief. I've heard the gist of what Hobart has said, and approve it. Now I'll call mother, so that we may all take courage and get a good grip on hope."

They consulted together briefly, and in the prospect of action, Helen was carried through the first dangerous crisis in her experience.

CHAPTER III. "DISABLED"

Mrs. Martine grieved over her son's unexpected resolve. In her estimation he was engaging in a very dangerous and doubtful expedition. Probably mothers will never outgrow a certain jealousy when they find that another woman has become first in the hearts of their sons. The sense of robbery was especially strong in this case, for Mrs. Martine was a widow, and Hobart an only and idolized child.

The mother speedily saw that it would be useless to remonstrate, and tearfully aided him in his preparations. Before he departed, he won her over as an ally. "These times, mother, are bringing heavy burdens to very many, and we should help each other bear them. You know what Helen is to me, and must be always. That is something which cannot be changed. My love has grown with my growth and become inseparable from my life. I have my times of weakness, but think I can truly say that I love her so well that I would rather make her happy at any cost to myself. If it is within my power, I shall certainly bring Nichol back, alive or dead. Prove your love to me, mother, by cheering, comforting, and sustaining that poor girl. I haven't as much hope of success as I tried to give her, but she needs hope now; she must have it, or there is no assurance against disastrous effects on her health and mind. I couldn't bear that."

"Well, Hobart, if he is dead, she certainly ought to reward you some day."

"We must not think of that. The future is not in our hands. We can only do what is duty now."

Noble, generous purposes give their impress to that index of character, the human face. When Martine came to say good−by to Helen, she saw the quiet, patient cripple in a new light. He no longer secured her strong affection chiefly on the basis of gentle, womanly commiseration. He was proving the possession of those qualities which appeal strongly to the feminine nature; he was showing himself capable of prompt, courageous action, and his plain face, revealing the spirit which animated him, became that of a hero in her eyes. She divined the truth the love so strong and unselfish that it would sacrifice itself utterly for her. He was seeking to bring back her lover when success in his mission would blot out all hope for him. The effect of his action was most salutary, rousing her from the inertia of grief and despair. "If a mere friend," she murmured, "can be so brave and self−forgetful, I have no excuse for giving away utterly."

She revealed in some degree her new impressions in parting. "Hobart," she said, holding his hand in both of hers, "you have done much to help me. You have not only brought hope, but you have also shown a spirit which would shame me out of a selfish grief. I cannot now forget the claims of others, of my dear father and mother here, and I promise you that I will try to be brave like you, like Albert. I shall not become a weak, helpless burden, I shall not sit still and wring idle hands when others are heroically doing and suffering. Good−by, my friend, my brother. God help us all!"

He felt that she understood him now as never before; and the knowledge inspired a more resolute purpose, if this were possible. That afternoon he was on his way. There came two or three days of terrible suspense for Helen, relieved only by telegrams from Martine as he passed from point to point. The poor girl struggled as a swimmer breasts pitiless waves intervening between him and the shore. She scarcely allowed herself an idle moment; but her effort was feverish and in a measure the result of excitement. The papers were searched for any scrap of intelligence, and the daily mail waited for until the hours and minutes were counted before its arrival.

One morning her father placed Nichol's letter in her hands. They so trembled in the immense hope, the overwhelming emotion which swept over her at sight of the familiar handwriting, that at first she could not open it. When at last she read the prophetic message, she almost blotted out the writing with her tears, moaning, "He's dead, he's dead!" In her morbid, overwrought condition, the foreboding that had been in the mind of the writer was conveyed to hers; and she practically gave up hope for anything better than the discovery and return of his remains. Her father, mother, and intimate friends tried in vain to rally her; but the conviction remained that she had read her lover's farewell words. In spite of the most pathetic and strenuous effort, she could not keep up any longer, and sobbed till she slept in utter exhaustion.

On the following day, old Mr. Wetherby came into the bank. The lines about his mouth were rigid with suppressed feeling. He handed Mr. Kemble a letter, saying in a husky voice, "Jim sent this. He says at the end I was to show it to you." The scrawl gave in brief the details about Captain Nichol already known to the reader, and stated also that Sam Wetherby was missing. "All I know is," wrote the soldier, "that we were driven back, and bullets flew like hail. The brush was so thick I couldn't see five yards either way when I lost sight of Sam."

The colonel of the regiment also wrote to Captain Nichol's father, confirming Private Wetherby's letter. The village had been thrown into a ferment by the tidings of the battle and its disastrous consequences. There was bitter lamentation in many homes. Perhaps the names of Captain Nichol and Helen were oftenest repeated in the little community, for the fact of their mutual hopes was no longer a secret. Even thus early some sagacious people nodded their heads and remarked, "Hobart Martine may have his chance yet." Helen Kemble believed without the shadow of a doubt that all the heart she had for love had perished in the wilderness.

The facts contained in Jim Wetherby's letter were telegraphed to Martine, and he was not long in discovering confirmation of them in the temporary hospitals near the battlefield. He found a man of Captain Nichol's company to whom Jim had related the circumstances. For days the loyal friend searched laboriously the horrible region of strife, often sickened nearly unto death by the scenes he witnessed, for his nature had not been rendered callous by familiarity with the results of war. Then instead of returning home, he employed the influence given by his letters and passes, backed by his own earnest pleading, to obtain permission for a visit to Nichol's regiment. He found it under fire; and long afterward Jim Wetherby was fond of relating how quietly the lame civilian listened to the shells shrieking over and exploding around him. Thus Martine learned all that could be gathered of Nichol's fate, and then, ill and exhausted, he turned his face northward. He felt that it would be a hopeless task to renew his search on the battlefield, much of which had been burned over. He also had the conviction it would be fatal to him to look upon its unspeakable horrors, and breathe again its pestilential air.

He was a sick man when he arrived at home, but was able to relate modestly in outline the history of his efforts, softening and concealing much that he had witnessed. In the delirium of fever which followed, they learned more fully of what he had endured, of how he had forced himself to look upon things which, reproduced in his ravings,

almost froze the blood of his watchers.

Helen Kemble felt that her cup of bitterness had been filled anew, yet the distraction of a new grief, in which there was a certain remorseful self−reproach, had the effect of blunting the sharp edge of her first sorrow. In this new cause for dread she was compelled in some degree to forget herself. She saw the intense solicitude of her father and mother, who had been so readily accessory to Martine's expedition; she also saw that his mother's heart was almost breaking under the strain of anxiety. His incoherent words were not needed to reveal that his effort had been prompted by his love. She was one of his watchers, patiently enduring the expressions of regret which the mother in her sharp agony could not repress. Nichol's last letter was now known by heart, its every word felt to be prophetic. She had indeed been called upon to exercise courage and fortitude greater than he could manifest even in the Wilderness battle. Although she often faltered, she did not fail in carrying out his instructions. When at last Martine, a pallid convalescent, could sit in the shade on the piazza, she looked older by years, having, besides, the expression seen in the eyes of some women who have suffered much, and can still suffer much more. In the matter relating to their deepest consciousness, no words had passed between them. She felt as if she were a widow, and hoped he would understand. His full recognition of her position, and acceptance of the fact that she did and must mourn for her lover, his complete self−abnegation, brought her a sense of peace.

The old clock on the landing of the stairway measured off the hours and days with monotonous regularity. Some of the hours and days had been immeasurably longer than the ancient timekeeper had indicated; but in accordance with usual human experiences, they began to grow shorter. Poignant sorrow cannot maintain its severity, or people could not live. Vines, grasses, and flowers covered the graves in Virginia; the little cares, duties, and amenities of life began to screen at times the sorrows that were nevertheless ever present.

"Hobart," Helen said one day in the latter part of June, "do you think you will be strong enough to attend the commemorative services next week? You know they have been waiting for you."

"Yes," he replied quietly; "'and they should not have delayed them so long. It is very sad that so many others have been added since− −since "

"Well, you have not been told, for we have tried to keep every depressing and disquieting influence from you. Dr. Barnes said it was very necessary, because you had seen so much that you should try to forget. Ah, my friend, I can never forget what you suffered for me! Captain Nichol's funeral sermon was preached while you were so ill. I was not present I could not be. I've been to see his mother often, and she understands me. I could not have controlled my grief, and I have a horror of displaying my most sacred feelings in public. Father and the people also wish you to be present at the general commemorative services, when our Senator will deliver a eulogy on those of our town who have fallen; but I don't think you should go if you feel that it will have a bad effect on you."

"I shall be present, Helen. I suppose my mind has been weak like my body; but the time has come when I must take up life again and accept its conditions as others are doing. You certainly are setting me a good example. I admit that my illness has left a peculiar repugnance to hearing and thinking about the war; it all seemed so very horrible. But if our brave men can face the thing itself, I should be weak indeed if I could not listen to a eulogy of their deeds."

"I am coming to think," resumed Helen, thoughtfully, "that the battle line extends from Maine to the Gulf, and that quiet people like you and me are upon it as truly as the soldiers in the field. I have thought that perhaps the most merciful wounds are often those which kill outright."

"I can easily believe that," he said.

His quiet tone and manner did not deceive her, and she looked at him wistfully as she resumed, "But if they do not kill, the pain must be borne patiently, even though we are in a measure disabled."

"Yes, Helen; and you are disabled in your power to give me what I can never help giving you. I know that. I will not misjudge or presume upon your kindness. We are too good friends to affect any concealments from each other."

"You have expressed my very thought. When you spoke of accepting the conditions of life, I hoped you had in mind what you have said the conditions of life as they ARE, as we cannot help or change them. We both have got to take up life under new conditions."

"You have; not I, Helen."

Tears rushed to her eyes as she faltered, "I would be transparently false should I affect not to know. What I wish you to feel through the coming months and years is that I cannot that I am disabled by my wound."

"I understand, Helen. We can go on as we have begun. You have lost, as I have not, for I have never possessed. You will be the greater sufferer; and it will be my dear privilege to cheer and sustain you in such ways as are possible to a simple friend."

She regarded him gratefully, and for the first time since that terrible May morning the semblance of a smile briefly illumined her face.

CHAPTER IV. MARTINE SEEKS AN ANTIDOTE

It can readily be understood that Martine in his expedition to the South had not limited his efforts solely to his search for Captain Nichol. Wherever it had been within his power he had learned all that he could of other officers and men who had come from his native region; and his letters to their relatives had been in some instances sources of unspeakable comfort. In his visit to the front he had also seen and conversed with his fellow−townsmen, some of whom had since perished or had been wounded. As he grew stronger, Helen wrote out at his dictation all that he could remember concerning these interviews; and these accounts became precious heirlooms in many families.

On the Fourth of July the commemorative oration was delivered by the Senator, who proved himself to be more than senator by his deep, honest feeling and good taste. The "spread eagle" element was conspicuously absent in his solemn, dignified, yet hopeful words. He gave to each their meed of praise. He grew eloquent over the enlisted men who had so bravely done their duty without the incentive of ambition. When he spoke of the honor reflected on the village by the heroism of Captain Nichol, the hearts of the people glowed with gratitude and pride; but thoughts of pity came to all as they remembered the girl, robed in black, who sat with bowed head among them.

"I can best bring my words to a close," said the Senator, "by reading part of a letter written by one of your townsmen, a private in the ranks, yet expressive of feelings inseparable from our common human nature:

"DEAR FATHER You know I ain't much given to fine feelings or fine words. Poor Sam beat me all holler in such things; but I want you and all the folks in Alton to know that you've got a regular soldier at home. Of course we were all glad to see Bart Martine; and we expected to have a good−natured laugh at his expense when the shells began to fly. Soldiers laugh, as they eat, every chance they get, 'cause they remember it may be the last one. Well, we knew Bart didn't know any more about war than a chicken, and we expected to see him get very nervous and limp off to the rear on the double quick. He didn't scare worth a cent. When a shell screeched over our heads, he just waited till the dinged noise was out of our ears and then went on with his questions about poor Cap and

Sam and the others from our town. We were supporting a battery, and most of us lying down. He sat there with us a good hour, telling about the folks at home, and how you were all following us with your thoughts and prayers, and how you all mourned with those who lost friends, and were looking after the children of the killed and wounded. Fact is, before we knew it we were all on our feet cheering for Alton and the folks at home and the little lame man, who was just as good a soldier as any of us. I tell you he heartened up the boys, what's left of us. I'm sorry to hear he's so sick. If he should die, bury him with a soldier's honors. JAMES WETHERBY."

"These plain, simple, unadorned words," concluded the Senator, "need no comment. Their force and significance cannot be enhanced by anything I can say. I do not know that I could listen quietly to shrieking and exploding shells while I spoke words of courage and good cheer; but I do know that I wish to be among the foremost to honor your modest, unassuming townsman, who could do all this and more."

Martine was visibly distressed by this unexpected feature in the oration and the plaudits which followed. He was too sad, too weak in body and mind, and too fresh from the ghastly battlefield, not to shrink in sensitive pain from personal and public commendation. He evaded his neighbors as far as possible and limped hastily away.

He did not see Helen again till the following morning, for her wound had been opened afresh, and she spent the remainder of the day and evening in the solitude of her room. Martine was troubled at this, and thought she felt as he did.

In the morning she joined him on the piazza. She was pale from her long sad vigil, but renewed strength and a gentle patience were expressed in her thin face.

"It's too bad, Helen," he broke out in unwonted irritation. "I wouldn't have gone if I had known. It was a miserable letting down of all that had gone before that reference to me."

Now she smiled brightly as she said, "You are the only one present who thought so. Has this been worrying you?"

"Yes, it has. If the speaker had seen what I saw, he would have known better. His words only wounded me."

"He judged you by other men, Hobart. His words would not have wounded very many. I'm glad I heard that letter that I have learned what I never could from you. I'm very proud of my friend. What silly creatures women are, anyway! They want their friends to be brave, yet dread the consequences of their being so beyond words."

"Well," said Martine, a little grimly, "I'm going to my office to− morrow. I feel the need of a long course of reading in Blackstone."

"You must help keep me busy also," was her reply.

"I've thought about that; yes, a great deal. You need some wholesome, natural interest that is capable of becoming somewhat absorbing. Is it strange that I should recommend one phase of my hobby, flowers? You know that every tree, shrub, and plant on our little place is a sort of a pet with me. You are fond of flowers, but have never given much thought to their care, leaving that to your gardener. Flowers are only half enjoyed by those who do not cultivate them, nurse, or pet them. Then there is such an infinite variety that before you know it your thoughts are pleasantly occupied in experimenting with even one family of plants. It is an interest which will keep you much in the open air and bring you close to Mother Nature."

The result of this talk was that the sad−hearted girl first by resolute effort and then by a growing fondness for the tasks, began to take a personal interest in the daily welfare of her plants. Martine and her father were always on the look−out for something new and rare; and as winter approached, the former had a small conservatory built on the sunny side of the house. They also gave her several caged song−birds, which soon learned to recognize and

welcome her. From one of his clients Martine obtained a droll− looking dog that seemed to possess almost human intelligence. In the daily care of living things and dependent creatures that could bloom or be joyous without jarring upon her feelings, as would human mirth or gayety, her mind became wholesomely occupied part of each day; she could smile at objects which did not know, which could not understand.

Still, there was no effort on her part to escape sad memories or the acts and duties which revived them. A noble monument had been erected to Captain Nichol, and one of her chief pleasures was to decorate it with the flowers grown under her own care. Few days passed on which she did not visit one of the families who were or had been represented at the front, while Mrs. Nichol felt that if she had lost a son she had in a measure gained a daughter. As the months passed and winter was wellnigh spent, the wise gossips of the village again began to shake their heads and remark, "Helen Kemble and Bart Martine are very good friends; but I guess that's all it will amount to all, at any rate, for a long time."

All, for all time, Helen had honestly thought. It might easily have been for all time had another lover sought her, or if Martine himself had become a wooer and so put her on her guard. It was his patient acceptance of what she had said could not be helped, his self−forgetfulness, which caused her to remember his need a need greatly increased by a sad event. In the breaking up of winter his mother took a heavy cold which ended in pneumonia and death.

The gossips made many plans for him and indulged in many surmises as to what lie would do; but he merely engaged the services of an old woman as domestic, and lived on quietly as before. Perhaps he grew a little morbid after this bereavement and clung more closely to his lonely hearth.

This would not be strange. Those who dwell among shadows become ill at ease away from them. Helen was the first to discover this tendency, and to note that he was not rallying as she had hoped he would. He rarely sought their house except by invitation, and then often lapsed into silences which he broke with an evident effort. He never uttered a word of complaint or consciously appealed for sympathy, but was slowly yielding to the steady pressure of sadness which had almost been his heritage. She would have been less than woman if, recalling the past and knowing so well the unsatisfied love in his heart, she had not felt for him daily a larger and deeper commiseration. When the early March winds rattled the casements, or drove the sleety rain against the windows, she saw him in fancy sitting alone brooding, always brooding.

One day she asked abruptly, "Hobart, what are you thinking about so deeply when you are looking at the fire?"

A slow, deep flush came into his face, and he hesitated in his answer. At last he said, "I fear I'm getting into a bad mood, and think I must do something decided. Well, for one thing, the continuance of this war weighs upon my spirit. Men are getting so scarce that I believe they will take me in some capacity. Now that mother is not here, I think I ought to go."

"Oh, Hobart, we would miss you so!" she faltered.

He looked up with a smile. "Yes, Helen, I think you would not many others, though. You have become so brave and strong that you do not need me any more."

"I am not so brave and strong as I seem. If I were, how did I become so? With the tact and delicacy of a woman, yet with the strength of a man, you broke the crushing force of the first blow, and have helped me ever since."

"You see everything through a very friendly medium. At any rate I could not have been content a moment if I had not done all in my power. You do not need me any longer; you have become a source of strength to others. I cannot help seeing crowded hospital wards; and the thought pursues me that in one of them I might do something to restore a soldier to his place in the field or save him for those at home. I could at least be a hospital nurse, and I

believe it would be better for me to be doing some such work."

"I believe it would be better for me also," she answered, her eyes full of tears.

"No, Helen no, indeed. You have the higher mission of healing the heart−wounds which the war is making in your own vicinity. You should not think of leaving your father and mother in their old age, or of filling their days with anxiety which might shorten their lives."

"It will be very hard for us to let you go. Oh, I did not think I would have to face this also!"

He glanced at her hastily, for there was a sharp distress in her tone, of which she was scarcely conscious herself. Then, as if recollecting himself, he reasoned gently and earnestly: "You were not long in adopting the best antidote for trouble. In comforting others, you have been comforted. The campaign is opening in Virginia; and I think it would be a good and wholesome thing for me to be at work among the wounded. If I can save one life, it will be such a comfort after the war is over."

"Yes," she replied, softly; "the war will be over some day. Albert, in his last letter, said the war would cease, and that happy days of peace were coming. How they can ever be happy days to some I scarcely know; but he seemed to foresee the future when he wrote."

"Helen, I'm going. Perhaps the days of peace will be a little happier if I go."

CHAPTER V. SECOND BLOOM

Martine carried out his purpose almost immediately, seeking the temporary and most exposed hospitals on the extreme left of Grant's army before Petersburg. Indeed, while battles were still in progress he would make his way to the front and become the surgeon's tireless assistant. While thus engaged, even under the enemy's fire, he was able to render services to Jim Wetherby which probably saved the soldier's life. Jim lost his right arm, but found a nurse who did not let him want for anything till the danger point following amputation had passed. Before many weeks he was safe at home, and from him Helen learned more of Martine's quiet heroism than she could ever gather from his letters. In Jim Wetherby's estimation, Cap and Bart Martine were the two heroes of the war.

The latter had found the right antidote. Not a moment was left for morbid brooding. On every side were sharp physical distress, deadly peril to life and limb, pathetic efforts to hold ground against diseases or sloughing wounds. In aiding such endeavor, in giving moral support and physical care, Martine forgot himself. Helen's letters also were an increasing inspiration. He could scarcely take up one of them and say, "Here her words begin to have a warmer tinge of feeling;" but as spring advanced, imperceptibly yet surely, in spite of pauses and apparent retrogressions, just so surely she revealed a certain warmth of sympathy. He was engaged in a work which made it easy for her to idealize him. His unselfish effort to help men live, to keep bitter tears from the eyes of their relatives, appealed most powerfully to all that was unselfish in her nature, and she was beginning to ask, "If I can make this man happier, why should I not do so?" Nichol's letter gained a new meaning in the light of events: "I do not ask you to forget me that would be worse than death but I ask you to try to be happy and to make others happy."

"A noble, generous nature prompted those words," she now often mused. "How can I obey their spirit better than in rewarding the man who not only has done so much for me, but also at every cost sought to rescue him?"

In this growing disposition she had no innate repugnance to overcome, nor the shrinking which can neither be defined nor reasoned against. Accustomed to see him almost daily from childhood, conscious for years that he was giving her a love that was virtually homage, she found her heart growing very compassionate and ready to

yield the strong, quiet affection which she believed might satisfy him. This had come about through no effort on her part, from no seeking on his, but was the result of circumstances, the outgrowth of her best and most unselfish feelings.

But the effect began to separate itself in character from its causes. All that had gone before might explain why she was learning to love him, and be sufficient reason for this affection, but a woman's love, even that quiet phase developing in Helen's heart, is not like a man's conviction, for which he can give his clear−cut reasons. It is a tenderness for its object a wish to serve and give all in return for what it receives.

Martine vaguely felt this change in Helen long before he understood it. He saw only a warmer glow of sisterly affection, too high a valuation of his self−denying work, and a more generous attempt to give him all the solace and support within her power.

One day in July, when the war was well over and the field hospitals long since broken up, he wrote from Washington, where he was still pursuing his labors:

"My work is drawing to a close. Although I have not accomplished a tithe of what I wished to do, and have soon so much left undone, I am glad to remember that I have alleviated much pain and, I think, saved some lives. Such success as I have had, dear Helen, has largely been due to you. Your letters have been like manna. You do not know it would be impossible for you to know the strength they have given, the inspiration they have afforded. I am naturally very weary and worn physically, and the doctors say I must soon have rest; but your kind words have been life−giving to my soul. I turn to them from day to day as one would seek a cool, unfailing spring. I can now accept life gratefully with the conditions which cannot be changed. How fine is the influence of a woman like you! What deep springs of action it touches! When waiting on the sick and wounded, I try to blend your womanly nature with my coarser fibre. Truly, neither of us has suffered in vain if we learn better to minister to others. I cannot tell you how I long to see the home gardens again; and it now seems that just to watch you in yours will be unalloyed happiness."

Helen smiled over this letter with sweet, deep meanings in her eyes.

One August evening, as the Kemble family sat at tea, he gave them a joyous surprise by appearing at the door and asking in a matter− of−fact voice, "Can you put an extra plate on the table?"

There was no mistaking the gladness of her welcome, for it was as genuine as the bluff heartiness of her father and the gentle solicitude of her mother, who exclaimed, "Oh, Hobart, how thin and pale you are!"

"A few weeks' rest at home will remedy all that," he said. "The heat in Washington was more trying than my work."

"Well, thank the Lord! you ARE at home once more," cried the banker. "I was thinking of drawing on the authorities at Washington for a neighbor who had been loaned much too long."

"Helen," said Martine, with pleased eyes, "how well you look! It is a perfect delight to see color in your cheeks once more. They are gaining, too, their old lovely roundness. I'm going to say what I think right out, for I've been with soldiers so long that I've acquired their bluntness."

"It's that garden work you lured me into," she explained. "I hope you won't think your plants and trees have been neglected."

"Have you been keeping my pets from missing me?"

"I guess they have missed you least of all. Helen has seen to it that they were cared for first," said Mrs. Kemble, emphatically.

"You didn't write about that;" and he looked at the girl gratefully.

"Do you think I could see weeds and neglect just over the fence?" she asked, with a piquant toss of her head.

"Do you think I could believe that you cared for my garden only that your eyes might not be offended?"

"There, I only wished to give you a little surprise. You have treated us to one by walking in with such delightful unexpectedness, and so should understand. I'll show you when you are through supper."

"I'm through now;" and he rose with a promptness most pleasing to her. His gladness in recognizing old and carefully nurtured friends, his keen, appreciative interest in the new candidates for favor that she had planted, rewarded her abundantly.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "what a heavenly exchange from the close, fetid air of hospital wards! Could the first man have been more content in his divinely planted garden?"

She looked at him shyly and thought, "Perhaps when you taste of the fruit of knowledge the old story will have a new and better meaning."

She now regarded him with a new and wistful interest, no longer seeing him through the medium of friendship only. His face, thin and spiritualized, revealed his soul without disguise. It was the countenance of one who had won peace through the divine path of ministry healing others, himself had been healed. She saw also his unchanged, steadfast love shining like a gem over which flows a crystal current. Its ray was as serene as it was undimmed. It had taken its place as an imperishable quality in his character a place which it would retain without vicissitude unless some sign from her called it into immediate and strong manifestation. She was in no haste to give this. Time was touching her kindly; the sharp, cruel outlines of the past were softening in the distance, and she was content to remember that the treasure was hers when she was ready for it a treasure more valued daily.

With exultation she saw him honored by the entire community. Few days passed without new proofs of the hold he had gained on the deepest and best feelings of the people. She who once had pitied now looked up to him as the possessor of that manhood which the most faultless outward semblance can only suggest.

Love is a magician at whose touch the plainest features take on new aspects. Helen's face had never been plain. Even in its anguish it had produced in beholders the profound commiseration which is more readily given when beauty is sorrowful. Now that a new life at heart was expressing itself, Martine, as well as others, could not fail to note the subtile changes. While the dewy freshness of her girlish bloom was absent, the higher and more womanly qualities were now revealing themselves. Her nature had been deepened by her experiences, and the harmony of her life was all the sweeter for its minor chords.

To Martine she became a wonderful mystery, and he almost worshipped the woman whose love he believed buried in an unknown grave, but whose eyes were often so strangely kind. He resumed his old life, but no longer brooded at home, when the autumn winds began to blow. He recognized the old danger and shunned it resolutely. If he could not beguile his thoughts from Helen, it was but a step to her home, and her eyes always shone with a luminous welcome. Unless detained by study of the legal points of some case in hand, he usually found his way over to the Kemble fireside before the evening passed, and his friends encouraged him to come when he felt like it. The old banker found the young man exceedingly companionable, especially in his power to discuss intelligently the new financial conditions into which the country was passing. Helen would smile to herself as she watched the two men absorbed in questions she little understood, and observed her mother nodding drowsily over

her knitting. The scene was so peaceful, so cheery, so hopeful against the dark background of the past, that she could not refrain from gratitude. Her heart no longer ached with despairing sorrow, and the anxious, troubled expression had faded out of her parents' faces.

"Yes," she would murmur softly to herself, "Albert was right; the bloody war has ceased, and the happy days of peace are coming. Heaven has blessed him and made his memory doubly blessed, in that he had the heart to wish them to be happy, although he could not live to see them. Unconsciously he took the thorns out of the path which led to his friend and mine. How richly father enjoys Hobart's companionship! He will be scarcely less happy when he knows than yonder friend, who is such a very scrupulous friend. Indeed, how either is ever going to know I scarcely see, unless I make a formal statement."

Suddenly Martine turned, and caught sight of her expression.

"All I have for your thoughts! What wouldn't I give to know them!"

Her face became rosier than the firelight warranted as she laughed outright and shook her head.

"No matter," he said; "I am content to hear you laugh like that."

"Yes, yes," added the banker; "Helen's laugh is sweeter to me than any music I ever heard. Thank God! we all can laugh again. I am getting old, and in the course of nature must soon jog on to the better country. When that time comes, the only music I want to hear from earth is good, honest laughter."

"Now, papa, hush that talk right away," cried Helen, with glistening eyes.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Kemble asked, waking up.

"Nothing, my dear, only it's time for us old people to go to bed."

"Well, I own that it would be more becoming to sleep there than to reflect so unfavorably on your conversation. Of late years talk about money matters always puts me to sleep."

"That wasn't the case, was it, my dear, when we tried to stretch a thousand so it would reach from one January to another?"

"I remember," she replied, smiling and rolling up her knitting, "that we sometimes had to suspend specie payments. Ah, well, we were happy."

When left alone, it was Helen's turn to say, "Now your thoughts are wool−gathering. You don't see the fire when you look at it that way."

"No, I suppose not," replied Martine. "I'll be more frank than you. Your mother's words, 'We were happy,' left an echo in my mind. How experience varies! It is pleasant to think that there are many perfectly normal, happy lives like those of your father and mother."

"That's one thing I like in you, Hobart. You are so perfectly willing that others should be happy."

"Helen, I agree with your father. Your laugh WAS music, the sweetest I ever heard. I'm more than willing that you should be happy. Why should you not be? I have always felt that what he said was true what he said about the right to laugh after sorrow but it never seemed so true before. Who could wish to leave blighting sorrow after him? Who could sing in heaven if he knew that he had left tears which could not be dried on earth?"

"You couldn't," she replied with bowed head.

"Nor you, either; nor the brave man who died, to whom I only do justice in believing that he would only be happier could he hear your laugh. Your father's wholesome, hearty nature should teach us to banish every morbid tendency. Let your heart grow as light as it will, my friend. Your natural impulses will not lead you astray. Good−night."

"You feel sure of that?" she asked, giving him a hand that fluttered in his, and looking at him with a soft fire in her eyes.

"Oh, Helen, how distractingly beautiful you are! You are blooming again like your Jack−roses when the second growth pushes them into flower. There; I must go. If I had a stone in my breast instead of a heart Good−night. I won't be weak again."

CHAPTER VI. MORE THAN REWARD

Helen Kemble's character was simple and direct She was one who lived vividly in the passing hour, and had a greater capacity for deep emotions than for retaining them. The reputation for constancy is sometimes won by those incapable of strong convictions. A scratch upon a rock remains in all its sharpness, while the furrow that has gone deep into the heart of a field is eventually almost hidden by a new flowering growth. The truth was fully exemplified in Helen's case; and a willingness to marry her lifelong lover, prompted at first by a spirit of self−sacrifice, had become, under the influence of daily companionship, more than mere assent. While gratitude and the wish to see the light of a great, unexpected joy come into his eyes remained her chief motives, she had learned that she could attain a happiness herself, not hoped for once, in making him happy.

He was true to his word, after the interview described in the preceding chapter. He did not consciously reveal the unappeased hunger of his heart, but her intuition was never at fault a moment.

One Indian−summer−like morning, about the middle of October, he went over to her home and said, "Helen, what do you say to a long day's outing? The foliage is at its brightest, the air soft as that of June. Why not store up a lot of this sunshine for winter use?"

"Yes, Helen, go," urged her mother. "I can attend to everything."

"A long day, did you stipulate?" said the girl in ready assent; "that means we should take a lunch. I don't believe you ever thought of that."

"We could crack nuts, rob apple−orchards, or if driven to extremity, raid a farmhouse."

"You have heard too much from the soldiers about living off the country. I'd rather raid mamma's cupboard before we start. I'll be ready as soon as you are."

He soon appeared in his low, easy phaeton; and she joined him with the presentiment that there might be even greater gladness in his face by evening than it now expressed. While on the way to the brow of a distant hill which would be their lunching place, they either talked with the freedom of old friends or lapsed into long silences.

At last he asked, "Isn't it a little odd that when with you the sense of companionship is just as strong when you are not talking?"

"It's a comfort you are so easily entertained. Don't you think I'm a rather moderate talker for a woman?"

"Those that talk the most are often least entertaining. I've thought a good deal about it the unconscious influence of people on one another. I don't mean influence in any moral sense, but in the power to make one comfortable or uncomfortable, and to produce a sense of restfulness and content or to make one ill at ease and nervously desirous of escape."

"And you have actually no nervous desire to escape, no castings around in your mind for an excuse to turn around and drive home?"

"No one could give a surer answer to your question than yourself. I've been thinking of something pleasanter than my enjoyment."

"Well?"

"That your expression has been a very contented one during the last hour. I am coming to believe that you can accept my friendship without effort. You women are all such mysteries! One gets hold of a clew now and then. I have fancied that if you had started out in the spirit of self−sacrifice that I might have a pleasant time, you would be more conscious of your purpose. Even your tact might not have kept me from seeing that you were exerting yourself; but the very genius of the day seems to possess you. Nature is not exerting herself in the least. No breath of air is stirring; all storms are in the past or the future. With a smile on her face, she is just resting in serene content, as you were, I hope. She is softening and obscuring everything distant by an orange haze, so that the sunny present may be all the more real. Days like these will do you good, especially if your face and manner reveal that you can be as truly at rest as Nature."

"Yet what changes may soon pass over the placid scene!"

"Yes, but don't think of them."

"Well, I won't not now. Yes, you are becoming very penetrating. I am not exerting myself in the least to give you a pleasant time. I am just selfishly and lazily content."

"That fact gives me so much more than content that it makes me happy."

"Hobart, you are the most unselfish man I ever knew."

"Nonsense!"

They had reached their picnic−ground the edge of a grove whose bright−hued foliage still afforded a grateful shade. The horse was unharnessed and picketed so that he might have a long range for grazing. Then Martine brought the provision basket to the foot of a great oak, and sat down to wait for Helen, who had wandered away in search of wild flowers. At last she came with a handful of late−blooming closed gentians.

"I thought these would make an agreeable feature in your lunch."

"Oh, you are beginning to exert yourself."

"Yes, I have concluded to, a little. So must you, to the extent of making a fire. The rest will be woman's work. I propose to drink your health in a cup of coffee."

"Ah, this is unalloyed," he cried, sipping it later on.

"The coffee?"

"Yes, and everything. We don't foresee the bright days any more than the dark ones. I did not dream of this in Virginia."

"You are easily satisfied. The coffee is smoky, the lunch is cold, winter is coming, and "

"And I am very happy," he said.

"It would be a pity to disturb your serenity."

"Nothing shall disturb it to−day. Peace is one of the rarest experiences in this world. I mean only to remember that our armies are disbanded and that you are at rest, like Nature."

She had brought a little book of autumn poems, and after lunch read to him for an hour, he listening with the same expression of quiet satisfaction. As the day declined, she shivered slightly in the shade. He immediately arose and put a shawl around her.

"You are always shielding me," she said gently.

"One can do so little of that kind of thing," he replied, "not much more than show intent."

"Now you do yourself injustice." After a moment's hesitancy she added, "I am not quite in your mood to−day, and even Nature, as your ally, cannot make me forget or even wish to forget."

"I do not wish you to forget, but merely cease to remember for a little while. You say Nature is my ally. Listen: already the wind is beginning to sigh in the branches overhead. The sound is low and mournful, as if full of regret for the past and forebodings for the future. There is a change coming. All that I wished or could expect in you was that this serene, quiet day would give you a respite that complete repose in which the wounded spirit is more rapidly healed and strengthened for the future."

"Have you been strengthened? Have you no fears for the future?"

"No fears, Helen. My life is strong in its negation. The man who is agitated by hopes and fears, who is doomed to disappointments, is the one who has not recognized his limitations, who has not accepted well−defined conditions."

"Hobart, I'm going to put you on your honor now. Remember, and do not answer hastily," and her gaze into his face was searching. Although quiet and perfectly self−controlled, the rich color mounted to her very brow.

"Well, Helen," he asked wonderingly.

"Imagine it possible," she continued with the same earnest gaze, "that you were a woman who has loved as I have loved, and lost as I have. The circumstances are all known, and you have only to recall them. If a man had loved you as you have loved me "

"But, Helen, can you not believe in a love so strong that it does not ask "

By a gesture she checked him and repeated, "But if a man had loved you as you have loved me remember now, on your honor would you permit him to love with no better reward than the consciousness of being a solace, a help, a sort of buffer between you and the ills of life?"

"But, Helen, I am more than that: I am your friend."

"Indeed you are, the best a woman ever had, or I could not speak as I am doing. Yet what I say is true. From the first it has been your sleepless aim to stand between me and trouble. What have I ever done for you?"

"In giving me your friendship "

Again she interrupted him, saying, "That virtually means giving you the chance for continued self−sacrifice. Any man or woman in the land would give you friendship on such terms, YOUR terms with me. But you do not answer my question; yet you have answered it over and over again. Were you in my place with your unselfish nature, you could not take so very much without an inevitable longing to return all in your power."

He was deeply agitated. Burying his face in his hands, he said hoarsely, "I must not look at you, or my duty may be too hard. Ah, you are banishing peace and serenity now with a vengeance! I recognize your motive whither your thoughts are tending. Your conscience, your pity, your exaggerated gratitude are driving you to contemplate a self−sacrifice compared with which mine is as nothing. Yet the possibility of what you suggest is so sweet, so oh, it is like the reward of heaven for a brief life!" Then he bowed his head lower and added slowly, as if the words were forced from him, "No, Helen, you shall not reward me. I cannot take as pay, or 'return,' as you express it, the reward that you are meditating. I must not remember in after years that my efforts in your behalf piled up such a burdensome sense of obligation that there was but one escape from it."

She came to his side, and removing his hands from his face, retained one of them as she said, gently, "Hobart, I am no longer a shy girl. I have suffered too deeply, I have learned too thoroughly how life may be robbed of happiness, and for a time, almost of hope, not to see the folly of letting the years slip away, unproductive of half what they might yield to you and me. I understand you; you do not understand me, probably because your ideal is too high. You employed an illustration in the narrowest meaning. Is heaven given only as a reward? Is not every true gift an expression of something back of the gift, more than the gift?"

"Helen!"

"Yes, Hobart, in my wish to make you happier I am not bent on unredeemed self−sacrifice. You have been the most skilful of wooers."

"And you are the divinest of mysteries. How have I wooed you?"

"By not wooing at all, by taking a course which compelled my heart to plead your cause, by giving unselfish devotion so unstintedly that like the rain and dew of heaven, it has fostered a new life in my heart, different from the old, yet sweet, real, and precious. I have learned that I can be happier in making you happy. Oh, I shall be no martyr. Am I inconstant because time and your ministry have healed the old wound because the steady warmth and glow of your love has kindled mine?"

He regarded her with a gaze so rapt, so reverent, so expressive of immeasurable gratitude that her eyes filled with tears. "I think you do understand me," she whispered.

He kissed her hand in homage as he replied, "A joy like this is almost as hard to comprehend at first as an equally great sorrow. My garden teaches me to understand you. A perfect flower−stalk is suddenly and rudely broken. Instead of dying, it eventually sends out a little side−shoot which gives what bloom it can."

"And you will be content with what it can give?"

"I shall be glad with a happiness which almost terrifies me. Only God knows how I have longed for this."

That evening the old banker scarcely ceased rubbing his hands in general felicitation, while practical, housewifely Mrs. Kemble already began to plan what she intended to do toward establishing Helen in the adjoining cottage.

Now that Martine believed his great happiness possible, he was eager for its consummation. At his request the 1st of December was named as the wedding day. "The best that a fireside and evening lamp ever suggested will then come true to me," ha urged. "Since this can be, life is too short that it should not be soon."

Helen readily yielded. Indeed, they were all so absorbed in planning for his happiness as to be oblivious of the rising storm. When at last the girl went to her room, the wind sighed and wailed so mournfully around the house as to produce a feeling of depression and foreboding.

CHAPTER VII. YANKEE BLANK

The wild night storm which followed the most memorable day of his life had no power to depress Martine. In the wavy flames and glowing coals of his open fire he saw heavenly pictures of the future. He drew his mother's low chair to the hearth, and his kindled fancy placed Helen in it. Memory could so reproduce her lovely and familiar features that her presence became almost a reality. In a sense he watched her changing expression and heard her low, mellow tones. The truth that both would express an affection akin to his own grew upon his consciousness like the incoming of a sun−lighted tide. The darkness and storm without became only the background of his pictures, enhancing every prophetic representation. The night passed in ecstatic waking dreams of all that the word "home" suggests when a woman, loved as he loved Helen, was its architect.

The days and weeks which followed were filled with divine enchantment; the prosaic world was transfigured; the intricacies of the law were luminous with the sheen of gold, becoming the quartz veins from which he would mine wealth for Helen; the plants in his little rose−house were cared for with caressing tenderness because they gave buds which would be worn over the heart now throbbing for him. Never did mortal know such unalloyed happiness as blessed Martine, as he became daily more convinced that Helen was not giving herself to him merely from the promptings of compassion.

At times, when she did not know he was listening, he heard her low, sweet laugh; and it had a joyous ring and melody which repeated itself like a haunting refrain of music. He would say smilingly, "It is circumstantial evidence, equivalent to direct proof."

Helen and her mother almost took possession of his house while he was absent at his office, refurnishing and transforming it, yet retaining with reverent memory what was essentially associated with Mrs. Martine. The changing aspects of the house did not banish the old sense of familiarity, but were rather like the apple−tree in the corner of the garden when budding into new foliage and flower. The banker's purse was ever open for all this renovation, but Martine jealously persisted in his resolve to meet every expense himself. Witnessing his gladness and satisfaction, they let him have his way, he meanwhile exulting over Helen's absorbed interest in the adornment of her future home.

The entire village had a friendly concern in the approaching wedding; and the aged gossips never tired of saying, "I told you so," believing that they understood precisely how it had all come about. Even Mrs. Nichol aquiesced with a few deep sighs, assuring herself, "I suppose it's natural. I'd rather it was Bart Martine than anybody else."

A few days before the 1st of December, Martine received a telegram from an aged uncle residing in a distant State. It conveyed a request hard to comply with, yet he did not see how it could be evaded. The despatch was delivered in the evening while he was at the Kembles', and its effect upon the little group was like a bolt out of a clear sky. It ran:

"Your cousin dangerously ill at Hospital, Washington. Go to him at once, if possible, and telegraph me to come, if necessary."

Hobart explained that this cousin had remained in the army from choice, and that his father, old and feeble, naturally shrank from a journey to which he was scarcely equal. "My hospital experience," he concluded, "leads him to think that I am just the one to go, especially as I can get there much sooner than he. I suppose he is right. Indeed, I do not know of any one else whom he could call upon. It certainly is a very painful duty at this time."

"I can't endure to think of it," Helen exclaimed.

"It's a clear question of conscience, Helen," he replied gently. "Many years have passed since I saw this cousin, yet he, and still more strongly his father, have the claims of kinship. If anything should happen which my presence could avert, you know we should both feel bad. It would be a cloud upon our happiness. If this request had come before you had changed everything for me, you know I would have gone without a moment's hesitation. Very gratitude should make me more ready for duty;" yet he signed deeply.

"But it may delay the wedding, for which the invitations have gone out," protested Mrs. Kemble.

"Possibly it may, if my cousin's life is in danger." Then, brightening up, he added: "Perhaps I shall find that I can leave him in good care for a short time, and then we can go to Washington on our wedding trip. I would like to gain associations with that city different from those I now have."

"Come now," said the banker, hopefully, "if we must face this thing, we must. The probabilities are that it will turn out as Hobart says. At worst it can only be a sad interruption and episode. Hobart will be better satisfied in the end if he does what he now thinks his duty."

"Yours is the right view," assented the young man, firmly. "I shall take the midnight train, and telegraph as soon as I have seen my cousin and the hospital surgeon."

He went home and hastily made his preparations; then, with valise in hand, returned to the Kembles'. The old people bade him Godspeed on his journey, and considerately left him with his affianced.

"Hobart," Helen entreated, as they were parting, "be more than ordinarily prudent. Do not take any risks, even the most trivial, unless you feel you must. Perhaps I'm weak and foolish, but I'm possessed with a strange, nervous dread. This sudden call of duty− −for so I suppose I must look upon it seems so inopportune;" and she hid her tears on his shoulder.

"You are taking it much too seriously, darling," he said, gently drawing her closer to him.

"Yes, my reason tells me that I am. You are only going on a brief journey, facing nothing that can be called danger. Yet I speak as I feel I cannot help feeling. Give me glad reassurance by returning quickly and safely. Then hereafter I will laugh at forebodings."

"There, you need not wait till I reach Washington. You shall hear from me in the morning, and I will also telegraph when I have opportunity on my journey."

"Please do so, and remember that I could not endure to have my life impoverished again."

Late the following evening, Martine inquired his way to the bedside of his cousin, and was glad indeed to find him convalescent. His own experienced eyes, together with the statement of the sick man and wardmaster, convinced him that the danger point was well passed. In immense relief of mind he said cheerily, "I will watch

to−night"; and so it was arranged.

His cousin, soothed and hushed in his desire to talk, soon dropped into quiet slumber, while Martine's thronging thoughts banished the sense of drowsiness. A shaded lamp burned near, making a circle of light and leaving the rest of the ward dim and shadowy. The scene was very familiar, and it was an easy effort for his imagination to place in the adjoining cots the patients with whom, months before, he had fought the winning or losing battle of life. While memory sometimes went back compassionately to those sufferers, his thoughts dwelt chiefly upon the near future, with its certainty of happiness a happiness doubly appreciated because his renewed experience in the old conditions of his life made the home which awaited him all the sweeter from contrast. He could scarcely believe that he was the same man who in places like this had sought to forget the pain of bereavement and of denial of his dearest wish he who in the morning would telegraph Helen that the wedding need not even be postponed, or any change made in their plans.

The hours were passing almost unnoted, when a patient beyond the circle of light feebly called for water. Almost mechanically Hobart rose to get it, when a man wearing carpet slippers and an old dressing−gown shuffled noiselessly into view.

"Captain Nichol!" gasped Martine, sinking back, faint and trembling, in his chair.

The man paid no attention, but passed through the circle of light to the patient, gave him a drink, and turned. Martine stared with the paralysis of one looking upon an apparition.

When the figure was opposite to him, he again ejaculated hoarsely, "Captain Nichol!"

The form in slippers and gray ghostly dressing−gown turned sleepy eyes upon him without the slightest sign of recognition, passed on, and disappeared among the shadows near the wardmaster's room.

A blending of relief and fearful doubt agitated Martine. He knew he had been wide awake and in the possession of every faculty that his imagination had been playing him no tricks. He was not even thinking of Nichol at the time; yet the impression that he had looked upon and spoken to his old schoolmate, to Helen's dead lover, had been as strong as it was instantaneous. When the man had turned, there had been an unnatural expression, which in a measure dispelled the illusion. After a moment of thought which scorched his brain, he rose and followed the man's steps, and was in time to see him rolling himself in his blanket on the cot nearest the door. From violent agitation, Martine unconsciously shook the figure outlined in the blanket roughly, as he asked, "What's your name?"

"Yankee Blank, doggone yer! Kyant you wake a feller 'thout yankin' 'im out o' baid? What yer want?"

"Great God!" muttered Hobart, tottering back to his seat beside his sleeping cousin, "was there ever such a horrible, mocking suggestion of one man in another? Yankee Blank what a name! Southern accent and vernacular, yet Nichol's voice! Such similarity combined with such dissimilarity is like a nightmare. Of course it's not Nichol. He was killed nearly two years ago. I'd be more than human if I could wish him back now; but never in my life have I been so shocked and startled. This apparition must account for itself in the morning."

But he could not wait till morning; he could not control himself five minutes. He felt that he must banish that horrible semblance of Nichol from his mind by convincing himself of its absurdity.

He waited a few moments in order to compose his nerves, and then returned. The man had evidently gone to sleep.

"What a fool I am!" Martine again muttered. "Let the poor fellow sleep. The fact that he doesn't know me is proof enough. The idea of wanting any proof! I can investigate his case in the morning, and, no doubt, in broad light that astonishing suggestion of Nichol will disappear."

He was about to turn away when the patient who had called for water groaned slightly. As if his ears were as sensitive to such sounds as those of a mother who hears her child even when it stirs, the man arose. Seeing Martine standing by him, he asked in slight irritation, "What yer want? Why kyant yer say what yer want en have done 'th it? Lemme 'tend ter that feller yander firs'. We uns don't want no mo' stiffs;" and he shuffled with a peculiar, noiseless tread to the patient whose case seemed on his mind. Martine followed, his very hair rising at the well−remembered tones, and the mysterious principle of identity again revealed within the circle of light.

"This is simply horrible!" he groaned inwardly, "and I must have that man account for himself instantly."

"Now I'll 'tend ter yer, but yer mout let a feller sleep when he kin,"

"Don't you know me?" faltered Martine, overpowered.

"Naw."

"Please tell me your real name, not your nickname."

"Ain' got no name 'cept Yankee Blank. What's the matter with yer, anyhow?"

"Didn't you ever hear of Captain Nichol?"

"Reckon not. Mout have. I've nussed mo' cap'ins than I kin reckerlect."

"Are you a hospital nurse?"

"Sorter 'spect I am. That's what I does, anyhow. Have you anything agin it? Don't yer come 'ferin' round with me less yer a doctor, astin' no end o' questions. Air you a new doctor?"

"My name is Hobart Martine," the speaker forced himself to say, expecting fearfully a sign of recognition, for the impression that it was Nichol grew upon him every moment, in spite of apparent proof to the contrary.

"Hump! Hob't Ma'tine. Never yeared on yer. Ef yer want ter chin mo' in the mawnin', I'll be yere."

"Wait a moment, Yan "

"Yankee Blank, I tole yer."

"Well, here's a dollar for the trouble I'm making you," and Martine's face flushed with shame at the act, so divided was his impression about the man.

Yankee Blank took the money readily, grinned, and said, "Now I'll chin till mawnin' ef yer wants hit."

"I won't keep you long. You remind me of of well, of Captain Nichol."

"He must 'a' been a cur'ous chap. Folks all say I'm a cur'ous chap."

"Won't you please tell me all that you can remember about yourself?"

"'Tain't much. Short hoss soon curried. Allus ben in hospitals. Had high ole jinks with a wound on my haid. Piece o' shell, they sez, cut me yere," and he pointed to a scar across his forehead. "That's what they tole me. Lor'! I couldn't mek much out o' the gibberish I firs' year, en they sez I talked gibberish too. But I soon got the hang o' the talk in the hospital. Well, ez I wuz sayin', I've allus been in hospitals firs' one, then anuther. I got well, en the sojers call me Yankee Blank en set me waitin' on sick uns en the wounded. That's what I'm a−doin' now."

"You were in Southern hospitals?"

"I reckon. They called the place Richman."

"Why did you come here?"

"Kaze I wuz bro't yere. They said I was 'changed."

"Exchanged, wasn't it?"

"Reckon it was. Anyhow I wuz bro't yere with a lot o' sick fellers. I wuzn't sick. For a long time the doctors kep' a− pesterin' me with questions, but they lemme 'lone now. I 'spected you wuz a new doctor, en at it agin."

"Don't you remember the village of Alton?"

The man shook his head.

"Don't you " and Martine's voice grew husky "don't you remember Helen Kemble?"

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Never yeared on her. I only reckerlect people I've seen in hospitals. Women come foolin' roun' some days, but Lor'! I kin beat any on 'em teekin' keer o' the patients; en wen they dies, I kin lay 'em out. You ast the wardmaster ef I kant lay out a stiff with the best o' 'em."

"That will do. You can go to sleep now."

"All right, Doc. I call everybody doc who asts sech a lot o' questions." He shuffled to his cot and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER VIII. "HOW CAN I?"

Martine sank into his chair again. Although the conversation had been carried on in low tones, it was the voice of Nichol that he had heard. Closer inspection of the slightly disfigured face proved that, apart from the scar on the forehead, it was the countenance of Nichol. A possible solution of the mystery was beginning to force itself in Hobart's reluctant mind. When Nichol had fallen in the Wilderness, the shock of his injury had rendered him senseless and caused him to appear dead to the hasty scrutiny of Sam and Jim Wetherby. They were terribly excited and had no time for close examination. Nichol might have revived, have been gathered up with the Confederate wounded, and sent to Richmond. There was dire and tremendous confusion at that period, when within the space of two or three days tens of thousands were either killed or disabled. In a Southern hospital Nichol might have recovered physical health while, from injury to the brain, suffering complete eclipse of memory. In this case he would have to begin life anew, like a child, and so would pick up the vernacular and bearing of the enlisted men with whom he would chiefly associate.

Because he remembered nothing and know nothing, he may at first have been tolerated as a "cur'ous chap," then employed as he had explained. He could take the place of a better man where men were greatly needed.

This theory could solve the problem; and Martine's hospital experience prepared his mind to understand what would be a hopeless mystery to many. He was so fearfully excited that be could not remain in the ward. The very proximity to this strange being, who had virtually risen from the dead and appeared to him of all others, was a sort of torture in itself.

What effect would this discovery have on his relations to Helen? He dared not think yet he must think. Already the temptation of his life was forming in his mind. His cousin was sleeping; and with a wild impatience to escape, to get away from all his kind, he stole noiselessly out into the midnight and deserted streets. On, on he went, limping he knew not, cared not where, for his passion and mental agony drove him hither and thither like a leaf before a fitful gale.

"No one knows of this," he groaned. "I can still return and marry Helen. But oh, what a secret to carry!"

Then his heart pleaded. "This is not the lover she lost only a horrible, mocking semblance. He has lost his own identity; he does not even know himself would not know her. Ah! I'm not sure of that. I would be dead indeed if her dear features did not kindle my eyes in recognition. It may be that the sight of her face is the one thing essential to restore him. I feel this would be true were it my case. But how can I give her up now? How can? how can I? Oh, this terrible journey! No wonder Helen had forebodings. She loves me; she is mine. No one else has so good a right. We were to be married only a few hours hence. Then she whom I've loved from childhood would make my home a heaves on earth. And yet and yet " Even in the darkness he buried his face in his hands, shuddered, moaned, writhed, and grated his teeth in the torment of the conflict.

Hour after hour he wavered, now on the point of yielding, then stung by conscience into desperate uncertainty. The night was cold, the howling wind would have chilled him at another time, but during his struggle great drops of sweat often poured from his face. Only the eye of God saw that battle, the hardest that was fought and won during the war.

At last, when well out of the city, he lifted his agonized eyes and saw the beautiful hues of morning tingeing the east. Unconsciously, he repeated the sublime, creative words, "Let there be light." It came to him. With the vanishing darkness, he revolted finally against the thought of any shadows existing between him and Helen. She should have all the light that he had, and decide her own course. He had little hope that she would wed him, even if she did not marry Nichol in his present condition a condition probably only temporary and amenable to skilful treatment.

Wearily he dragged his lame foot back to a hotel in the populous party of the city, and obtained food and wine, for he was terribly exhausted. Next he telegraphed Mr. Kemble:

"Arrived last evening. The wedding will have to be postponed. Will explain later."

"It's the best I can do now," he muttered. "Helen will think it is all due to my cousin's illness." Then he returned to the hospital and found his relative in a state of wonderment at his absence, but refreshed from a good night's rest. Yankee Blank was nowhere to be seen.

"Hobart," exclaimed his cousin, "you look ill ten years older than you did last night."

"You see me now by daylight," was the quiet reply. "I am not very well."

"It's a perfect shame that I've been the cause of so much trouble, especially when it wasn't necessary."

"Oh, my God!" thought Martine, "there was even no need of this fatal journey." But his face had become grave and inscrutable, and the plea of ill−health reconciled his cousin to the necessity of immediate return. There was no good reason for his remaining, for by a few additional arrangements his relative would do very well and soon be able to take care of himself. Martine felt that lie could not jeopardize his hard−won victory by delay, which was as torturing as the time intervening between a desperate surgical operation and the knowledge that it is inevitable.

After seeing that his cousin made a good breakfast, he sought a private interview with the wardmaster. He was able to extract but little information about Yankee Blank more than the man had given himself. "Doctors say he may regain his memory at any time, or it may be a long while, and possibly never," was the conclusion.

"I think I know him," said Martine. "I will bring physician from the city to consult this morning with the surgeon in charge."

"I'm glad to hear it," was the reply. "Something would have to be done soon. He is just staying on here and making himself useful to some extent."

When Martine re−entered the ward, Yankee Blank appeared, grinned, and said affably, "Howdy." Alas! a forlorn, miserable hope that he might have been mistaken was banished from Hobart's mind now that he saw Nichol in the clear light of day. The scar across his forehead and a change of expression, denoting the eclipse of fine, cultivated manhood, could not disguise the unmistakable features. There was nothing to be done but carry out as quickly as possible the purpose which had cost him so dear.

He first telegraphed his uncle to dismiss further anxiety, and that his son would soon be able to visit him. Then the heavy− hearted man sought a physician whom he knew well by reputation.

The consultation was held, and Nichol (as he may be more properly named hereafter) was closely questioned and carefully examined. The result merely confirmed previous impressions. It was explained, as far as explanation can be given of the mysterious functions of the brain, that either the concussion of the exploding shell or the wound from a flying fragment had paralyzed the organ of memory. When such paralysis would cease, if ever, no one could tell. The power to recall everything might return at any moment or it might be delayed indefinitely. A shock, a familiar face, might supply the potency required, or restoration come through the slow, unseen processes of nature. Martine believed that Helen's face and voice would accomplish everything.

He was well known to the medical authorities and had no difficulty in securing belief that he had identified Nichol. He also promised that abundant additional proof should be sent on from Alton, such certainty being necessary to secure the officer's back pay and proper discharge from the service. The surgeon then addressed the man so strangely disabled, "You know I'm in charge of this hospital?"

"I reckon," replied Nichol, anxiously, for the brief experience which he could recall had taught him that the authority of the surgeon−in−chief was autocratic.

"Well, first, you must give up the name of Yankee Blank. Your name hereafter is Captain Nichol."

"All right, Doctor. I'll be a gin'ral ef you sez so."

"Very well; remember your name is Captain Nichol. Next, you must obey this man and go with him. You must do just what he says in all respects. His name is Mr. Hobart Martine."

"Yes, he tole me las' night, Hob't Ma'tine. He took on mighty cur'ous after seein' me."

"Do you understand that you are to mind, to obey him in all respects just as you have obeyed me?"

"I reckon. Will he tek me to anuther hospital?"

"He will take you where you will be well cared for and treated kindly." Having written Nichol's discharge from the hospital, the surgeon turned to other duties.

Martine informed his cousin, as far as it was essential, of the discovery he had made and of the duties which it imposed, then took his leave. Nichol readily accompanied him, and with the exception of a tendency to irritation at little things, exhibited much of the good−natured docility of a child. Martine took him to a hotel, saw that he had a bath, put him in the hands of a barber, and then sent for a clothier. When dressed in clean linen and a dark civilian suit, the appearance of the man was greatly improved. Hobart had set his teeth, and would entertain no thought of compromise with his conscience. He would do by Nichol as he would wish to be done by if their relations were reversed. Helen should receive no greater shock than was inevitable, nor should Nichol lose the advantage of appearing before her in the outward aspect of a gentleman.

Martine then planned his departure so that he would arrive at Alton in the evening the evening of the day on which he was to have been married. He felt that Mr. Kemble should see Nichol first and hear the strange story; also that the father must break the news to the daughter, for he could not. It was a terrible journey to the poor fellow, for during the long hours of inaction he was compelled to face the probable results of his discovery. The sight of Nichol and his manner was intolerable; and in addition, he was almost as much care as a child. Everything struck him as new and strange, and he was disposed to ask numberless questions. His vernacular, his alternations of amusement and irritation, and the oddity of his ignorance concerning things which should be simple or familiar to a grown man, attracted the attention of his fellow− passengers. It was with difficulty that Martine, by his stern, sad face and a cold, repelling manner, kept curiosity from intruding at every point.

At last, with heart beating thickly, he saw the lights of Alton gleaming in the distance. It was a train not often used by the villagers, and fortunately no one had entered the car who knew him; even the conductor was a stranger. Alighting at the depot, he hastily took a carriage, and with his charge was driven to the private entrance of the hotel. Having given the hackman an extra dollar not to mention his arrival till morning, he took Nichol into the dimly−lighted and deserted parlor and sent for the well− known landlord. Mr. Jackson, a bustling little man, who, between the gossip of the place and his few guests, never seemed to have a moment's quiet, soon entered. "Why, Mr. Martine," he exclaimed, "we wasn't a−lookin' for you yet. News got around somehow that your cousin was dyin' in Washington and that your weddin' was put off too Why! you look like a ghost, even in this light," and he turned up the lamp.

Martine had told Nichol to stand by a window with his back to the door. He now turned the key, pulled down the curtain, then drew his charge forward where the light fell clear upon his face, and asked, "Jackson, who is that?"

The landlord stared, his jaw fell from sheer astonishment, as he faltered, "Captain Nichol!"

"Yes," said Nichol, with a pleased grin, "that's my new name! Jes' got it, like this new suit o' clo's, bes' I ever had, doggoned ef they ain't. My old name was Yankee Blank."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Jackson; "is he crazy?"

"Look yere," cried Nichol; "don' yer call me crazy or I'll light on yer so yer won't fergit it."

"There, there!" said Martine, soothingly, "Mr. Jackson doesn't mean any harm. He's only surprised to see you home again."

"Is this home? What's home?"

"It's the town where you were brought up. We'll make you understand about it all before long. Now you shall have some supper. Mr. Jackson is a warm friend of yours, and will see that you have a good one."

"I reckon we'll get on ef he gives me plenty o' fodder. Bring it toreckly, fer I'm hungry. Quit yer starin', kyant yer?" "Don't you know me, Captain Nichol? Why, I "

"Naw. Never seed ner yeared on yer. Did I ever nuss yer in a hospital? I kyant reckerlect all on 'em. Get we uns some supper."

"That's the thing to do first, Jackson," added Martine, "Show us upstairs to a private room and wait on us yourself. Please say nothing of this till I give you permission."

They were soon established in a suitable apartment, in which a fire was kindled. Nichol took a rocking−chair and acquiesced in Martine's going out on the pretext of hastening supper.

The landlord received explanations which enabled him to co−operate with Martine. "I could not," said the latter, "take him to his own home without first preparing his family. Neither could I take him to mine for several reasons."

"I can understand some of 'em, Mr. Martine. Why, great Scott! How about your marriage, now that "

"We won't discuss that subject. The one thing for you to keep in mind is that Nichol lost his memory at the time of his wound. He don't like to be stared at or thought strange. You must humor him much as you would a child. Perhaps the sight of familiar faces and scenes will restore him. Now copy this note in your handwriting and send it to Mr. Kemble. Tell your messenger to be sure to put it into the banker's hands and no other's," and he tore from his note−book a leaf on which was pencilled the following words:

"MR. KEMBLE:

"DEAR SIR A sick man at the hotel wishes to see you on important business. Don't think it's bad news about Mr. Martine, because it isn't. Please come at once and oblige, HENRY JACKSON."

CHAPTER IX. SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

This first day of winter, her fatal wedding−day, was a sad and strange one to Helen Kemble. The sun was hidden by dark clouds, yet no snow fell on the frozen ground. She had wakened in the morning with a start, oppressed by a disagreeable yet forgotten dream. Hastily dressing, she consoled herself with the hope of a long letter from Martine, explaining everything and assuring her of his welfare; but the early mail brought nothing. As the morning advanced, a telegram from Washington, purposely delayed, merely informed her that her affianced was well and that full information was on its way.

"He has evidently found his cousin very low, and needing constant care," she had sighingly remarked at dinner.

"Yes, Nellie," said the banker, cheerily, "but it is a comfort he is well. No doubt you are right about his cousin, and it has turned out as Hobart feared. In this case it is well he went, for he would always have reproached himself if he had not. The evening mail will probably make all clear."

"It has been so unfortunate!" complained Mrs. Kemble. "If it had only happened a little earlier, or a little later! To have all one's preparations upset and one's plans frustrated is exasperating. Were it not for that journey, Helen would have been married by this time. People come ostensibly to express sympathy, but in reality to ask

questions."

"I don't care about people," said Helen, "but the day has been so different from what we expected that it's hard not to yield to a presentiment of trouble. It is so dark and gloomy that we almost need a lamp at midday."

"Well, well," cried hearty Mr. Kemble, "I'm not going to cross any bridges till I come to them. That telegram from Hobart is all we need, to date. I look at things as I do at a bank−bill. If its face is all right, and the bill itself all right, that's enough. You women−folks have such a lot of moods and tenses! Look at this matter sensibly. Hobart was right in going. He's doing his duty, and soon will be back with mind and conscience at rest. It isn't as if he were ill himself."

"Yes, papa, that's just the difference; we women feel, and you men reason. What you say, though, is a good wholesome antidote. I fear I'm a little morbid to−day."

After dinner she and her mother slipped over to the adjoining cottage, which had been made so pretty for her reception. While Mrs. Kemble busied herself here and there, Helen kindled a fire on the hearth of the sitting−room and sat down in the low chair which she knew was designed for her. The belief that she would occupy it daily and be at home, happy herself and, better far, making another, to whom she owed so much, happy beyond even his fondest hope, brought smiles to her face as she watched the flickering blaze.

"Yes," she murmured, "I can make him happier even than he dreams. I know him so well, his tastes, his habits, what he most enjoys, that it will be an easy task to anticipate his wishes and enrich his life. Then he has been such a faithful, devoted friend! He shall learn that his example had not been lost on me,"

At this moment the wind rose in such a long mournful, human−like sigh about the house that she started up and almost shuddered. When the evening mail came and brought no letter, she found it hard indeed not to yield to deep depression. In vain her father reasoned with her. "I know all you say sounds true to the ear," she said, "but not to my heart. I can't help it; but I am oppressed with a nervous dread of some impending trouble."

They passed the early hours of the evening as best they could, seeking to divert each other's thoughts. It had been long since the kind old banker was so garrulous, and Helen resolved to reward him by keeping up. Indeed, she shrank from retiring, feeling that through the sleepless night she would be the prey of all sorts of wretched fancies. Never once did her wildest thoughts suggest what had happened, or warn her of the tempest soon to rage in her breast.

Then came the late messenger with the landlord's copied note. She snatched it from the bearer's hand before he could ring the bell, for her straining ears had heard his step even on the gravel walk. Tremblingly she tore open, the envelope in the hall without looking at the address.

"Mr. Jackson said how I was to give it to your father," protested the messenger.

"Well, well," responded Mr. Kemble, perturbed and anxious, "I'm here. You can go unless there's an answer required.'

"Wasn't told nothin' 'bout one," growled the departing errand−boy.

"Give the note to me, Helen," said her father. "Why do you stare at it so?"

She handed it to him without a word, but looked searchingly in his face, and so did his wife, who had joined him.

"Why, this is rather strange," he said.

"I think it is," added Helen, emphatically.

Mrs. Kemble took the note and after a moment ejaculated: "Well, thank the Lord! it isn't about Hobart."

"No, no," said the banker, almost irritably. "We've all worried about Hobart till in danger of making fools of ourselves. As if people never get sick and send for relatives, or as if letters were never delayed! Why, bless me! haven't we heard to−day that he was well? and hasn't Jackson, who knows more about other people's business than his own, been considerate enough to say that his request has nothing to do with Hobart? It is just as he says, some one is sick and wants to arrange about money matters before banking hours to−morrow. There, it isn't far. I'll soon be back."

"Let me go with you, father," pleaded Helen. "I can stay with Mrs. Jackson or sit in the parlor till you are through."

"Oh, no, indeed."

"Papa, I AM going with you," said Helen, half−desperately. "I don't believe I am so troubled for nothing. Perhaps it's a merciful warning, and I may be of use to you."

"Oh, let her go, father," said his wife. "She had better be with you than nervously worrying at home. I'll be better satisfied if she is with you."

"Bundle up well, then, and come along, you silly little girl."

Nichol was too agreeably occupied with his supper to miss Hobart, who watched in the darkened parlor for the coming of Mr. Kemble. At last he saw the banker passing through the light streaming from a shop−window, and also recognized Helen at his side. His ruse in sending a note purporting to come from the landlord had evidently failed; and here was a new complication. He was so exhausted in body and mind that he felt he could not meet the girl now without giving way utterly. Hastily returning to the room in which were Nichol and Jackson, he summoned the latter and said, "Unfortunately, Miss Kemble is coming with her father. Keep your counsel; give me a light in another private room; detain the young lady in the parlor, and then, bring Mr. Kemble to me."

"Ah, glad to see you, Mr. Kemble," said the landlord, a moment or two later, with reassuring cheerfulness; "you too, Miss Helen. That's right, take good care of the old gentleman. Yes, we have a sick man here who wants to see you, sir. Miss Helen, take a seat in the parlor by the fire while I turn up the lamp. Guess you won't have to wait long."

"Now, Helen," said her father, smiling at her significantly, "can you trust me out of your sight to go upstairs with Mr. Jackson?"

Much relieved, she smiled in return and sat down to wait.

"Who is this man, Jackson?" Mr. Kemble asked on the stairs.

"Well, sir, he said he would explain everything."

A moment later the banker needed not Martine's warning gesture enjoining silence, for he was speechless with astonishment.

"Mr. Jackson," whispered Martine, "will you please remain in the other room and look after your patient?"

"Hobart," faltered Mr. Kemble, "in the name of all that's strange, what does this mean?"

"It is indeed very strange, sir. You must summon all your nerve and fortitude to help us through. Never before were your strength and good strong common−sense more needed. I've nearly reached the end of my endurance. Please, sir, for Helen's sake, preserve your self−control and the best use of all your faculties, for you must now advise. Mr. Kemble, Captain Nichol is alive."

The banker sank into a chair and groaned. "This would have been glad news to me once; I suppose it should be so now. But how, how can this be?"

"Well, sir, as you say, it should be glad news; it will be to all eventually. I am placed in a very hard position; but I have tried to do my duty, and will."

"Why, Hobart, my boy, you look more worn than you did after your illness. Merciful Heaven! what a complication!"

"A far worse one than you can even imagine. Captain Nichol wouldn't know you. His memory was destroyed at the time of the injury. All before that is gone utterly;" and Martine rapidly narrated what is already known to the reader, concluding, "I'm sorry Helen came with you, and I think you had better get her home as soon as possible. I could not take him to my home for several reasons, or at least I thought it best not to. It is my belief that the sight of Helen, the tones of her voice, will restore him; and I do not think it best for him to regain his consciousness of the past in a dwelling prepared for Helen's reception as my wife. Perhaps later on, too, you will understand why I cannot see him there. I shall need a home, a refuge with no such associations. Here, on this neutral ground, I thought we could consult, and if necessary send for his parents to−night. I would have telegraphed you, but the case is so complicated, so difficult. Helen must be gradually prepared for the part she must take. Cost me what it may, Nichol must have his chance. His memory may come back instantly and he recall everything to the moment of his injury. What could be more potent to effect this than the sight and voice of Helen? No one here except Jackson is now aware of his condition. If she can restore him, no one else, not even his parents, need know anything about it, except in a general way. It will save a world of disagreeable talk and distress. At any rate, this course seemed the best I could hit upon in my distracted condition."

"Well, Hobart, my poor young friend, you have been tried as by fire," said Mr. Kemble, in a voice broken by sympathy; "God help you and guide us all in this strange snarl! I feel that the first thing to be done is to get Helen home. Such tidings as yours should be broken to her in that refuge only."

"I agree with you most emphatically, Mr. Kemble. In the seclusion of her own home, with none present except yourself and her mother, she should face this thing and nerve herself to act her part, the most important of all. If she cannot awaken Captain Nichol's memory, it is hard to say what will, or when he will be restored."

"Possibly seeing me, so closely associated with her, may have the same effect," faltered the banker.

"I doubt it; but we can try it. Don't expect me to speak while in the hallway. Helen, no doubt, is on the alert, and I cannot meet her to−night. I am just keeping up from sheer force of will. You must try to realize it. This discovery will change everything for me. Helen's old love will revive in all−absorbing power. I've faced this in thought, but cannot in reality NOW I simply CANNOT. It would do no good. My presence would be an embarrassment to her, and I taxed beyond mortal endurance. You may think me weak, but I cannot help it. As soon as possible I must put you, and if you think best, Captain Nichol's father, in charge of the situation. Jackson can send for his father at once if you wish."

"I do wish it immediately. I can't see my way through. this. I would like Dr. Barnes' advice and presence also."

"I think it would be wise, sir. The point I wish to make is that I have done about all that I now can in this affair. My further presence is only another complication. At any rate, I must have a respite the privilege of going quietly to my own home as soon as possible."

"Oh, Hobart, my heart aches for you; it just ACHES for you. You have indeed been called upon to endure a hundredfold too much in this strange affair. How it will all end God only knows. I understand you sufficiently. Leave the matter to me now. We will have Dr. Barnes and Mr. and Mrs. Nichol here as soon as can be. I suppose I had better see the captain a few moments and then take Helen home."

Martine led the way into the other apartment, where Nichol, rendered good−natured by his supper and a cigar, was conversing sociably with the landlord. Mr. Kemble fairly trembled as he came forward, involuntarily expecting that the man so well known to him must give some sign of recognition.

Nichol paid no heed to him. He had been too long accustomed to see strangers coming and going to give them either thought or attention.

"I say, Hob't Ma'tine," he began, "don' yer cuss me fer eatin' all the supper. I 'lowed ter this Jackson, as yer call 'im, that yer'd get a bite somewhar else, en he 'lowed yer would."

"All right, Nichol; I'm glad you had a good supper."

"I say, Jackson, this Ma'tine's a cur'ous chap mo cur'ous than I be, I reckon. He's been actin' cur'ous ever since he seed me in the horspital. It's all cur'ous. 'Fore he come, doctors en folks was trying ter fin' out 'bout me, en this Ma'tine 'lows he knows all 'bout me. Ef he wuzn't so orful glum, he'd be a good chap anuff, ef he is cur'ous. Hit's all a−changin' somehow, en yet' tisn't. Awhile ago nobody knowd 'bout me, en they wuz allus a− pesterin' of me with questions. En now Ma'tine en you 'low you know 'bout me, yet you ast questions jes' the same. Like anuff this man yere," pointing with his cigar to Mr. Kemble, who was listening with a deeply−troubled face, "knows 'bout me too, yet wants to ast questions. I don' keer ef I do say it, I had better times with the Johnnies that call me Yankee Blank than I ever had sence. Well, ole duffer [to Mr. Kemble], ast away and git yer load off'n yer mind. I don't like glum faces roun' en folks jes' nachelly bilin' over with questions."

"No, Captain Nichol," said the banker, gravely and sadly, "I've no questions to ask. Good−by for the present."

Nichol nodded a careless dismissal and resumed his reminiscences with Jackson, whose eager curiosity and readiness to laugh were much more to his mind.

Following the noise made by closing the door, Helen's voice rang up from the hall below, "Papa!"

"Yes, I'm coming, dear," he tried to answer cheerily. Then he wrung Martine's hand and whispered, "Send for Dr. Barnes. God knows you should have relief. Tell Jackson also to have a carriage go for Mr. Nichol at once. After the doctor comes you may leave all in our hands. Good−by."

Martine heard the rustle of a lady's dress and retired precipitately.

CHAPTER X. "YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND"

With an affectation of briskness he was far from feeling, Mr. Kemble came down the stairs and joined his daughter in the hall. He had taken pains to draw his hat well over his eyes, anticipating and dreading her keen scrutiny, but, strange to say, his troubled demeanor passed unnoticed. In the interval of waiting Helen's thoughts had taken a new turn. "Well, papa," she began, as they passed into the street, "I am curious to know about the sick

man. You stayed an age, but all the same I'm glad I came with you. Forebodings, presentiments, and all that kind of thing seemed absurd the moment I saw Jackson's keen, mousing little visage. His very voice is like a ray of garish light entering a dusky, haunted room. Things suggesting ghosts and hobgoblins become ridiculously prosaic, and you are ashamed of yourself and your fears."

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Kemble, yielding to irritation in his deep perplexity, "the more matter−of−fact we are the better we're off. I suppose the best thing to do is just to face what happens and try to be brave."

"Well, papa, what's happened to annoy you to−night? Is this sick man going to make you trouble?"

"Like enough. I hope not. At any rate, he has claims which I must meet."

"Don't you think you can meet them?" was her next anxious query, her mind reverting to some financial obligation.

"We'll see. You and mother'll have to help me out, I guess. I'll tell you both when we get home;" and his sigh was so deep as to be almost a groan.

"Papa," said Helen, earnestly pressing his arm, "don't worry. Mamma and I will stand by you; so will Hobart. He is the last one in the world to desert one in any kind of trouble."

"I know that, no one better; but I fear he'll be in deeper trouble than any of us. The exasperating thing is that there should be any trouble at all. If it had only happened before well, well, I can't talk here in the street. As you say, you must stand by me, and I'll do the best I can by you and all concerned."

"Oh, papa, there was good cause for my foreboding."

"Well, yes, and no. I don't know. I'm at my wits' end. If you'll be brave and sensible, you can probably do more than any of us."

"Papa, papa, something IS the matter with Hobart," and she drew him hastily into the house, which they had now reached.

Mrs. Kemble met them at the door. Alarmed at her husband's troubled face, she exclaimed anxiously, "Who is this man? What did he want?"

"Come now, mother, give me a chance to get my breath. We'll close the doors, sit down, and talk it all over."

Mrs. Kemble and her daughter exchanged an apprehensive glance and followed with the air of being prepared for the worst.

The banker sat down and wiped the perspiration from his brow, then looked dubiously at the deeply anxious faces turned toward him. "Well," he said, "I'm going to tell you everything as far as I understand it. Now I want to see if you two can't listen calmly and quietly and not give way to useless feeling. There's much to be done, and you especially, Helen, must be in the right condition to do it."

"Oh, papa, why torture me so? Something HAS happened to Hobart. I can't endure this suspense."

"Something has happened to us all," replied her father, gravely. "Hobart has acted like a hero, like a saint; so must you. He is as well and able to go about as you are. I've seen him and talked with him."

"He saw you and not me?" cried the girl, starting up.

"Helen, I entreat, I command you to be composed and listen patiently. Don't you know him well enough to be sure he had good reasons "

"I can't imagine a reason," was the passionate reply, as she paced the floor. "What reason could keep me from him? Merciful Heaven! father, have you forgotten that I was to marry him to−day? Well," she added hoarsely, standing before him with hands clinched in her effort at self−restraint, "the reason?"

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! he has not forgotten it," groaned Mr. Kemble. "Well, I might as well out with it. Suppose Captain Nichol was not killed after all?"

Helen sank into a chair as if struck down as Nichol had been himself. "What!" she whispered; and her face was white indeed.

Mrs. Kemble rushed to her husband, demanding, "Do you mean to tell us that Captain Nichol is alive?"

"Yes; that's just the question we've got to face."

"It brings up another question," replied his wife, sternly. "If he's been alive all this time, why did he not let us know? As far as I can make out, Hobart has found him in Washington "

"Helen," cried her father to the trembling girl, "for Heaven's sake, be calm!"

"He's alive, ALIVE!" she answered, as if no other thought could exist in her mind. Her eyes were kindling, the color coming into her face, and her bosom throbbed quickly as if her heart would burst its bonds. Suddenly she rushed to her father, exclaiming, "He was the sick man. Oh, why did you not let me see him?"

"Well, well!" ejaculated Mr. Kemble, "Hobart was right, poor fellow! Yes, Helen, Captain Nichol is the sick man, not dangerously ill, however. You are giving ample reason why you should not see him yet; and I tell you plainly you can't see him till you are just as composed as I am."

She burst into a joyous, half−hysterical laugh as she exclaimed, "That's not asking much. I never saw you so moved, papa. Little wonder! The dead is alive again! Oh, papa, papa, you don't understand me at all! Could I hear such tidings composedly I who have wept so many long nights and days over his death? I must give expression to overwhelming feeling here where it can do no harm, but if I had seen him when I do see him ah! he'll receive no harm from me."

"But, Helen, think of Hobart," cried Mrs. Kemble, in sharp distress.

"Mother, mother, I cannot help it. Albert is alive, ALIVE! The old feeling comes back like the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep. You cannot know, cannot understand; Hobart will. I'm sorry, SORRY for him; but he will understand. I thought Albert was dead; I wanted to make Hobart happy. He was so good and kind and deserving that I did love him in a sincere, quiet way, but not with my first love, not as I loved Albert. I thought my love was buried with him; but it has burst the grave as he has. Papa, papa, let me go to him, now, NOW! You say he is sick; it is my place to nurse him back to life. Who has a better right? Why do you not bring him here?"

"Perhaps it will be best, since Helen feels so," said Mr. Kemble, looking at his wife.

"Well, I don't know," she replied with a deep sigh. "We certainly don't wish the public to be looking on any more than we can help. He should be either here or at his own home."

"There's more reason for what you say than you think," Mr. Kemble began.

"There, papa," interrupted Helen, "I'd be more or less than human if I could take! this undreamed−of news quietly, I can see how perplexed and troubled you've been, and how you've kindly tried to prepare me for the tidings. You will find that I have strength of mind to meet all that is required of me. It is all simpler to me than to you, for in a matter of this kind the heart is the guide, indeed, the only guide. Think! If Albert had come back months ago; if Hobart had brought him back wounded and disabled how would we have acted? Only our belief in his death led to what has happened since, and the fact of life changes everything back to "

"Now, Helen, stop and listen to me," said her father, firmly. "In one sense the crisis is over, and you've heard the news which I scarcely knew how to break to you. You say you will have strength of mind to meet what is required of you. I trust you may. But it's time you understood the situation as far as I do. Mother's words show she's off the track in her suspicion. Nichol is not to blame in any sense. He is deserving of all sympathy, and yet oh, dear, it is such a complication!" and the old man groaned as he thought of the personality who best knew himself as Yankee Blank. "The fact is," he resumed to his breathless listeners, "Nichol is not ill at all physically. His mind is affected "

Mrs. Kemble sank back in her chair, and Helen uttered a cry of dismay.

"Yes, his mind is affected peculiarly. He remembers nothing that happened before he was wounded. You must realize this, Helen; you must prepare yourself for it. His loss of memory is much more sad than if he had lost an arm or a leg. He remembers only what he has picked up since his injury."

"Then, then, he's not insane?" gasped Helen.

"No, no, I should say not," replied her father, dubiously; "yet his words and manner produce much the same effect as if he were even a stronger effect."

"Oh, this is dreadful!" cried his wife.

"Dreadful indeed, but not hopeless, you know. Keep in mind doctors say that his memory may come back at any time; and Hobart has the belief that the sight and voice of Helen will bring it back."

"God bless Hobart," said Helen, with a deep breath, "and God help him! His own love inspired that belief. He's right; I know he's right."

"Well, perhaps he is. I don't know. I thought Nichol would recognize me; but there wasn't a sign."

"Oh, papa," cried Helen, smiling through her tears, "there are some things which even your experience and wisdom fail in. Albert will know me. We have talked long enough; now let us act."

"You don't realize it all yet, Helen; you can't. You must remember that Nichol regained consciousness in a Southern hospital. He has learned to talk and act very much like such soldiers as would associate with him."

"The fact that he's alive and that I now may restore him is enough, papa."

"Well, I want Dr. Barnes present when you meet him."

"Certainly; at least within call."

"I must stipulate too," said Mrs. Kemble. "I don't wish the coming scenes to take place in a hotel, and under the eyes of that gossip, Jackson. I don't see why Hobart took him there."

"I do," said Mr. Kemble, standing up for his favorite. "Hobart has already endured more than mortal man ought, yet he has been most delicately considerate. No one but Jackson and Dr. Barnes know about Nichol and his condition. I have also had Nichol's father and mother sent for on my own responsibility, for they should take their share of the matter. Hobart believes that Helen can restore Nichol's memory. This would simplify everything and save many painful impressions. You see, it's such an obscure trouble, and there should be no ill−advised blundering in the matter. The doctors in Washington told Hobart that a slight shock, or the sight of an object that once had the strongest hold upon his thoughts well, you understand."

"Yes," said Helen, "I DO understand. Hobart is trying to give Albert the very best chance. Albert wrote that his last earthly thoughts would be of me. It is but natural that my presence should kindle those thoughts again. It was like Hobart, who is almost divine in his thoughtfulness of others, to wish to shield Albert from the eyes of even his own father and mother until he could know them, and know us all. He was only taken to the hotel that we all might understand and be prepared to do our part. Papa, bring Albert here and let his father and mother come here also. He should be sacredly shielded in his infirmity, and give a every chance to recover before being seen by others; and please, papa, exact from Jackson a solemn promise not to tattle about Albert."

"Yes, yes; but we have first a duty to perform. Mother, please prepare a little lunch, and put a glass of your old currant wine on the tray. Hobart must not come to a cold, cheerless home. I'll go and have his old servant up and ready to receive him."

"No, mamma, that is still my privilege," said Helen, with a rush, of tears. "Oh, I'm so sorry, SORRY for him! but neither he nor I can help or change what is, what's true."

When the tray was ready, she wrote and sealed these words:

"God bless you, Hobart; God reward you! You have made me feel to− night that earth is too poor, and only heaven rich enough to reward you.

"HELEN."

CHAPTER XI. MR. KEMBLE'S APPEAL

It often happens that the wife's disposition is an antidote to her husband: and this was fortunately true of Mrs. Jackson. She was neither curious nor gossiping, and with a quick instinct that privacy was desired by Martine, gave at an early hour her orders to close the house for the night. The few loungers, knowing that she was autocratic, slouched off to other resorts. The man and maids of all work were kept out of the way, while she and her husband waited on their unexpected guests. After Mr. Kemble's departure, the errand−boy was roused from his doze behind the stove and seat for Dr. Barnes; then Jackson wrote another note at Martine's dictation:

"MR. WILLIAM NICHOL:

"DEAR SIR A relative of yours is sick at my house. He came on the evening train. You and your wife had better come at once in the carriage."

Martine retired to the room in which he had seen Mr. Kemble, that he might compose himself before meeting the physician. The sound of Helen's voice, the mere proximity of the girl who at this hour was to have been his wife had not "old chaos" come again for him, were by no means "straws" in their final and crushing weight.

Motionless, yet with mind verging on distraction, he sat in the cold, dimly lighted room until aroused by the voice of Dr. Barnes.

"Why, Hobart!" cried his old friend, starting at the bloodshot eyes and pallid face of the young man, "what is the matter? You need me, sure enough, but why on earth are you shivering in this cold room at the hotel?"

Martine again said to Jackson: "Don't leave him," and closed the door. Then, to the physician: "Dr. Barnes, I am ill and worn−out. I know it only too well. You must listen carefully while I in brief tell you why you were sent for; then you and others must take charge and act as you think best. I'm going home. I must have rest and a respite. I must be by myself;" and he rapidly began to sketch his experiences in Washington.

"Hold!" said the sensible old doctor, who indulged in only a few strong exclamations of surprise, which did not interrupt the speaker, "hold! You say you left the ward to think it over, after being convinced that you had discovered Nichol. Did you think it over quietly?"

"Quietly!" repeated Martine, with intense bitterness. "Would a man, not a mummy, think over such a thing quietly? Judge me as you please, but I was tempted as I believe never man was before. I fought the Devil till morning."

"I thought as much," said the doctor, grasping Martine's hand, then slipping a finger on his pulse. "You fought on foot too, didn't you?"

"Yes, I walked the streets as if demented."

"Of course. That in part accounts for your exhaustion. Have you slept much since?"

"Oh, Doctor, let me get through and go home!"

"No, Hobart, you can't get through with me till I am with you. My dear fellow, do you think that I don't understand and sympathize with you? There's no reason why you should virtually risk your life for Captain Nichol again. Take this dose of quinine at once, and then proceed. I can catch on rapidly. First answer, how much have you slept since?"

"The idea of sleep! You can remedy this, Doctor, after my part in this affair is over. I must finish now. Helen may return, and I cannot meet her, nor am I equal to seeing Mr. and Mrs. Nichol. My head feels queer, but I'll get through somehow, if the strain is not kept up too long;" and he finished in outline his story. In conclusion he said, "You will understand that you are now to have charge of Nichol. He is prepared by his experience to obey you, for he has always been in hospitals, where the surgeon's will is law. Except with physicians, he has a sort of rough waywardness, learned from the soldiers."

"Yes, I understand sufficiently now to manage. You put him in my charge, then go home, and I'll visit you as soon as I can."

"One word more, Doctor. As far as you think best, enjoin reticence on Jackson. If the sight of Helen restores Nichol, as I believe it will, little need ever be said about his present condition. Jackson would not dare to disobey a physician's injunction."

"Don't you dare disobey them, either. I'll manage him too. Come."

Nichol had slept a good deal during the latter part of his journey, and now was inclined to wakefulness a tendency much increased by his habit of waiting on hospital patients at night. In the eager and curious Jackson he

had a companion to his mind, who stimulated in him a certain child−like vanity.

"Hello, Ma'tine," he said, "ye're gittin' tired o' me, I reckon, ye're off so much. I don't keer. This yere Jackson's a lively cuss, en I 'low we'll chin till mawnin'."

"Yes, Nichol, Mr. Jackson is a good friend of yours; and here is another man who is more than a friend. You remember what the surgeon at the hospital said to you?"

"I reckon," replied Nichol, anxiously. "Hain't I minded yer tetotally?"

"Yes, you have done very well indeed remarkably well, since you knew I was not a doctor. Now this man is a doctor the doctor I was to bring you to. You won't have to mind me any more, but you must mind this man, Dr. Barnes, in all respects, just as you did the doctors in the hospitals. As long as you obey him carefully he will be very good to you."

"Oh, I'll mind, Doctor," said Nichol, rising and assuming the respectful attitude of a hospital nurse. "We uns wuz soon larned that't wuzn't healthy to go agin the doctor. When I wuz Yankee Blank, 'fo' I got ter be cap'n, I forgot ter give a Johnny a doze o' med'cine, en I'm doggoned ef the doctor didn't mek me tek it myse'f. Gee wiz! sech a time ez I had! Hain't give the doctors no trouble sence."

"All right, Captain Nichol," said Dr. Barnes, quietly, "I understand my duties, and I see that you understand yours. As you say, doctors must be obeyed, and I already see that you won't make me or yourself any trouble. Good−night, Hobart, I'm in charge now."

"Good−night, Doctor. Mr. Jackson, I'm sure you will carry out Dr. Barnes' wishes implicitly."

"Yer'd better, Jackson," said Nichol, giving him a wink. "A doctor kin give yer high ole jinks ef ye're not keerful."

Martine now obeyed the instinct often so powerful in the human breast as well as in dumb animals, and sought the covert, the refuge of his home, caring little whether he was to live or die. When he saw the lighted windows of Mr. Kemble's residence, he moaned as if in physical pain. A sudden and immeasurable longing to see, to speak with Helen once before she was again irrevocably committed to Nichol, possessed him. He even went to her gate to carry out his impulse, then curbed himself and returned resolutely to his dwelling. As soon as his step was on the porch, the door opened and Mr. Kemble gave him the warm grasp of friendship. Without a word, the two men entered the sitting−room, sat down by the ruddy fire, and looked at each other, Martine with intense, questioning anxiety in his haggard face. The banker nodded gravely as he said, "Yes, she knows."

"It's as I said it would be?" Martine added huskily, after a moment or two.

"Well, my friend, she said you would understand her better than any one else. She wrote you this note."

Martine's hands so trembled that he could scarcely break the seal. He sat looking at the tear−blurred words some little time, and grew evidently calmer, then faltered, "Yes, it's well to remember God at such a time. He has laid heavy burdens upon me. He is responsible for them, not I. If I break, He also will be responsible."

"Hobart," said Mr. Kemble, earnestly, "you must not break under this, for our sake as well as your own. I have the presentiment that we shall all need you yet, my poor girl perhaps most of all. She doesn't, she can't realize it. Now, the dead is alive again. Old girlish impulses and feelings are asserting themselves. As is natural, she is deeply excited; but this tidal wave of feeling will pass, and then she will have to face both the past and future. I know her well enough to be sure she could never be happy if this thing wrecked you. And then, Hobart," and the old man sank his voice to a whisper, "suppose suppose Nichol continues the same."

"He cannot," cried Martine, almost desperately. "Oh, Mr. Kemble, don't suggest any hope for me. My heart tells me there is none, that there should not be any. No, she loved him as I have loved her from childhood. She is right. I do understand her so well that I know what the future will be."

"Well," said Mr. Kemble, firmly, as he rose, "she shall never marry him as he is, with my consent. I don't feel your confidence about Helen's power to restore him. I tell you, Hobart, I'm in sore straits. Helen is the apple of my eye. She is the treasure of our old age. God knows I remember what you have done for her and for us in the past; and I feel that we shall need you in the future. You've become like a son to mother and me, and you must stand by us still. Our need will keep you up and rally you better than all Dr. Barnes' medicine. I know you well enough to know that. But take the medicine all the same; and above all things, don't give way to anything like recklessness and despair. As you say, God has imposed the burden. Let him give you the strength to bear it, and other people's burdens too, as you have in the past. I must go now. Don't fail me."

Wise old Mr. Kemble had indeed proved the better physician. His misgivings, fears, and needs, combined with his honest affection, had checked the cold, bitter flood of despair which had been overwhelming Martine. The morbid impression that he would be only another complication, and of necessity an embarrassment to Helen and her family, was in a measure removed. Mere words of general condolence would not have helped him; an appeal like that to the exhausted soldier, and the thought that the battle for him was not yet over, stirred the deep springs of his nature and slowly kindled the purpose to rally and be ready. He rose, ate a little of the food, drank the wine, then looked around the beautiful apartment prepared for her who was to have been his wife, "I have grown weak and reckless," he said. "I ought to have known her well enough I do know her so well as to be sure that I would cloud her happiness if this thing destroyed me."

CHAPTER XII. "YOU MUST REMEMBER"

Mr. And Mrs. Nichol wonderingly yet promptly complied with the request for their presence, meantime casting about in their minds as to the identity of the relative who had summoned them so unexpected. Mr. Kemble arrived at the hotel at about the same moment as they did, and Jackson was instructed to keep the carriage in waiting. "It was I who sent for you and your wife," said the banker. "Mr. Martine, if possible, would have given you cause for a great joy only; but I fear it must be tempered with an anxiety which I trust will not be long continued;" and he led the way into the parlor.

"Is it can it be about Albert?" asked Mrs. Nichols trembling, and sinking into a chair.

"Yes, Mrs. Nichol. Try to keep your fortitude, for perhaps his welfare depends upon it."

"Oh, God be praised! The hope of this never wholly left me, because they didn't find his body."

Dr. Barnes came down at once, and with Mr. Kemble tried to soothe the strong emotions of the parents, while at the same time enlightening them as to their son's discovery and condition.

"Well," said Mr. Nichol, in strong emphasis; "Hobart Martine is one of a million."

"I think he ought to have brought Albert right to me first," Mrs. Nichol added, shaking her head and wiping her eyes. "After all, a mother's claim "

"My dear Mrs. Nichol," interrupted Dr. Barnes, "there was no thought of undervaluing your claim on the part of our friend Hobart. He has taken what he believed, and what physicians led him to believe, was the best course to restore your son. Besides, Mr. Martine is a very sick man. Even now he needs my attention more than Captain Nichol. You must realize that he was to have married Miss Kemble to−day; yet he brings back your son, sends for

Mr. Kemble in order that his daughter, as soon as she can realize the strange truth, may exert her power. He himself has not seen the girl who was to have been his bride."

"Wife, wife," said Mr. Nichol, brokingly, "no mortal man could do more for us than Hobart Martine, God bless him!"

"Mrs. Nichol," began Mr. Kemble, "my wife and Helen both unite in the request that you and your husband bring your son at once to our house; perhaps you would rather meet him in the privacy "

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, "I cannot wait. Please do not think I am insensible to all this well−meant kindness; but a mother's heart cannot wait. He'll know ME me who bore him and carried him on my breast."

"Mrs. Nichol, you shall see him at once," said the doctor. "I hope it will be as you say; but I'm compelled to tell you that you may be disappointed. There's no certainty that this trouble will pass away at once under any one's influence. You and your husband come with me. Mr. Kemble, I will send Jackson down, and so secure the privacy which you would kindly provide. I will be present, for I may be needed."

He led the way, the mother following with the impetuosity and abandon of maternal love, and the father with stronger and stranger emotions than he had ever known, but restrained in a manner natural to a quiet, reticent man. They were about to greet one on whom they had once centred their chief hopes and affection, yet long mourned as dead. It is hard to imagine the wild tumult of their feelings. Not merely by words, but chiefly by impulse, immediate action, could they reveal how profoundly they were moved.

With kindly intention, as he opened the door of the apartment, the doctor began, "Mr. Jackson, please leave us a few "

Mrs. Nichol saw her son and rushed upon him, crying, "Albert, Albert!" It was enough at that moment that she recognized him; and the thought that he would not recognize her was banished. With an intuition of heart beyond all reasoning, she felt that he who had drawn his life from her must know her and respond to nature's first strong tie.

In surprise, Nichol had risen, then was embarrassed to find an elderly woman sobbing on his breast and addressing him in broken, endearing words by a name utterly unfamiliar. He looked wonderingly at his father, who stood near, trembling and regarding him through tear−dimmed eyes with an affectionate interest, impressive even to his limited perceptions.

"Doctor," he began over his mother's head, "what in thunder does all this here mean? Me 'n' Jackson was chinnin' comf't'bly, when sud'n you uns let loose on me two crazy old parties I never seed ner yeared on. Never had folks go on so 'bout me befo'. Beats even that Hob't Ma'tine," and he showed signs of rising irritation.

"Albert, Albert!" almost shrieked Mrs. Nichol, "don't you know me− −ME, your own mother?"

"Naw."

At the half−indignant, incredulous tone, yet more than all at the strange accent and form of this negative, the poor woman was almost beside herself. "Merciful God!" she cried, "this cannot be;" and she sank into a chair, sobbing almost hysterically.

For reasons of his own, Dr. Barnes did not interfere. Nature in powerful manifestations was actuating the parents; and he decided, now that things had gone so far, to let the entire energy of uncurbed emotion, combined with all the mysterious affinity of the closest kinship, exert its influence on the clogged brain of his patient.

For a few moments Mrs. Nichol was too greatly overcome to comprehend anything clearly; her husband, on the other hand, was simply wrought up to his highest capacity for action. His old instinct of authority returned, and he seized his son's hand and began, "Now, see here, Albert, you were wounded in your head "

"Yes, right yere," interrupted Nichol, pointing to his scar. "I knows all 'bout that, but I don't like these goin's on, ez ef I wuz a nachel−bawn fool, en had ter bleve all folks sez. I've been taken in too often. When I wuz with the Johnnies they'd say ter me, 'Yankee Blank, see that ar critter? That's a elephant.' When I'd call it a elephant, they'd larf an' larf till I flattened out one feller's nose. I dunno nothin' 'bout elephants; but the critter they pinted at wuz a cow. Then one day they set me ter scrubbin' a nigger to mek 'im white, en all sech doin's, till the head−doctor stopped the hull blamed nonsense. S'pose I be a cur'ous chap. I ain't a nachel−bawn ijit. When folks begin ter go on, en do en say things I kyant see through, then I stands off en sez, 'Lemme 'lone.' The hospital doctors wouldn't 'low any foolin' with me 't all."

"I'm not allowing any fooling with you," said Dr. Barnes, firmly. "I wish you to listen to that man and woman, and believe all they say. The hospital doctors would give you the same orders."

"All right, then," assented Nichol, with a sort of grimace of resignation. "Fire away, old man, an' git through with yer yarn so Jackson kin come back. I wish this woman wouldn't take on so. Hit makes me orful oncomf't'ble, doggoned ef hit don't."

The rapid and peculiar utterance, the seemingly unfeeling words of his son, stung the father into an ecstasy of grief akin to anger. A man stood before him, as clearly recognized as his own image in a mirror. The captain was not out of his mind in any familiar sense of the word; he remembered distinctly what had happened for months past. He must recall, he must be MADE to recollect the vital truths of his life on which not only his happiness but that of others depended. Although totally ignorant of what the wisest can explain but vaguely, Mr. Nichol was bent on restoring his son by the sheer force of will, making him remember by telling him what he should and must recall. This he tried to do with strong, eager insistence. "Why, Albert," he urged, "I'm your father; and that's your mother."

Nichol shook his head and looked at the doctor, who added gravely, "That's all true."

"Yes," resumed Mr. Nichol, with an energy and earnestness of utterance which compelled attention. "Now listen to reason. As I was saying, you were wounded in the head, and you have forgotten what happened before you were hurt. But you must remember, you must, indeed, or you will break your mother's heart and mine, too."

"But I tell yer, I kyant reckerlect a thing befo' I kinder waked up in the hospital, en the Johnnies call me Yankee Blank. I jes' wish folks would lemme alone on that pint. Hit allus bothers me en makes me mad. How kin I reckerlect when I kyant?" and he began to show signs of strong vexation.

Dr. Barnes was about to interfere when Mrs. Nichol, who had grown calmer, rose, took her son's hand, and said brokenly: "Albert, look me in the face, your mother's face, and try, TRY with all your heart and soul and mind. Don't you remember ME?"

It was evident that her son did try. His brow wrinkled in the perplexed effort, and he looked at her fixedly for a moment or more; but no magnetic current from his mother's hand, no suggestion of the dear features which had bent over him in childhood and turned toward him in love and pride through subsequent years found anything in his arrested consciousness answering to her appeal.

The effort and its failure only irritated him, and he broke out: "Now look yere, I be as I be. What's the use of all these goin's on? Doctor, if you sez these folks are my father and mother, so be it. I'm learning somethin' new all the time. This ain't no mo' quar, I s'pose, than some other things. I've got to mind a doctor, for I've learned that

much ef I hain t nuthin' else, but I want you uns to know that I won't stan' no mo' foolin'. Doctors don't fool me, en they've got the po'r ter mek a feller do ez they sez, but other folks is got ter be keerful how they uses me."

Mrs. Nichol again sank into her chair and wept bitterly; her husband at last remained silent in a sort of inward, impotent rage of grief. There was their son, alive and in physical health, yet between him and them was a viewless barrier which they could not break through.

The strange complications, the sad thwartings of hope which must result unless he was restored, began to loom already in the future.

Dr. Barnes now came forward and said: "Captain Nichol, you are as you are at this moment, but you must know that you are not what you were once. We are trying to restore you to your old self. You'd be a great deal better off if we succeed. You must help us all you can. You must be patient, and try all the time to recollect. You know I am not deceiving you, but seeking to help you. You don't like this. That doesn't matter. Didn't you see doctors do many things in hospitals which the patients didn't like?"

"I reckon," replied Nichol, growing reasonable at once when brought on familiar ground.

"Well, you are my patient. I may have to do some disagreeable things, but they won't hurt you. It won't be like taking off an arm or a leg. You have seen that done, I suppose?"

"You bet!" was the eager, proud reply. "I used to hold the fellows when they squirmed."

"Now hold yourself. Be patient and good−natured. While we are about it, I want to make every appeal possible to your lost memory, and I order you to keep on trying to remember till I say: 'Through for the present.' If we succeed, you'll thank me all the days of your life. Anyhow, you must do as I say."

"Oh, I know that."

"Well, then, your name is Captain Nichol. This is Mr. Nichol, your father; this lady is your mother. Call them father and mother when you speak to them. Always speak kindly and pleasantly. They'll take you to a pleasant home when I'm through with you, and you must mind them. They'll be good to you everyway."

Nichol grinned acquiescence and said: "All right, Doctor."

"Now you show your good sense. We'll have you sound and happy yet." The doctor thought a moment and then asked: "Mr. Nichol, I suppose that after our visit to Mr. Kemble, you and your wife would prefer to take your son home with you?"

"Certainly," was the prompt response.

"I would advise you to do so. After our next effort, however it results, we all will need rest and time for thought. Captain, remain here a few moments with your father and mother. Listen good−naturedly and answer pleasantly to whatever they may say to you. I will be back soon."

CHAPTER XIII. "I'M HELEN"

Dr. Barnes descended the stairs to the parlor where Mr. Kemble impatiently awaited him. "Well?" said the banker, anxiously.

"I will explain while on the way to your house. The carriage is still ready, I suppose?" to Jackson.

"Yes," was the eager reply; "how did he take the meeting of his parents?"

"In the main as I feared. He does not know them yet. Mr. Jackson, you and I are somewhat alike in one of our duties. I never talk about my patients. If I did, I ought to be drummed out of the town instead of ever being called upon again. Of course you feel that you should not talk about your guests. You can understand why the parties concerned in this matter would not wish to have it discussed in the village."

"Certainly, Doctor, certainly," replied Jackson, reddening, for he knew something of his reputation for gossip. "This is no ordinary case."

"No, it is not. Captain Nichol and his friends would never forgive any one who did not do right by them now. In about fifteen minutes or so I will return. Have the carriage wait for me at Mr. Kemble's till again wanted. You may go back to the captain and do your best to keep him wide−awake."

Jackson accompanied them to the conveyance and said to the man on the box: "Obey all Dr. Barnes's orders."

As soon as the two men were seated, the physician began: "Our first test has failed utterly;" and he briefly narrated what had occurred, concluding, "I fear your daughter will have no better success. Still, it is perhaps wise to do all we can, on the theory that these sudden shocks may start up the machinery of memory. Nichol is excited; such powers as he possesses are stimulated to their highest activity, and he is evidently making a strong effort to recall the past, I therefore now deem it best to increase the pressure on his brain to the utmost. If the obstruction does not give way, I see no other course than to employ the skill of experts and trust to the healing processes of time."

"I am awfully perplexed, Doctor," was the reply. "You must be firm with me on one point, and you know your opinion will have great weight. Under no sentimental sense of duty, or even of affection, must Helen marry Nichol unless he is fully restored and given time to prove there is no likelihood of any return of this infirmity."

"I agree with you emphatically. There is no reason for such self− sacrifice on your daughter's part. Nichol would not appreciate it. He is not an invalid; on the contrary, a strong, muscular man, abundantly able to take care of himself under the management of his family."

"He has my profound sympathy," continued Mr. Kemble, "but giving that unstintedly is a very different thing from giving him my only child."

"Certainly. Perhaps we need not say very much to Miss Helen on this point at present. Unless he becomes his old self she will feel that she has lost him more truly than if he were actually dead. The only deeply perplexing feature in the case is its uncertainty. He may be all right before morning, and he may never recall a thing that happened before the explosion of that shell."

The carriage stopped, and Mr. Kemble hastily led the way to his dwelling. Helen met them at the door. "Oh, how long you have been!" she protested; "I've just been tortured by suspense."

Dr. Barnes took her by the hand and led her to the parlor. "Miss Helen," he said gravely, "if you are not careful you will be another patient on my hands. Sad as is Captain Nichol's case, he at least obeys me implicitly; so must you. Your face is flushed, your pulse feverish, and "

"Doctor," cried the girl, "you can't touch the disease till you remove the cause. Why is he kept so long from me?"

"Helen, child, you MUST believe that the doctor that we all are doing our best for you and Nichol," said Mr. Kemble, anxiously. "His father and mother came to the hotel. It was but natural that they should wish to see him at once. How would we feel?"

"Come, Helen, dear, you must try to be more calm," urged the mother, gently, with her arm around her daughter's neck. "Doctor, can't you give her something to quiet her nerves?"

"Miss Helen, like the captain, is going to do just as I say, aren't you? You can do more for yourself than I can do for you. Remember, you must act intelligently and cooperate with me. His father, and especially his mother, exhibited the utmost degree of emotion and made the strongest appeals without effect. Now we must try different tactics. All must be quiet and nothing occur to confuse or irritate him."

"Ah, how little you all understand me! The moment you give me a chance to act I can be as calm as you are. It's this waiting, this torturing suspense that I cannot endure. Hobart would not have permitted it. He knows, he understands. Every effort will fail till Albert sees me. It will be a cause for lasting gratitude to us both that I should be the one to restore him. Now let me manage. My heart will guide me better than your science."

"What will you do?" inquired her father, in deep solicitude.

"See, here's his picture," she replied, taking it from a table near "the one he gave me just before he marched away. Let him look at that and recall himself. Then I will enter. Oh, I've planned it all! My self−control will be perfect. Would I deserve the name of woman if I were weak or hysterical? No, I would do my best to rescue any man from such a misfortune, much more Albert, who has such sacred claims."

"That's a good idea of yours about the photograph. Well, I guess I must let Nature have her own way again, only in this instance I advise quiet methods."

"Trust me, Doctor, and you won't regret it."

"Nerve yourself then to do your best, but prepare to be disappointed for the present. I do not and cannot share in your confidence."

"Of course you cannot," she said, with a smile which illuminated her face into rare beauty. "Only love and faith could create my confidence."

"Miss Helen," was the grave response, "would love and faith restore Captain Nichol's right arm if he had lost it?"

"Oh, but that's different," she faltered.

"I don't know whether it is or not. We are experimenting. There may be a physical cause obstructing memory which neither you nor any one can now remove. Kindness only leads me to temper your hope."

"Doctor," she said half−desperately, "it is not hope; it is belief. I could not feel as I do if I were to be disappointed."

"Ah, Miss Helen, disappointment is a very common experience. I must stop a moment and see one who has learned this truth pretty thoroughly. Then I will bring Nichol and his parents at once."

Tears filled her eyes. "Yes, I know," she sighed; "my heart just bleeds for him, but I cannot help it. Were I not sure that Hobart understands me better than any one else, I should be almost distracted. This very thought of him nerves me. Think what he did for Albert from a hard sense of duty. Can I fail? Good−by, and please, PLEASE

hasten."

Martine rose to greet the physician with a clear eye and a resolute face. "Why, why!" cried Dr. Barnes, cheerily, "you look a hundred per cent better. That quinine "

"There, Doctor, I don't undervalue your drugs; but Mr. Kemble has been to see me and appealed to me for help to still be on hand if needed. Come, I've had my hour for weakness. I am on the up−grade now. Tell me how far the affair has progressed."

"Haven't time, Hobart. Since Mr. Kemble's treatment is so efficacious, I'll continue it. You will be needed, you will indeed, no matter how it all turns out. I won't abandon my drugs, either. Here, take this."

Martine took the medicine as administered. "Now when you feel drowsy, go to sleep," added the doctor.

"Tell me one thing has she seen him yet?"

"No; his father and mother have, and he does not know them. It's going to be a question of time, I fear."

"Helen will restore him."

"So she believes, or tries to. I mercifully shook her faith a little. Well, she feels for you, old fellow. The belief that you understand her better than any one has great sustaining power."

"Say I won't fail her; but I entreat that you soon let me know the result of the meeting."

"I'll come in," assented the doctor, as he hastily departed. Then he added sotto voce, "If you hear anything more under twelve or fifteen hours, I'm off my reckoning."

Re−entering the carriage, he was driven rapidly to the hotel. Jackson had played his part, and had easily induced Nichol to recount his hospital experience in the presence of his parents, who listened in mingled wonder, grief, and impotent protest.

"Captain, put on your overcoat and hat and come with me," said the doctor, briskly. "Your father and mother will go with us."

"Good−by, Jackson," said Nichol, cordially. "Ye're a lively cuss, en I hopes we'll have a chaince to chin agin."

With a blending of hope and of fear, his parents followed him. The terrible truth of his sensibility to all that he should recognize and remember became only the more appalling as they comprehended it. While it lost none of its strangeness, they were compelled to face and to accept it as they could not do at first.

"Now, Captain," said the doctor, after they were seated in the carriage, "listen carefully to me. It is necessary that you recall what happened before you were wounded. I tell you that you must do it if you can, and you know doctors must be obeyed."

"Look yere, Doctor, ain't I a−tryin'? but I tell yer hit's like tryin' ter lift myself out o' my own boots."

"Mind, now, I don't say you must remember, only try your best. You can do that?"

"I reckon."

"Well, you are going to the house of an old friend who knew you well before you were hurt. You must pay close heed to all she says just as you would to me. You must not say any rude, bad words, such as soldiers often use, but listen to every word she says. Perhaps you'll know her as soon as you see her. Now I've prepared you. I won't be far off."

"Don't leave me, Doctor. I jes' feels nachelly muxed up en mad when folks pester me 'bout what I kyant do."

"You must not get angry now, I can tell you. That would never do at all. I FORBID it."

"There, there now, Doctor, I won't, doggone me ef I will," Nichol protested anxiously.

Mr. Kemble met them at the door, and the captain recognized him instantly.

"Why, yere's that sensible ole feller what didn't want to ast no questions," he exclaimed.

"You are right, Captain Nichol, I have no questions to ask."

"Well, ef folks wuz all like you I'd have a comf't'ble time"

"Come with me, Captain," said the physician, leading the way into the parlor. Mr. Kemble silently ushered Mr. and Mrs. Nichol into the sitting−room on the opposite side of the hall and placed them in the care of his wife. He then went into the back parlor in which was Helen, now quiet as women so often are in emergencies. Through a slight opening between the sliding−door she looked, with tightly clasped hands and parted lips, at her lover. At first she was conscious of little else except the overwhelming truth that before her was one she had believed dead. Then again surged up with blinding force the old feeling which had possessed her when she saw him last when he had impressed his farewell kiss upon her lips. Remembering the time for her to act was almost at hand, she became calm more from the womanly instinct to help him than from the effort of her will.

Dr. Barnes said to Nichol, "Look around. Don't you think you have seen this room before? Take your time and try to remember."

The captain did as he was bidden, but soon shook his head. "Hit's right purty, but I don't reckerlect."

"Well, sit down here, then, and look at that picture. Who is it?"

"Why, hit's me me dressed up as cap'n," ejaculated Nichol, delightedly.

"Yes, that was the way you looked and dressed before you were wounded."

"How yer talk! This beats anythin' I ever yeared from the Johnnies."

"Now, Captain Nichol, you see we are not deceiving you. We called you captain. There's your likeness, taken before you were hurt and lost your memory, and you can see for yourself that you were a captain. You must think how much there is for you to try to remember. Before you went to the war, long before you got hurt, you gave this likeness of yourself to a young lady that you thought a great deal of. Can't you recall something about it?"

Nichol wrinkled his scarred forehead, scratched his head, and hitched uneasily in his chair, evidently making a vain effort to penetrate the gloom back of that vague awakening in the Southern hospital. At last he broke out in his usual irritation, "Naw, I kyant, doggon "

"Hush! you must not use that word here. Don't be discouraged. You are trying; that's all I ask," and the doctor laid a soothing hand on his shoulder. "Now, Captain, I'll just step in the next room. You think quietly as you can about the young lady to whom you gave that picture of yourself."

Nichol was immensely pleased with his photograph, and looked at it in all its lights. While thus gratifying a sort of childish vanity, Helen entered noiselessly, her blue eyes, doubly luminous from the pallor of her face, shining like sapphires. So intent was her gaze that one might think it would "kindle a soul under the ribs of death."

At last Nichol became conscious of her presence and started, exclaiming, "Why, there she is herself."

"OH, Albert, you DO know me," cried the girl, rushing toward him with outstretched hand.

He took it unhesitatingly, saying with a pleased wonder, "Well, I reckon I'm comin' round. Yer the young lady I give this picture to?"

"I'm Helen," she breathed, with an indescribable accent of tenderness and gladness.

"Why, cert'ny. The doctor tole me 'bout you."

"But you remember me yourself?" she pleaded. "You remember what you said to me when you gave me this picture?" and she looked into his eyes with an expression which kindled even his dull senses.

"Oh, shucks!" he said slowly, "I wish I could. I'd like ter 'blige yer, fer ye're right purty, en I am a−tryin' ter mind the doctor."

Such a sigh escaped her that one might think her heart and hope were going with it. The supreme moment of meeting had come and gone, and he did not know her; she saw and felt in her inmost soul that he did not. The brief and illusive gleam into the past was projected only from the present, resulting from what he had been told, not from what he recalled.

She withdrew her hand, turned away, and for a moment or two her form shook with sobs she could not wholly stifle. He looked on perplexed and troubled, then broke out, "I jes' feels ez ef I'd split my blamed ole haid open "

She checked him by a gesture. "Wait," she cried, "sit down." She took a chair near him and hastily wiped her eyes. "Perhaps I can help you remember me. You will listen closely, will you not?"

"I be dog oh, I forgot," and he looked toward the back parlor apprehensively. "Yes, mees, I'll do anythin' yer sez."

"Well, once you were a little boy only so high, and I was a little girl only so high. We both lived in this village and we went to school together. We studied out of the same books together. At three o'clock in the afternoon school was out, and then we put our books in our desks and the teacher let us go and play. There was a pond of water, and it often froze over with smooth black ice. You and I used to go together to that pond; and you would fasten my skates on my feet "

"Hanged ef I wouldn't do it agin," he cried, greatly pleased. "Yer beats 'em all. Stid o' astin' questions, yer tells me all 'bout what happened. Why, I kin reckerlect it all ef I'm tole often anuff."

With a sinking heart she faltered on, "Then you grew older and went away to school, and I went away to school. We had vacations; we rode on horseback together. Well, you grew to be as tall as you are now; and then came a war and you wore a captain's uniform, like like that you see in your likeness, and and " she stopped. Her rising

color became a vivid flush; she slowly rose as the thought burned its way into her consciousness that she was virtually speaking to a stranger. Her words were bringing no gleams of intelligence into his face; they were throwing no better, no stronger light upon the past than if she were telling the story to a great boy. Yet he was not a boy. A man's face was merely disfigured (to her eyes) by a grin of pleasure instead of a pleased smile; and a man's eyes were regarding her with an unwinking stare of admiration. She was not facing her old playmate, her old friend and lover, but a being whose only consciousness reached back but months, through scenes, associations coarse and vulgar like himself. She felt this with an intuition that was overwhelming. She could not utter another syllable, much less speak of the sacred love of the past. "O God!" she moaned in her heart, "the man has become a living grave in which his old self is buried. Oh, this is terrible, terrible!"

As the truth grew upon her she sprang away, wringing her hands and looking upon him with an indescribable expression of pity and dread. "Oh," she now moaned aloud, "if he had only come back to me mutilated in body, helpless! but this change "

She fled from the room, and Nichol stared after her in perplexed consternation.

CHAPTER XIV. "FORWARD! COMPANY A"

When Mrs. Kemble was left alone with Captain Nichol's parents in the sitting−room, she told them of Helen's plan of employing the photograph in trying to recall their son to himself. It struck them as an unusually effective method. Mrs. Kemble saw that their anxiety was so intense that it was torture for them to remain in suspense away from the scene of action. It may be added that her own feelings also led her to go with them into the back parlor, where all that was said by Nichol and her daughter could be heard. Her solicitude for Helen was not less than theirs for their son; and she felt the girl might need both motherly care and counsel. She was opposed even more strenuously than her husband to any committal on the daughter's part to her old lover unless he should become beyond all doubt his former self. At best, it would be a heavy cross to give up Martine, who had won her entire affection. Helen's heart presented a problem too deep for solution. What would what could Captain Nichol be to her child in his present condition, should it continue?

It was but natural, therefore, that she and her husband should listen to Helen's effort to awaken memories of the past with profound anxiety. How far would she go? If Nichol were able to respond with no more appreciative intelligence than he had thus far manifested, would a sentiment of pity and obligation carry her to the point of accepting him as he was, of devoting herself to one who, in spite of all their commiseration and endeavors to tolerate, might become a sort of horror in their household! It was with immense relief that they heard her falter in her story, for they quickly divined that there was nothing in him which responded to her effort. When they heard her rise and moan, "If he had only come back to me mutilated in body, helpless! but this change " they believed that she was meeting the disappointment as they could wish.

Mr. and Mrs. Nichol heard the words also, and while in a measure compelled to recognize their force, they conveyed a meaning hard to accept. The appeal upon which so much hope had been built had failed. In bitterness of soul, the conviction grew stronger that their once brave, keen−minded son would never be much better than an idiot.

Then Helen appeared among them as pale, trembling, and overwhelmed as if she had seen a spectre. In strong reaction from her effort and blighted hope she was almost in a fainting condition. Her mother's arms received her and supported her to a lounge; Mrs. Nichol gave way to bitter weeping; Mr. Kemble wrung the father's hand in sympathy, and then at his wife's request went for restoratives. Dr. Barnes closed the sliding−doors and prudently reassured Nichol: "You have done your best, Captain, and that is all I asked of you. Remain here quietly and look at your picture for a little while, and then you shall have a good long rest."

"I did try, Doctor," protested Nichol, anxiously. "Gee wiz! I reckon a feller orter try ter please sech a purty gyurl. She tole me lots. Look yere, Doctor, why kyan't I be tole over en over till I reckerlect it all?"

"Well, we'll see, Captain. It's late now, and we must all have a rest. Stay here till I come for you."

Nichol was so pleased with his photograph that he was well content in its contemplation. The physician now gave his attention to Helen, who was soon so far restored as to comprehend her utter failure. Her distress was great indeed, and for a few moments diverted the thoughts of even Mr. and Mrs. Nichol from their own sad share in the disappointment.

"Oh, oh!" sobbed Helen, "this is the bitterest sorrow the war has brought us yet."

"Well, now, friends," said Dr. Barnes, "it's time I had my say and gave my orders. You must remember that I have not shared very fully in your confidence that the captain could be restored by the appeals you have made; neither do I share in this abandonment to grief now. As the captain says, he is yet simply unable to respond. We must patiently wait and see what time and medical skill can do for him. There is no reason whatever for giving up hope. Mrs. Kemble, I would advise you to take Miss Helen to her room, and you, Mr. Nichol, to take your wife and son home. I will call in the morning, and then we can advise further."

His counsel was followed, the captain readily obeying when told to go with his parents. Then the physician stepped over to Martine's cottage and found, as he supposed, that the opiate and exhausted nature had brought merciful oblivion.

It was long before Helen slept, nor would she take anything to induce sleep. She soon became quiet, kissed her mother, and said she wished to be alone. Then she tried to look at the problem in all its aspects, and earnestly asked for divine guidance. The decision reached in the gray dawn brought repose of mind and body.

It was late in the afternoon when Martine awoke with a dull pain in his head and heart. As the consciousness of all that had happened returned, he remembered that there was good reason for both. His faithful old domestic soon prepared a dainty meal, which aided in giving tone to his exhausted system. Then he sat down by his fire to brace himself for the tidings he expected to hear. Helen's chair was empty. It would always be hers, but hope was gone that she would smile from it upon him during the long winter evenings. Already the room was darkening toward the early December twilight, and he felt that his life was darkening in like manner. He was no longer eager to hear what had occurred. The mental and physical sluggishness which possessed him was better than sharp pain; he would learn all soon enough the recognition, the beginning of a new life which inevitably would drift further and further from him. His best hope was to get through the time, to endure patiently and shape his life so as to permit as little of its shadow as possible to fall upon hers. But as he looked around the apartment and saw on every side the preparations for one who had been his, yet could be no longer, his fortitude gave way, and he buried his face in his hands.

So deep was his painful revery that he did not hear the entrance of Dr. Barnes and Mr. Kemble. The latter laid a hand upon his shoulder and said kindly, "Hobart, my friend, it is just as I told you it would be. Helen needs you and wishes to see you."

Martine started up, exclaiming, "He must have remembered her."

Mr. Kemble shook his head. "No, Hobart," said the doctor, "she was as much of a stranger to him as you were. There were, of course, grounds for your expectation and hers also, but we prosaic physiologists have some reason for our doubtings as well as you for your beliefs. It's going to be a question of time with Nichol. How are you yourself? Ah, I see," he added, with his finger on his patient's pulse. "With you it's going to be a question of tonics."

"Yes, I admit that," Martine replied, "but perhaps of tonics other than those you have in mind. You said, sir [to Mr. Kemble], that Helen wished to see me?"

"Yes, when you feel well enough."

"I trust you will make yourselves at home," said Martine, hastily preparing to go out.

"But don't you wish to hear more about Nichol?" asked the doctor, laughing.

"Not at present. Good−by."

Yet he was perplexed how to meet the girl who should now have been his wife; and he trembled with strange embarrassment as he entered the familiar room in which he had parted from her almost on the eve of their wedding. She was neither perplexed nor embarrassed, for she had the calmness of a fixed purpose. She went swiftly to him, took his hand, led him to a chair, then sat down beside him. He looked at her wonderingly and listened sadly as she asked, "Hobart, will you be patient with me again?"

"Yes," he replied after a moment, yet he sighed deeply in foreboding.

Tears came into her eyes, yet her voice did not falter as she continued: "I said last night that you would understand me better than any one else; so I believe you will now. You will sustain and strengthen me in what I believe to be duty."

"Yes, Helen, up to the point of such endurance as I have. One can't go beyond that."

"No, Hobart, but you will not fail me, nor let me fail. I cannot marry Captain Nichol as he now is" there was an irrepressible flash of joy in his dark eyes "nor can I," she added slowly and sadly, "marry you." He was about to speak, but she checked him and resumed. "Listen patiently to me first. I have thought and thought long hours, and I think I am right. You, better than I, know Captain Nichol's condition its sad contrast to his former noble self. The man we once knew is veiled, hidden, lost how can we express it? But he exists, and at any time may find and reveal himself. No one, not even I, can revolt at what he is now as he will revolt at it all when his true consciousness returns. He has met with an immeasurable misfortune. He is infinitely worse off than if helpless worse off than if he were dead, if this condition is to last; but it may not last. What would he think of me if I should desert him now and leave him nothing to remember but a condition of which he could only think with loathing? I will hide nothing from you, Hobart, my brave, true friend you who have taught me what patience means. If you had brought him back utterly helpless, yet his old self in mind, I could have loved him and married him, and you would have sustained me in that course. Now I don't know. My future, in this respect, is hidden like his. The shock I received last night, the revulsion of feeling which followed, leaves only one thing clear. I must try to do what is right by him; it will not be easy. I hope you will understand. While I have the deepest pity that a woman can feel, I shrink from him NOW, for the contrast between his former self and his present is so terrible. Oh, it is such a horrible mystery! All Dr. Barnes's explanations do not make it one bit less mysterious and dreadful. Albert took the risk of this; he has suffered this for his country. I must suffer for him; I must not desert him in his sad extremity. I must not permit him to awake some day and learn from others what he now is, and that I, the woman he loved, of all others, left him to his degradation. The consequences might be more fatal than the injury which so changed him. Such action on my part might destroy him morally. Now his old self is buried as truly as if he had died. I could never look him in the face again if I left him to take his chances in life with no help from me, still less if I did that which he could scarcely forgive. He could not understand all that has happened since we thought him dead. He would only remember that I deserted him in his present pitiable plight. Do you understand me, Hobart?"

"I must, Helen."

"I know how hard it is for you. Can you think I forget this for a moment? Yet I send for you to help, to sustain me in a purpose which changes our future so greatly. Do you not remember what you said once about accepting the conditions of life as they are? We must do this again, and make the best of them."

"But if suppose his memory does not come back. Is there to be no hope?"

"Hobart, you must put that thought from you as far as you can. Do you not see whither it might lead? You would not wish Captain Nichol to remain as he is?"

"Oh," he cried desperately, "I'm put in a position that would tax any saint in the calendar."

"Yes, you are. The future is not in our hands. I can only appeal to you to help me do what I think is right NOW."

He thought a few moments, took his resolve, then gave her his hand silently. She understood him without a word.

The news of the officer's return and of his strange condition was soon generally known in the village; but his parents, aided by the physician, quickly repressed those inclined to call from mere curiosity. At first Jim Wetherby scouted the idea that his old captain would not know him, but later had to admit the fact with a wonder which no explanations satisfied. Nichol immediately took a fancy to the one−armed veteran, who was glad to talk by the hour about soldiers and hospitals.

Before any matured plan for treatment could be adopted Nichol became ill, and soon passed into the delirium of fever. "The trouble is now clear enough," Dr. Barnes explained. "The captain has lived in hospitals and breathed a tainted atmosphere so long that his system is poisoned. This radical change of air has developed the disease."

Indeed, the typhoid symptoms progressed so rapidly as to show that the robust look of health had been in appearance only. The injured, weakened brain was the organ which suffered most, and in spite of the physician's best efforts his patient speedily entered into a condition of stupor, relieved only by low, unintelligible mutterings. Jim Wetherby became a tireless watcher, and greatly relieved the grief−stricken parents. Helen earnestly entreated that she might act the part of nurse also, but the doctor firmly forbade her useless exposure to contagion. She drove daily to the house, yet Mrs. Nichol's sad face and words could scarcely dissipate the girl's impression that the whole strange episode was a dream.

At last it was feared that the end was near. One night Dr. Barnes, Mr. and Mrs. Nichol, and Jim Wetherby were watching in the hope of a gleam of intelligence. He was very low, scarcely more than breathing, and they dreaded lest there might be no sign before the glimmer of life faded out utterly.

Suddenly the captain seemed to awake, his glassy eyes kindled, and a noble yet stern expression dignified his visage. In a thick voice he said, "For " Then, as if all the remaining forces of life asserted themselves, he rose in his bed and exclaimed loudly, "Forward! Company A. Guide right. Ah!" He fell back, now dead in very truth.

"Oh!" cried Jim Wetherby, excitedly, "them was the last words I heard from him just before the shell burst, and he looks now just as he did then."

"Yes," said Dr. Barnes, sadly and gravely, "memory came back to him at the point where he lost it. He has died as we thought at first a brave soldier leading a charge."

The stern, grand impress of battle remained upon the officer's countenance. Friends and neighbors looked upon his ennobled visage with awe, and preserved in honored remembrance the real man that temporarily had been obscured. Helen's eyes, when taking her farewell look, were not so blinded with tears but that she recognized his restored manhood. Death's touch had been more potent than love's appeal.

In the Wilderness, upon a day fatal to him and so many thousands, Captain Nichol had prophesied of the happy days of peace. They came, and he was not forgotten.

One evening Dr. Barnes was sitting with Martine and Helen at their fireside. They had been talking about Nichol, and Helen remarked thoughtfully, "It was so very strange that he should have regained his memory in the way and at the time he did."

"No," replied the physician, "that part of his experience does not strike me as so very strange. In typhoid cases a lucid interval is apt to precede death. His brain, like his body, was depleted, shrunken slightly by disease. This impoverishment probably removed the cerebral obstruction, and the organ of memory renewed its action at the point where it had been arrested. My theory explains his last ejaculation, 'Ah!' It was his involuntary exclamation as he again heard the shell burst. The reproduction in his mind of this explosion killed him instantly after all. He was too enfeebled to bear the shock. If he had passed from delirium into quiet sleep ah, well! he is dead, and that is all we can know with certainty."

"Well," said Martine, with a deep breath, "I am glad he had every chance that it was possible for us to give him."

"Yes, Hobart," added his wife, gently, "you did your whole duty, and I do not forget what it cost you."