A Modern Chronicle, Book I

Winston Churchill

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I. WHAT'S IN HEREDITY?

HONORA LEFFINGWELL is the original name of our heroine. She was born in the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, at Nice, in France, and she spent the early years of her life in St. Louis, a somewhat conservative old city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Her father was Randolph Leffingwell, and he died in the early flower of his manhood, while filling with a grace that many remember the post of United States Consul at Nice. As a linguist he was a phenomenon, and his photograph in the tortoise−shell frame proves indubitably, to anyone acquainted with the fashions of 1870, that he was a master of that subtlest of all arts, dress. He had gentle blood in his veins, which came from Virginia through Kentucky in a coach and six, and he was the equal in appearance and manners of any duke who lingered beside classic seas.

Honora has often pictured to herself a gay villa set high above the curving shore, the amethyst depths shading into emerald, laced with milk−white foam, the vivid colours of the town, the gay costumes; the excursions, the dinner−parties presided over by the immaculate young consul in three languages, and the guests chosen from the haute noblesse of Europe. Such was the vision in her youthful mind, added to by degrees as she grew into young−ladyhood and surreptitiously became familiar with the writings of Ouida and the Duchess, and other literature of an educating cosmopolitan nature.

Honora's biography should undoubtedly contain a sketch of Mrs. Randolph Leffingwell. Beauty and dash and a knowledge of how to seat a table seem to have been the lady's chief characteristics; the only daughter of a carefully dressed and carefully preserved widower, likewise a linguist, whose super−refined tastes and the limited straits to which he, the remaining scion of an old Southern family, had been reduced by a gentlemanly contempt for money, led him to choose Paris rather than New York as a place of residence. One of the occasional and carefully planned trips to the Riviera proved fatal to the beautiful but reckless Myrtle Allison. She, who might

have chosen counts or dukes from the Tagus to the Danube, or even crossed the Channel, took the dashing but impecunious American consul, with a faith in his future that was sublime. Without going over too carefully the upward path which led to the post of their country's representative at the court of St. James, neither had the slightest doubt that Randolph Leffingwell would tread it.

It is needless to dwell upon the chagrin of Honora's maternal grandfather, Howard Allison, Esquire, over this turn of affairs, this unexpected bouleversement, as he spoke of it in private to his friends in his Parisian club. For many years he had watched the personal attractions of his daughter grow, and a brougham and certain other delights not to be mentioned had gradually become, in his mind, synonymous with old age. The brougham would have on its panels the Allison crest, and his distinguished (and titled) son−in−law would drop in occasionally at the little apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann. Alas, for visions, for legitimate hopes shattered forever! On the day that Randolph Leffingwell led Miss Allison down the aisle of the English church the vision of the brougham and the other delights faded. Howard Allison went back to his club.

Three years later, while on an excursion with Sir Nicholas Baker and a merry party on the Italian side, the horses behind which Mr. and Mrs. Leffingwell were driving with their host ran away, and in the flight managed to precipitate the vehicle, and themselves, down the side of one of the numerous deep valleys of the streams seeking the Mediterranean. Thus, by a singular caprice of destiny Honora was deprived of both her parents at a period which some chose to believe − was the height of their combined glories. Randolph Leffingwell lived long enough to be taken back to Nice, and to consign his infant daughter and sundry other unsolved problems to his brother Tom.

Brother Tom or Uncle Tom, as we must call him with Honora cheerfully accepted the charge. For his legacies in life had been chiefly blessings in disguise. He was paying teller of the Prairie Bank, and the thermometer registered something above 90º Fahrenheit on the July morning when he stood behind his wicket reading a letter from Howard Allison, Esquire, relative to his niece. Mr. Leffingwell was at this period of his life forty−eight, but the habit he had acquired of assuming responsibilities and burdens seemed to have had the effect of making his age indefinite. He was six feet tall, broad−shouldered, his mustache and hair already turning; his eyebrows were a trifle bushy, and his eyes reminded men of one eternal and highly prized quality honesty. They were blue grey. Ordinarily they shed a light which sent people away from his window the happier without knowing why; but they had been known, on rare occasions, to flash on dishonesty and fraud like the lightnings of the Lord. Mr. Isham, the president of the bank, coined a phrase about him. He said that Thomas Leffingwell was constitutionally honest.

Although he had not risen above the position of paying teller, Thomas Leffingwell had a unique place in the city of his birth; and the esteem in which he was held by capitalists and clerks proves that character counts for something. On his father's failure and death he had entered the Prairie Bank, at eighteen, and never left it. If he had owned it, he could not have been treated by the customers with more respect. The city, save for a few notable exceptions, like Mr. Isham, called him Mr. Leffingwell, but behind his back often spoke of him as Tom.

On the particular hot morning in question, as he stood in his seersucker coat reading the unquestionably pompous letter of Mr. Allison announcing that his niece was on the high seas, he returned the greetings of his friends with his usual kindness and cheer. In an adjoining compartment a long−legged boy of fourteen was busily stamping letters.

"Peter," said Mr. Leffingwell, "go ask Mr. Isham if I may see him."

It is advisable to remember the boy's name. It was Peter Erwin, and he was a favourite in the bank, where he had been introduced by Mr. Leffingwell himself. He was an orphan and lived with his grandmother, an impoverished old lady with good blood in her veins who boarded in Graham's Row, on Olive Street. Suffice it to add, at this time, that he worshipped Mr. Leffingwell, and that he was back in a twinkling with the information that Mr.

Isham was awaiting him.

The president was seated at his desk. In spite of the thermometer he gave no appearance of discomfort in his frock−coat. He had scant, sandy−grey whiskers, a tightly closed and smooth−shaven upper lip, a nose with a decided ridge, and rather small but penetrating eyes in which the blue pigment had been used sparingly. His habitual mode of speech was both brief and sharp, but people remarked that he modified it a little for Tom Leffingwell. "Come in, Tom," he said. "Anything the matter?"

"Mr. Isham, I want a week off, to go to New York."

The request, from Tom Leffingwell, took Mr. Isham's breath. One of the bank president's characteristics was an extreme interest in the private affairs of those who came within his zone of influence and especially when these affairs evinced any irregularity.

"Randolph again?" he asked quickly.

Tom walked to the window, and stood looking out into the street. His voice shook as he answered:−

"Ten days ago I learned that my brother was dead, Mr. Isham."

The president glanced at the broad back of his teller. Mr. Isham's voice was firm, his face certainly betrayed no feeling, but a flitting gleam of satisfaction might have been seen in his eye.

"Of course, Tom, you may go," he answered.

Thus came to pass an event in the lives of Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary, that journey to New York (their first) of two nights and two days to fetch Honora. We need not dwell upon all that befell them. The first view of the Hudson, the first whiff of the salt air on this unwonted holiday, the sights of this crowded city of wealth, all were tempered by the thought of the child coming into their lives. They were standing on the pier when the windows were crimson in the early light, and at nine o'clock on that summer's morning the Albania was docked, and the passengers came crowding down the gang−plank. Prosperous tourists, most of them, with servants and stewards carrying bags of English design and checked steamer rugs; and at last a ruddy−faced bonne with streamers and a bundle of ribbons and laces Honora Honora, aged eighteen months, gazing at a subjugated world.

"What a beautiful child!" exclaimed a woman on the pier.

Was it instinct or premonition that led them to accost the bonne?

"Oui, Laffingwell!" she cried, gazing at them in some perplexity. Three children of various sizes clung to her skirts, and a younger nurse carried a golden−haired little girl of Honora's age. A lady and gentleman followed. The lady was beginning to look matronly, and no second glance was required to perceive that she was a person of opinion and character. Mr. Holt was smaller than his wife, neat in dress and unobtrusive in appearance. In the rich Mrs. Holt, the friend of the Randolph Leffingwells, Aunt Mary was prepared to find a more vapidly fashionable personage, and had schooled herself forthwith.

"You are Mrs. Thomas Leffingwell?" she asked. "Well, I am relieved." The lady's eyes, travelling rapidly over Aunt Mary's sober bonnet and brooch and gown, made it appear that these features in Honora's future guardian gave her the relief in question. "Honora, this is your aunt."

Honora smiled from amidst the laces, and Aunt Mary, only too ready to capitulate, surrendered. She held out her arms. Tears welled up in the Frenchwoman's eyes as she abandoned her charge.

"Pauvre mignonne!" she cried.

But Mrs. Holt rebuked the nurse sharply, in French, a language with which neither Aunt Mary nor Uncle Tom was familiar. Fortunately, perhaps. Mrs. Holt's remark was to the effect that Honora was going to a sensible home.

"Hortense loves her better than my own children," said that lady.

Honora seemed quite content in the arms of Aunt Mary, who was gazing so earnestly into the child's face that she did not at first hear Mrs. Holt's invitation to take breakfast with them on Madison Avenue, and then she declined politely. While crossing on the steamer, Mrs. Holt had decided quite clearly in her mind just what she was going to say to the child's future guardian, but there was something in Aunt Mary's voice and manner which made these remarks seem unnecessary although Mrs. Holt was secretly disappointed not to deliver them.

"It was fortunate that we happened to be in Nice at the time," she said with the evident feeling that some explanation was due. "I did not know poor Mrs. Randolph Leffingwell very very intimately, or Mr. Leffingwell. It was such a sudden such a terrible affair. But Mr. Holt and I were only too glad to do what we could."

"We feel very grateful to you," said Aunt Mary, quietly.

Mrs. Holt looked at her with a still more distinct approval, being tolerably sure that Mrs. Thomas Leffingwell understood. She had cleared her skirts of any possible implication of intimacy with the late Mrs. Randolph, and done so with a master touch.

In the meantime Honora had passed to Uncle Tom. After securing the little trunk, and settling certain matters with Mr. Holt, they said good−by to her late kind protectors, and started off for the nearest street−cars, Honora pulling Uncle Tom's mustache. More than one pedestrian paused to look back at the tall man carrying the beautiful child, bedecked like a young princess, and more than one passenger in the street cars smiled at them both.

CHAPTER II. PERDITA RECALLED

SAINT LOUIS, or that part of it which is called by dealers in real estate the choice residence section, grew westward. And Uncle Tom might be said to have been in the vanguard of the movement. In the days before Honora was born he had built his little house on what had been a farm on the Olive Street Road, at the crest of the second ridge from the river. Up this ridge, with clanking traces, toiled the horse−cars that carried Uncle Tom downtown to the bank and Aunt Mary to market.

Fleeing westward, likewise, from the smoke, friends of Uncle Tom's and Aunt Mary's gradually surrounded them building, as a rule, the high Victorian mansions in favour at that period, which were placed in the centre of commodious yards. For the friends of Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary were for the most part rich, and belonged, as did they, to the older families of the city. Mr. Dwyer's house, with its picture gallery, was across the street.

In the midst of such imposing company the little dwelling which became the home of our heroine sat well back in a plot that might almost be called a garden. In summer its white wooden front was nearly hidden by the quivering leaves of two tall pear trees. On the other side of the brick walk, and near the iron fence, was an elm and a flower bed that was Uncle Tom's pride and the admiration of the neighbourhood. Honora has but to shut her eyes to see it aflame with tulips at Eastertide. The eastern wall of the house was a mass of Virginia creeper, and beneath that another flower bed, and still another in the back−yard behind the lattice fence covered with cucumber vine. There were, besides, two maples and two apricot trees, relics of the farm, and of blessed memory. Such apricots! Visions of hot summer evenings come back, with Uncle Tom, in his seersucker coat, with his green watering−pot, bending over the beds, and Aunt Mary seated upright in her chair, looking up from her knitting with a loving eye.

Behind the lattice, on these summer evenings, stands the militant figure of that old retainer, Bridget the cook, her stout arms akimbo, ready to engage in vigorous banter should Honora deign to approach.

"Whisht, 'Nora darlint, it's a young lady ye'll be soon, and the beaux a−comin' 'round!" she would cry, and throw back her head and laugh until the tears were in her eyes.

And the princess, a slim figure in an immaculate linen frock with red ribbons which Aunt Mary had copied from Longstreth's London catalogue, would reply with dignity:

"Bridget, I wish you would try to remember that my name is Honora."

Another spasm of laughter from Bridget.

"Listen to that now!" she would cry to another ancient retainer, Mary Ann, the housemaid, whose kitchen chair was tilted up against the side of the woodshed. "It'll be 'Miss Honora' next, and George Hanbury here to−day with his eye through a knothole in the fence, out of his head for a sight of ye."

George Hanbury was Honora's cousin, and she did not deem his admiration a subject fit for discussion with Bridget.

"Sure," declared Mary Ann, "it's the air of a princess the child has."

That she should be thought a princess did not appear at all remarkable to Honora at twelve years of age. Perdita may have had such dreams. She had been born, she knew, in some wondrous land by the shores of the summer seas, not at all like St. Louis, and friends and relatives had not hesitated to remark in her hearing that she resembled her father, that handsome father who surely must have been a prince, whose before−mentional photograph in the tortoise−shell frame was on the bureau in her little room. So far as Randolph Leffingwell was concerned, photography had not been invented for nothing. Other records of him remained which Honora had likewise seen: one end of a rose−covered villa which Honora thought was a wing of his palace; a coach and four he was driving, and which had chanced to belong to an Englishman, although the photograph gave no evidence of this ownership. Neither Aunt Mary nor Uncle Tom had ever sought for reasons perhaps obvious to correct the child's impression of an extraordinary paternity.

Aunt Mary was a Puritan of Southern ancestry, and her father had been a Presbyterian minister. Uncle Tom was a member of the vestry of a church still under Puritan influences. As a consequence for Honora, there were Sunday afternoons periods when the imaginative faculty, in which she was by no means lacking, was given full play. She would sit by the hour in the swing Uncle Tom had hung for her under the maple near the lattice, while castles rose on distant heights against blue skies. There was her real home, in a balconied chamber that overlooked mile upon mile of rustling forest in the valley; and when the wind blew, the sound of it was like the sea. Honora did not remember the sea, but its music was often in her ears.

She would be aroused from these dreams of greatness by the appearance of old Catherine, her nurse, on the side porch, reminding her that it was time to wash for supper. No princess could have had a more humble tiring−woman than Catherine.

Honora cannot be unduly blamed. When she reached the "little house under the hill" (as Catherine called the chamber beneath the eaves), she beheld reflected in the mirror an image like a tall, white flower that might indeed have belonged to a princess. Her hair, the colour of burnt sienna, fell evenly to her shoulders; her features even then had regularity and hauteur; her legs, in their black silk stockings, were straight; and the simple white lawn frock made the best of a slender figure. Those frocks of Honora's were a continual source of wonder −and sometimes of envy to Aunt Mary's friends; who returned from the seaside in the autumn, after a week among the

fashions in Boston or New York, to find Honora in the latest models, and better dressed than their own children. Aunt Mary made no secret of the methods by which these seeming miracles were performed, and showed Cousin Eleanor Hanbury the fashion plates in the English periodicals. Cousin Eleanor sighed.

"Mary, you are wonderful," she would say. "Honora's clothes are better−looking than those I buy in the East, at such fabulous prices, from Cavendish."

Indeed, no woman was ever farther removed from personal vanity than Aunt Mary. She looked like a little Quakeress. Her silvered hair was parted in the middle and had, in spite of palpable efforts towards tightness and repression, a perceptible ripple in it. Grey was her only concession to colour, and her gowns and bonnets were of a primness which belonged to the past. Repression, or perhaps compression, was her note, for the energy confined within her little body was a thing to have astounded scientists. And Honora grew to womanhood and reflection before she had guessed or considered that her aunt was possessed of intense emotions which had no outlet. Her features were regular, her shy eye had the clearness of a forest pool. She believed in predestination, which is to say that she was a fatalist; and while she steadfastly continued to regard this world as a place of sorrow and trials, she concerned herself very little about her participation in a future life. Old Dr. Ewing, the rector of St. Anne's, while conceding that no better or more charitable woman existed, found it so exceedingly difficult to talk to her on the subject of religion that he had never tried it but once.

Such was Aunt Mary. The true student of human nature should not find it surprising that she spoiled Honora and strove at what secret expense, care, and self−denial to Uncle Tom and herself, none will ever know to adorn the child that she might appear creditably among companions whose parents were more fortunate in this world's goods; that she denied herself to educate Honora as these other children were educated. Nor is it astonishing that she should not have understood the highly complex organism of the young lady we have chosen for our heroine, who was shaken, at the age of thirteen, by unfulfilled longings.

Very early in life Honora learned to dread the summer, when one by one the families of her friends departed until the city itself seemed a remote and distant place from what it had been in the spring and winter. The great houses were closed and blinded, and in the evening the servants who had been left behind chattered on the front steps. Honora could not bear the sound of the trains that drifted across the night, and the sight of the trunks piled in the Hanburys' hall, in Wayland Square, always filled her with a sickening longing. Would the day ever come when she, too, would depart for the bright places of the earth? Sometimes, when she looked in the mirror, she was filled with a fierce belief in a destiny to sit in the high seats, to receive homage and dispense bounties, to discourse with great intellects, to know London and Paris and the marts and centres of the world as her father had. To escape only to escape from the prison walls of a humdrum existence, and to soar!

Let us, if we can, reconstruct an August day when all (or nearly all) of Honora's small friends were gone eastward to the mountains or the seaside. In "the little house under the hill," the surface of which was a hot slate roof, Honora would awake about seven o'clock to find old Catherine bending over her in a dun−coloured calico dress, with the light fiercely beating against the closed shutters that braved it so unflinchingly throughout the day.

"The birrds are before ye, Miss Honora, honey, and your uncle waterin' his roses this half−hour."

Uncle Tom was indeed an early riser. As Honora dressed (Catherine assisting as at a ceremony), she could see him, in his seersucker coat, bending tenderly over his beds; he lived enveloped in a peace which has since struck wonder to Honora's soul. She lingered in her dressing, even in those days, falling into reveries from which Catherine gently and deferentially aroused her; and Uncle Tom would be carving the beefsteak and Aunt Mary pouring the coffee when she finally arrived in the dining room to nibble at one of Bridget's unforgettable rolls or hot biscuits. Uncle Tom had his joke, and at quarter−past eight precisely he would kiss Aunt Mary and walk to the corner to wait for the ambling horse−car that was to take him to the bank. Sometimes Honora went to the corner with him, and he waved her good−by from the platform as he felt in his pocket for the nickel that was to pay his

fare.

When Honora returned, Aunt Mary had donned her apron, and was industriously aiding Mary Ann to wash the dishes and maintain the customary high polish on her husband's share of the Leffingwell silver which, standing on the side table, shot hither and thither rays of green light that filtered through the shutters into the darkened room. The child partook of Aunt Mary's pride in that silver, made for a Kentucky great−grandfather Leffingwell by a famous Philadelphia silversmith three−quarters of a century before. Honora sighed.

"What's the matter, Honora?" asked Aunt Mary, without pausing in her vigorous rubbing.

"The Leffingwells used to be great once upon a time, didn't they, Aunt Mary?"

"Your Uncle Tom," answered Aunt Mary, quietly, "is the greatest man I know, child."

"And my father must have been a great man, too," cried Honora, "to have been a consul and drive coaches."

Aunt Mary was silent. She was not a person who spoke easily on difficult subjects.

"Why don't you ever talk to me about my father, Aunt Mary? Uncle Tom does."

"I didn't know your father, Honora."

"But you have seen him?"

"Yes," said Aunt Mary, dipping her cloth into the whiting; "I saw him at my wedding. But he was very young."
"What was he like?" Honora demanded. "He was very handsome, wasn't he?"

"Yes, child."

"And he had ambition, didn't he, Aunt Mary?"

Aunt Mary paused. Her eyes were troubled as she looked at Honora, whose head was thrown back.

"What kind of ambition do you mean, Honora?"

"Oh," cried Honora, "to be great and rich and powerful, and to be somebody."

"Who has been putting such things in your head, my dear?"

"No one, Aunt Mary. Only, if I were a man, I shouldn't rest until I became great."

Alas, that Aunt Mary, with all her will, should have such limited powers of expression! She resumed her scrubbing of the silver before she spoke.

"To do one's duty, to accept cheerfully and like a Christian the responsibilities and burdens of life, is the highest form of greatness, my child. Your Uncle Tom has had many things to trouble him; he has always worked for others, and not for himself. And he is respected and loved by all who know him."

"Yes, I know, Aunt Mary. But −"

"But what, Honora?"

"Then why isn't he rich, as my father was?"

"Your father wasn't rich, my dear," said Aunt Mary, sadly.

"Why, Aunt Mary!" Honora exclaimed, "he lived in a beautiful house, and owned horses. Isn't that being rich?"

Poor Aunt Mary!

"Honora," she answered, "there are some things you are too young to understand. But try to remember, my dear, that happiness doesn't consist in being rich."

"But I have often heard you say that you wished you were rich, Aunt Mary, and had nice things, and a picture gallery like Mr. Dwyer."

"I should like to have beautiful pictures, Honora."

"I don't like Mr. Dwyer," declared Honora, abruptly. "You mustn't say that, Honora," was Aunt Mary's reproof. "Mr. Dwyer is an upright, public−spirited man, and he thinks a great deal of your Uncle Tom."

"I can't help it, Aunt Mary," said Honora. "I think he enjoys being − well, being able to do things for a man like Uncle Tom."

Neither Aunt Mary nor Honora guessed what a subtle criticism this was of Mr. Dwyer. Aunt Mary was troubled and puzzled; and she began to speculate (not for the first time) why the Lord had given a person with so little imagination a child like Honora to bring up in the straight and narrow path.

"When I go on Sunday afternoons with Uncle Tom to see Mr. Dwyer's pictures," Honora persisted, "I always feel that he is so glad to have what other people haven't, or he wouldn't have any one to show them to."

Aunt Mary shook her head. Once she had given her loyal friendship, such faults as this became as nothing.

"And then," said Honora, "when Mrs. Dwyer has dinner−parties for celebrated people who come here, why does she invite you in to see the table?"

"Out of kindness, Honora. Mrs. Dwyer knows that I enjoy looking at beautiful things."

"Why doesn't she invite you to the dinners?" asked Honora, hotly. "Our family is just as good as Mrs. Dwyer's."

The extent of Aunt Mary's distress was not apparent.

"You are talking nonsense, my child," she said. "All my friends know that I am not a person who can entertain distinguished people, and that I do not go out, and that I haven't the money to buy evening dresses. And even if I had," she added, "I haven't a pretty neck, so it's just as well."

A philosophy distinctly Aunt Mary's.

Uncle Tom, after he had listened without comment that evening to her account of this conversation, was of the opinion that to take Honora to task for her fancies would be waste of breath; that they would right themselves as she grew up. "I'm afraid it's inheritance, Tom," said Aunt Mary, at last. "And if so, it ought to be counteracted. We've seen other signs of it. You know Honora has little or no idea of the value of money or of its ownership."

"She sees little enough of it," Uncle Tom remarked with a smile.

"Tom."

"Well."

"Sometimes I think I've done wrong not to dress her more simply. I'm afraid it's given the child a taste for for self−adornment."

"I once had a fond belief that all women possessed such a taste," said Uncle Tom, with a quizzical look at his own exception. "To tell you the truth, I never classed it as a fault."

"Then I don't see why you married me," said Aunt Mary a periodical remark of hers. "But, Tom, I do wish her to appear as well as the other children, and" (Aunt Mary actually blushed) "the child has good looks."

"Why don't you go as far as old Catherine, and call her a princess?" he asked.

"Do you want me to ruin her utterly?" exclaimed Aunt Mary.

Uncle Tom put his hands on his wife's shoulders and looked down into her face, and smiled again. Although she held herself very straight, the top of her head was very little above the level of his chin.

"It strikes me that you are entitled to some little indulgence in life, Mary," he said.

One of the curious contradictions of Aunt Mary's character was a never dying interest, which held no taint of envy, in the doings of people more fortunate than herself. In the long summer days, after her silver was cleaned and her housekeeping and marketing finished, she read in the book−club periodicals of royal marriages, embassy balls, of great town and country houses and their owners at home and abroad. And she knew, by means of a correspondence with Cousin Eleanor Hanbury and other intimates, the kind of cottages in which her friends sojourned at the seashore or in the mountains; how many rooms they had, and how many servants, and very often who the servants were; she was likewise informed on the climate, and the ease with which it was possible to obtain fresh vegetables. And to all of this information Uncle Tom would listen, smiling but genuinely interested, while he carved at dinner.

One evening, when Uncle Tom had gone to play piquet with Mr. Isham, who was ill, Honora further surprised her aunt by exclaiming:−

"How can you talk of things other people have and not want them, Aunt Mary?"

"Why should I desire what I cannot have, my dear? I take such pleasure out of my friends' possessions as I can."

"But you want to go to the seashore, I know you do. I've heard you say so," Honora protested.

"I should like to see the open ocean before I die," admitted Aunt Mary, unexpectedly. "I saw New York harbour once, when we went to meet you. And I know how the salt water smells which is as much, perhaps, as I have the right to hope for. But I have often thought it would be nice to sit for a whole summer by the sea and listen to the waves dashing upon the beach, like those in the Chase picture in Mr. Dwyer's gallery."

Aunt Mary little guessed the unspeakable rebellion aroused in Honora by this acknowledgment of being fatally circumscribed. Wouldn't Uncle Tom ever be rich?

Aunt Mary shook her head she saw no prospect of it.

But other men, who were not half so good as Uncle Tom, got rich.

Uncle Tom was not the kind of man who cared for riches. He was content to do his duty in that sphere where God had placed him.

Poor Aunt Mary. Honora never asked her uncle such questions: to do so never occurred to her. At peace with all men, he gave of his best to children, and Honora remained a child. Next to his flowers, walking was Uncle Tom's chief recreation, and from the time she could be guided by the hand she went with him. His very presence had the gift of dispelling longings, even in the young; the gift of compelling delight in simple things. Of a Sunday afternoon, if the heat were not too great, he would take Honora to the wild park that stretches westward of the city, and something of the depth and intensity of his pleasure in the birds, the forest, and the wild flowers would communicate itself to her. She learned all unconsciously (by suggestion, as it were) to take delight in them; a delight that was to last her lifetime, a never failing resource to which she was to turn again and again. In winter, they went to the botanical gardens or the Zoo. Uncle Tom had a passion for animals, and Mr. Isham, who was a director, gave him a pass through the gates. The keepers knew him, and spoke to him with kindly respect. Nay, it seemed to Honora that the very animals knew him, and offered themselves ingratiatingly to be stroked by one whom they recognized as friend. Jaded horses in the street lifted their noses; stray, homeless cats rubbed against his legs, and vagrant dogs looked up at him trustfully with wagging tails.

Yet his goodness, as Emerson would have said, had some edge to it. Honora had seen the light of anger in his blue eye a divine ray. Once he had chastised her for telling Aunt Mary a lie (she could not have lied to him) and Honora had never forgotten it. The anger of such a man had indeed some element in it of the divine; terrible, not in volume, but in righteous intensity. And when it had passed there was no occasion for future warning. The memory of it lingered.

CHAPTER III. CONCERNING PROVIDENCE

WHAT quality was it in Honora that compelled Bridget to stop her ironing on Tuesdays in order to make hot waffles for a young woman who was late to breakfast? Bridget, who would have filled the kitchen with righteous wrath if Aunt Mary had transgressed the rules of the house, which were like the laws of the Medes and Persians! And in Honora's early youth Mary Ann, the housemaid, spent more than one painful evening writing home for cockle shells and other articles to propitiate our princess, who rewarded her with a winning smile and a kiss, which invariably melted the honest girl into tears. The Queen of Scots never had a more devoted chamber woman than old Catherine, who would have gone to the stake with a smile to save her little lady a single childish ill, and who spent her savings, until severely taken to task by Aunt Mary, upon objects for which a casual wish had been expressed. The saints themselves must at times have been aweary from hearing Honora's name.

Not to speak of Christmas! Christmas in the little house was one wild delirium of joy. The night before the festival was, to all outward appearances, an ordinary evening, when Uncle Tom sat by the fire in his slippers, as usual, scouting the idea that there would be any Christmas at all. Aunt Mary sewed, and talked with maddening calmness of the news of the day; but for Honora the air was charged with coming events of the first magnitude. The very furniture of the little sitting−room had a different air, the room itself wore a mysterious aspect, and the cannel−coal fire seemed to give forth a special quality of unearthly light. "Is to−morrow Christmas?" Uncle Tom would exclaim. "Bless me! Honora, I am so glad you reminded me."

"Now, Uncle Tom, you knew it was Christmas all the time!"

"Kiss your uncle good night, Honora, and go right to sleep, dear," − from Aunt Mary.

The unconscious irony in that command of Aunt Mary's! to go right to sleep! Many times was a head lifted from a small pillow, straining after the meaning of the squeaky noises that came up from below! Not Santa Claus. Honora's belief in him had merged into a blind faith in a larger and even more benevolent (if material) providence: the kind of providence which Mr. Meredith depicts, and which was to say to Beauchamp "Here's your marquise;" a particular providence which, at the proper time, gave Uncle Tom money, and commanded, with a smile, "Buy this for Honora she wants it." All sufficient reason! Soul−satisfying philosophy, to which Honora was to cling for many years of life. It is amazing how much can be wrung from a reluctant world by the mere belief in this kind of providence.

Sleep came at last, in the darkest of the hours. And still in the dark hours a stirring, a delicious sensation preceding reason, and the consciousness of a figure stealing about the room. Honora sat up in bed, shivering with cold and delight.

"Is it awake ye are, darlint, and it but four o'clock the morn!"

"What are you doing, Cathy?"

"Musha, it's to Mass I'm going, to ask the Mother of God to give ye many happy Christmases the like of this, Miss Honora." And Catherine's arms were about her.

"Oh, it's Christmas, Cathy, isn't it? How could I have forgotten it!"

"Now go to sleep, honey. Your aunt and uncle wouldn't like it at all at all if ye was to make noise in the middle of the night and it's little better it is."

Sleep! A despised waste of time in childhood. Catherine went to Mass, and after an eternity, the grey December light began to sift through the shutters, and human endurance had reached its limit. Honora, still shivering, seized a fleecy wrapper (the handiwork of Aunt Mary) and crept, a diminutive ghost, down the creaking stairway to the sitting−room. A sitting−room which now was not a sitting−room, but for to−day a place of magic. As though by a prearranged salute of the gods, at Honora's entrance the fire burst through the thick blanket of fine coal which Uncle Tom had laid before going to bed, and with a little gasp of joy that was almost pain, she paused on the threshold. That one flash, like Pizarro's first sunrise over Peru, gilded the edge of infinite possibilities.

Needless to enumerate them. The whole world, as we know, was in a conspiracy to spoil Honora. The Dwyers, the Cartwrights, the Haydens, the Brices, the Ishams, and I know not how many others had sent their tributes, and Honora's second cousins, the Hanburys, from the family mansion behind the stately elms of Wayland Square of which something anon. A miniature mahogany desk, a prayer−book and hymnal which the Dwyers had brought home from New York, endless volumes of a more secular and (to Honora) entrancing nature; roller skates; skates for real ice, when it should apppear in the form of sleet on the sidewalks; a sled; humbler gifts from Bridget, Mary Ann, and Catherine, and a wonderful coat, with hat to match, of a certain dark green velvet. When Aunt Mary appeared, an hour or so later, Honora was surveying her magnificence in the glass.

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" she cried, with her arms tightly locked around her aunt's neck, "how lovely! Did you send all the way to New York for it?"

"No, Honora," said her aunt, "it didn't come from New York." Aunt Mary did not explain that this coat had been her one engrossing occupation for six weeks, at such times when Honora was out or tucked away safely in bed.

Perhaps Honora's face fell a little. Aunt Mary scanned it rather anxiously. "Does that cause you to like it any less, Honora?" she asked.

"Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Honora, in a tone of reproval. And added after a little, "I suppose Mademoiselle made it."

"Does it make any difference who made it, Honora?"

"Oh, no indeed, Aunt Mary. May I wear it to Cousin Eleanor's to−day?"

"I gave it to you to wear, Honora."

Not in Honora's memory was there a Christmas breakfast during which Peter Erwin did not appear, bringing gifts. Peter Erwin, of whom we caught a glimpse doing an errand for Uncle Tom in the bank. With the complacency of the sun Honora was wont to regard this most constant of her satellites. Her awakening powers of observation had discovered him in bondage, and in bondage he had been ever since: for their acquaintance had begun on the first Sunday afternoon after Honora's arrival in St. Louis at the age of eighteen months. It will be remembered that Honora was even then a coquette, and as she sat in her new baby−carriage under the pear tree, flirted outrageously with Peter, who stood on one foot from embarrassment.

"Why, Peter," Uncle Tom had said slyly, "why don't you kiss her?"

That kiss had been Peter's seal of service. And he became, on Sunday afternoons, a sort of understudy for Catherine. He took an amazing delight in wheeling Honora up and down the yard, and up and down the sidewalk. Brunhilde or Queen Elizabeth never wielded a power more absolute, nor had an adorer more satisfactory; and of all his remarkable talents, none were more conspicuous than his abilities to tell a story and to choose a present. Emancipated from the perambulator, Honora would watch for him at the window, and toddle to the gate to meet him, a gentleman−in−waiting whose zeal, however arduous, never flagged.

On this particular Christmas morning, when she heard the gate slam, Honora sprang up from the table to don her green velvet coat. Poor Peter! As though his subjugation could be more complete!

"It's the postman," suggested Uncle Tom, wickedly.

"It's Peter!" cried Honora, triumphantly, from the hall as she flung open the door, letting in a breath of cold Christmas air out of the sunlight.

It was Peter, but a Peter who has changed some since perambulator days, just as Honora has changed some. A Peter who, instead of fourteen, is six and twenty; a full−fledged lawyer, in the office of that most celebrated of St. Louis practitioners, Judge Stephen Brice. For the Peter Erwins of this world are queer creatures, and move rapidly without appearing to the Honoras to move at all. A great many things have happened to Peter since he held been a messenger boy in the bank.

Needless to say, Uncle Tom had taken an interest in him. And, according to Peter, this fact accounted for all the good fortune which had followed. Shortly before the news came of his brother's death, Uncle Tom had discovered that the boy who did his errands so willingly was going to night school, and was the grandson of a gentleman who had fought with credit in the Mexican War, and died in misfortune: the grandmother was Peter's only living relative. Through Uncle Tom, Mr. Isham became interested, and Judge Brice. There was a certain scholarship in the Washington University which Peter obtained, and he worked his way through the law school afterwards.

A simple story, of which many a duplicate could be found in this country of ours. In the course of the dozen years or so of its unravelling the grandmother had died, and Peter had become, to all intents and purposes, a member of Uncle Tom's family. A place was set for him at Sunday dinner; and, if he did not appear, at Sunday tea. Sometimes at both. And here he was, as usual, on Christmas morning, his arms so full that he had had to push

open the gate with his foot.

"Well, well, well, well!" he said, stopping short on the doorstep and surveying our velvet−clad princess, "I've come to the wrong house." The princess stuck her finger into her cheek.

"Don't be silly, Peter!" she said; "and Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" he replied, edging sidewise in at the door and depositing his parcels on the mahogany horsehair sofa. He chose one, and seized the princess velvet coat and all! in his arms and kissed her. When he released her, there remained in her hand a morocco−bound diary, marked with her monogram, and destined to contain high matters.

"How could you know what I wanted, Peter?" she exclaimed, after she had divested it of the tissue paper, holly, and red ribbon in which he had so carefully wrapped it. For it is a royal trait to thank with the same graciousness and warmth the donors of the humblest and the greatest offerings.

There was a paper−knife for Uncle Tom, and a work−basket for Aunt Mary, and a dress apiece for Catherine, Bridget, and Mary Ann, none of whom Peter ever forgot. Although the smoke was even at that period beginning to creep westward, the sun poured through the lace curtains into the little dining−room and danced on the silver coffee−pot as Aunt Mary poured out Peter's cup, and the blue china breakfast plates were bluer than ever because it was Christmas. The humblest of familiar articles took on the air of a present. And after breakfast, while Aunt Mary occupied herself with that immemorial institution, which was to lure hitherwards so many prominent citizens of St. Louis during the day, eggnogg, Peter surveyed the offerings which transformed the sitting−room. The table had been pushed back against the bookcases, the chairs knew not their time−honoured places, and white paper and red ribbon littered the floor. Uncle Tom, relegated to a corner, pretended to read his newspaper, while Honora flitted from Peter's knees to his, or sat cross−legged on the hearthrug investigating a bottomless stocking.

"What in the world are we going to do with all these things?" said Peter.

"We?" cried Honora. "When we get married, I mean," said Peter, smiling at Uncle Tom. "Let's see!" and he began counting on his fingers, which were long but very strong so strong that Honora could never loosen even one of them when they gripped her. "One two three − eight Christmases before you are twenty−one. We'll have enough things to set us up in housekeeping. Or perhaps you'd rather get married when you are eighteen?"

"I've always told you I wasn't going to marry you, Peter," said Honora, with decision.

"Why not?" He always asked that question.

Honora sighed.

"I'll make a good husband," said Peter; "I'll promise. Ugly men are always good husbands."

"I didn't say you were ugly," declared the ever considerate Honora.

"Only my nose is too big," he quoted; "and I am too long one way and not wide enough."

"You have a certain air of distinction in spite of it," said Honora.

Uncle Tom's newspaper began to shake, and he read more industriously than ever.

"You've been reading novels!" said Peter, in a terrible judicial voice.

Honora flushed guiltily, and resumed her inspection of the stocking. Miss Rossiter, a maiden lady of somewhat romantic tendencies, was librarian of the Book Club that year. And as a result a book called "Harold's Quest," by an author who shall be nameless, had come to the house. And it was Harold who had had "a certain air of distinction."

"It isn't very kind of you to make fun of me when I pay you a compliment," replied Honora, with dignity.

"I was naturally put out," he declared gravely, "because you said you wouldn't marry me. But I don't intend to give up. No man who is worth his salt ever gives up."

"You are old enough to get married now," said Honora, still considerate. "But I am not rich enough," said Peter; "and besides, I want you."

One of the first entries in the morocco diary which had a lock and key to it was a description of Honora's future husband. We cannot violate the lock, nor steal the key from under her pillow. But this much, alas, may be said with discretion, that he bore no resemblance to Peter Erwin. It may be guessed, however, that he contained something of Harold, and more of Randolph Leffingwell; and that he did not live in St. Louis. An event of Christmas, after church, was the dinner of which Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary and Honora partook with Cousin Eleanor Hanbury, who had been a Leffingwell, and was a first cousin of Honora's father. Honora loved the atmosphere of the massive, yellow stone house in Wayland Square, with its tall polished mahogany doors and thick carpets, with its deferential darky servants, some of whom had been the slaves of her great uncle. To Honora, gifted with imagination, the house had an odour all its own; a rich, clean odour significant, in later life, of wealth and luxury and spotless housekeeping. And she knew it from top to bottom. The spacious upper floor, which in ordinary dwellings would have been an attic, was the realm of young George and his sisters, Edith and Mary (Aunt Mary's namesake). Rainy Saturdays, all too brief, Honora had passed there, when the big dolls' house in the playroom became the scene of domestic dramas which Edith rehearsed after she went to bed, although Mary took them more calmly. In his tenderer years, Honora even fired George, and riots occurred which took the combined efforts of Cousin Eleanor and Mammy Lucy to quell. It may be remarked, in passing, that Cousin Eleanor looked with suspicion upon this imaginative gift of Honora's, and had several serious conversations with Aunt Mary on the subject.

It was true, in a measure, that Honora quickened to life everything she touched, and her arrival in Wayland Square was invariably greeted with shouts of joy. There was no doll on which she had not bestowed a history, and by dint of her insistence their pasts clung to them with all the reality of a fate not by any means to be lived down. If George rode the huge rocking−horse, he was Paul Revere, or some equally historic figure, and sometimes, to Edith's terror, he was compelled to assume the rôle of Bluebeard, when Honora submitted to decapitation with a fortitude amounting to stoicism. Hide and seek was altogether too tame for her, a stake of life and death, or imprisonment or treasure, being a necessity. And many times was Edith extracted from the recesses of the cellar in a condition bordering on hysterics, the day ending tamely with a Bible story or a selection from "Little Women" read by Cousin Eleanor.

In autumn, and again in spring and early summer before the annual departure of the Hanbury family for the sea, the pleasant yard with its wide shade trees and its shrubbery was a land of enchantment threatened by a genie. Black Bias, the family coachman, polishing the fat carriage horses in the stable yard, was the genie; and George the intrepid knight who, spurred by Honora, would dash in and pinch Bias in a part of his anatomy which the honest darky had never seen. An ideal genie, for he could assume an astonishing fierceness at will.

"I'll git you yit, Marse George!"

Had it not been for Honora, her cousins would have found the paradise in which they lived a commonplace spot, and indeed they never could realize its tremendous possibilities in her absence. What would the Mediterranean

Sea and its adjoining countries be to us unless the wanderings of Ulysses and Æneas had made them real? And what would Cousin Eleanor's yard have been without Honora? Whatever there was of romance and folklore in Uncle Tom's library Honora had extracted at an early age, and with astonishing ease had avoided that which was dry and uninteresting. The result was a nomenclature for Aunt Eleanor's yard, in which there was even a terra incognita wherefrom venturesome travellers never returned, but were transformed into wild beasts or monkeys.

Although they acknowledged her leadership, Edith and Mary were sorry for Honora, for they knew that if her father had lived she would have had a house and garden like theirs, only larger, and beside a blue sea where it was warm always. Honora had told them so, and colour was lent to her assertions by the fact that their mother, when they repeated this to her, only smiled sadly, and brushed her eyes with her handkerchief. She was even more beautiful when she did so, Edith told her, a remark which caused Mrs. Hanbury to scan her younger daughter closely; it smacked of Honora. "Was Cousin Randolph handsome?" Edith demanded.

Mrs. Hanbury started, so vividly there arose before her eyes a brave and dashing figure, clad in grey English cloth, walking by her side on a sunny autumn morning in the Rue de la Paix. Well she remembered that trip abroad with her mother, Randolph's aunt, and how attentive he was, and showed them the best restaurants in which to dine. He had only been in France a short time, but his knowledge of restaurants and the world in general had been amazing, and his acquaintances legion. He had a way, which there was no resisting, of taking people by storm.

"Yes, dear," answered Mrs. Hanbury, absently, when the child repeated the question, "he was very handsome."

"Honora says he would have been President," put in George. "Of course I don't believe it. She said they lived in a palace by the sea in the south of France, with gardens and fountains and a lot of things like that, and princesses and princes and eunuchs −"

"And what!" exclaimed Mrs. Hanbury, aghast. "I know," said George, contemptuously, "she got that out of the 'Arabian Nights.'" But this suspicion did not prevent him, the next time Honora regaled them with more adventures of the palace by the summer seas, from listening with a rapt attention. No two tales were ever alike. His admiration for Honora did not wane, but increased. It differed from that of his sisters, however, in being a tribute to her creative faculties, while Edith's breathless faith pictured her cousin as having passed through as many adventures as Queen Esther. George paid her a characteristic compliment, but chivalrously drew her aside to bestow it. He was not one to mince matters.

"You're a wonder, Honora," he said. "If I could lie like that, I wouldn't want a pony."

He was forced to draw back a little from the heat of the conflagration he had kindled.

"George Hanbury," she cried, "don't you ever speak to me again! Never! Do you understand?"

It was thus that George, at some cost, had made a considerable discovery which, for the moment, shook even his scepticism. Honora believed it all herself.

Cousin Eleanor Hanbury was a person, or personage, who took a deep and abiding interest in her fellow−beings, and the old clothes of the Hanbury family went unerringly to the needy whose figures most resembled those of the original owners. For Mrs. Hanbury had a wide but comparatively unknown charity list. She was, secretly, one of the many providences which Honora accepted collectively, although it is by no means certain whether Honora, at this period, would have thanked her cousin for tuition at Miss Farmer's school, and for her daily tasks at French and music concerning which Aunt Mary was so particular. On the memorable Christmas morning when, arrayed in green velvet, she arrived with her aunt and uncle for dinner in Wayland Square, Cousin Eleanor drew Aunt Mary into her bedroom and shut the door, and handed her a sealed envelope. Without opening it, but guessing

with much accuracy its contents, Aunt Mary handed it back. "You are doing too much, Eleanor," she said.

Mrs. Hanbury was likewise a direct person.

"I will take it back on one condition, Mary. If you will tell me that Tom has finished paying Randolph's debts."

Mrs. Leffingwell was silent.

"I thought not," said Mrs. Hanbury. "Now Randolph was my own cousin, and I insist."

Aunt Mary turned over the envelope, and there followed a few moments' silence, broken only by the distant clamour of tin horns and other musical instruments of the season.

"I sometimes think, Mary, that Honora is a little like Randolph, and Mrs. Randolph. Of course, I did not know her."

"Neither did I," said Aunt Mary.

"Mary," said Mrs. Hanbury, again, "I realize how you worked to make the child that velvet coat. Do you think you ought to dress her that way?"

"I don't see why she shouldn't be as well dressed as the children of my friends, Eleanor."

Mrs. Hanbury laid her hand impulsively on Aunt Mary's.

"No child I know of dresses half as well," said Mrs. Hanbury. "The trouble you take −"

"Is rewarded," said Aunt Mary.

"Yes," Mrs. Hanbury agreed. "If my own daughters were half as good looking, I should be content. And Honora has an air of race. Oh, Mary, can't you see? I am only thinking of the child's future."

"Do you expect me to take down all my mirrors, Eleanor? If she has good looks," said Aunt Mary, "she has not learned it from my lips."

It was true. Even Aunt Mary's enemies, and she had some, could not accuse her of the weakness of flattery. So Mrs. Hanbury smiled, and dropped the subject.

CHAPTER IV. OF TEMPERAMENT

WE have the word of Mr. Cyrus Meeker that Honora did not have to learn to dance. The art came to her naturally. Of Mr. Cyrus Meeker, whose mustaches, at the age of five and sixty, are waxed as tight as ever, and whose little legs to−day are as nimble as of yore. He has a memory like Mr. Gladstone's, and can give you a social history of the city that is well worth your time and attention. He will tell you how, for instance, he was kicked by the august feet of Mr. George Hanbury on the occasion of his first lesson to that distinguished young gentleman; and how, although Mr. Meeker's shins were sore, he pleaded nobly for Mr. George, who was sent home in the carriage by himself, a punishment, by the way, which Mr. George desired above all things.

This celebrated incident occurred in the new ballroom at the top of the new house of young Mrs. Hayden, where the meetings of the dancing class were held weekly. Today the soot, like the ashes of Vesuvius, spouting from ten

thousand soft−coal craters, has buried that house and the whole district fathoms deep in social obscurity. And beautiful Mrs. Hayden what has become of her? And Lucy Hayden, that doll−like darling of the gods?

All this belongs, however, to another history, which may some day be written. This one is Honora's, and must be got on with, for it is to be a chronicle of lightning changes. Happy we if we can follow Honora, and we must be prepared to make many friends and drop them in the process.

Shortly after Mrs. Hayden had built that palatial house (which had a high fence around its grounds and a driveway leading to a porte−cochère) and had given her initial ball, the dancing class began. It was on a blue afternoon in late November that Aunt Mary and Honora, with Cousin Eleanor and the two girls, and George sulking in a corner of the carriage, were driven through the gates behind Bias and the fat horses of the Hanburys.

Honora has a vivid remembrance of the impression the house made on her, with its polished floors and spacious rooms filled with a new and mysterious and altogether inspiring fashion of things. Mrs. Hayden represented the outposts in the days of Richardson and Davenport had Honora but known it. This great house was all so different from anything she (and many others in the city) had ever seen. And she stood gazing into the drawing−room, with its curtains and decorously drawn shades, in a rapture which her aunt and cousins were far from guessing.

"Come, Honora," said her aunt. What's the matter, dear?"

How could she explain to Aunt Mary that the sight of beautiful things gave her a sort of pain when she did not yet know it herself? There was the massive stairway, for instance, which they ascended, softly lighted by a great leaded window of stained glass on the first landing; and the spacious bedrooms with their shining brass beds and lace spreads (another innovation which Honora resolved to adopt when she married); and at last, far above all, its deep−set windows looking out above the trees towards the park a mile to the westward, the ballroom, the ballroom, with its mirrors and high chandeliers, and chairs of gilt and blue set against the walls, all of which made no impression whatever upon George and Mary and Edith, but gave Honora a thrill. No wonder that she learned to dance quickly under such an inspiration!

And how pretty Mrs. Hayden looked as she came forward to greet them and kissed Honora! She had been Virginia Grey, and scarce had had a gown to her back when she had married the elderly Duncan Hayden, who had built her this house and presented her with a checkbook, a check−book which Virginia believed to be like the widow's cruse of oil − unfailing. Alas, those days of picnics and balls; of dinners at that recent innovation, the club; of theatre−parties and excursions to baseball games between the young men in Mrs. Hayden's train (and all young men were) who played at Harvard or Yale or Princeton; those days were too care−free to have endured.

"Aunt Mary," asked Honora, when they were home again in the lamplight of the little sitting−room, "why was it that Mr. Meeker was so polite to Cousin Eleanor, and asked her about my dancing instead of you?"

Aunt Mary smiled. "Because, Honora," she said, "because I am a person of no importance in Mr. Meeker's eyes."

"If I were a man," cried Honora, fiercely, "I should never rest until I had made enough money to make Mr. Meeker wriggle."

"Honora, come here," said her aunt, gazing in troubled surprise at the tense little figure by the mantel. "I don't know what could have put such things into your head, my child. Money isn't everything. In times of real trouble it cannot save one."

"But it can save one from humiliation!" exclaimed Honora, unexpectedly. Another sign of a peculiar precociousness, at fourteen, with which Aunt Mary was finding herself unable to cope. "I would rather be killed than humiliated by Mr. Meeker."

Whereupon she flew out of the room and upstairs, where old Catherine, in dismay, found her sobbing a little later.

Poor Aunt Mary! Few people guessed the spirit which was bound up in her, aching to extend its sympathy and not knowing how, save by an unswerving and undemonstrative devotion. Her words of comfort were as few as her silent deeds were many.

But Honora continued to go to the dancing class, where she treated Mr. Meeker with a hauteur that astonished him, amused Virginia Hayden, and perplexed Cousin Eleanor. Mr. Meeker's cringing soul responded, and in a month Honora was the leading spirit of the class, led the marches, and was pointed out by the little dancing master as all that a lady should be in deportment and bearing.

This treatment, which succeeded so well in Mr. Meeker's case, Honora had previously applied to others of his sex. Like most people with a future, she began young. Of late, for instance, Mr. George Hanbury had shown a tendency to regard her as his personal property; for George had a high−handed way with him, boys being an enigma to his mother. Even in those days he had a bullet head and a red face and square shoulders, and was rather undersized for his age which was Honora's. Needless to say, George did not approve of the dancing class; and let it be known, both by words and deeds, that he was there under protest. Nor did he regard with favour Honora's triumphal progress, but sat in a corner with several congenial spirits whose feelings ranged from scorn to despair, commenting in loud whispers upon those of his sex to whom the terpsichorean art came more naturally. Upon one Algernon Cartwright, for example, whose striking likeness to the Van Dyck portrait of a young king had been more than once commented upon by his elders, and whose velveteen suits enhanced the resemblance. Algernon, by the way, was the favourite male pupil of Mr. Meeker; and, on occasions, Algernon and Honora were called upon to give exhibitions for the others, the sight of which filled George with contemptuous rage. Algernon danced altogether too much with Honora, so George informed his cousin.

The simple result of George's protests was to make Honora dance with Algernon the more, evincing, even at this period of her career, a commendable determination to resent dictation. George should have lived in the Middle Ages, when the spirit of modern American womanhood was as yet unborn. Once he contrived, by main force, to drag her out into the hall.

"George," she said, "perhaps, if you'd let me alone perhaps I'd like you better."

"Perhaps," he retorted fiercely, "if you wouldn't make a fool of yourself with those mother's darlings, I'd like you better."

"George," said Honora, "learn to dance."

"Never!" he cried, but she was gone. While hovering around the door he heard Mrs. Hayden's voice.

"Unless I am tremendously mistaken, my dear," that lady was remarking to Mrs. Dwyer, whose daughter Emily's future millions were powerless to compel youths of fourteen to dance with her, although she is now happily married, "unless I am mistaken, Honora will have a career. The child will be a raving beauty. And she has to perfection the art of managing men. "As her father had the art of managing women," said Mrs. Dwyer. "Dear me, how well I remember Randolph! I would have followed him to to Cheyenne."

Mrs. Hayden laughed. "He never would have gone to Cheyenne, I imagine," she said.

"He never looked at me, and I have reason to be profoundly thankful for it," said Mrs. Dwyer.

Virginia Hayden bit her lip. She remembered a saying of Mrs. Brice, "Blessed are the ugly, for they shall not be tempted."

"They say that poor Tom Leffingwell has not yet finished paying his debts," continued Mrs. Dwyer, "although his uncle, Eleanor Hanbury's father, cancelled what Randolph had had from him in his will. It was twenty−five thousand dollars. James Hanbury, you remember, had him appointed consul at Nice. Randolph Leffingwell gave the impression of conferring a favour when he borrowed money. I cannot understand why he married that penniless and empty−headed beauty."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Hayden, "it was because of his ability to borrow money that he felt he could afford to."

The eyes of the two ladies unconsciously followed Honora about the room.

"I never knew a better or a more honest woman than Mary Leffingwell, but I tremble for her. She is utterly incapable of managing that child. If Honora is a complicated mechanism now, what will she be at twenty? She has elements in her which poor Mary never dreamed of. I overheard her with Emily, and she talks like a grown−up person."

Mrs. Hayden's dimples deepened.

"Better than some grown−up women," she said. "She sat in my room while I dressed the other afternoon. Mrs. Leffingwell had sent her with a note about that French governess. And, by the way, she speaks French as though she had lived in Paris."

Little Mrs. Dwyer raised her hands in protest.

"It doesn't seem natural, somehow. It doesn't seem exactly moral, my dear." "Nonsense," said Mrs. Hayden. "Mrs. Leffingwell is only giving the child the advantages which her companions have Emily has French, hasn't she?"

"But Emily can't speak it that way," said Mrs. Dwyer. "I don't blame Mary Leffingwell. She thinks she is doing her duty, but it has always seemed to me that Honora was one of those children who would better have been brought up on bread and butter and jam."

"Honora would only have eaten the jam," said Mrs. Hayden. "But I love her."

"I, too, am fond of the child, but I tremble for her. I am afraid she has that terrible thing which is called temperament."

George Hanbury made a second heroic rush, and dragged Honora out once more.

"What is this disease you've got?" he demanded.

"Disease?" she cried; "I haven't any disease."

"Mrs. Dwyer says you have temperament, and that it is a terrible thing."

Honora stopped him in a corner.

"Because people like Mrs. Dwyer haven't got it," she declared, with a warmth which George found inexplicable.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"You'll never know, either, George," she answered; it's soul."

"Soul!" he repeated; "I have one, and its immortal," he added promptly.

In the summer, that season of desolation for Honora, when George Hanbury and Algernon Cartwright and other young gentlemen were at the seashore learning to sail boats and to play tennis, Peter Erwin came to his own. Nearly every evening after dinner, while the light was still lingering under the shade trees of the street, and Aunt Mary still placidly sewing in the wicker chair on the lawn, and Uncle Tom making the tour of flowers with his watering pot, the gate would slam, and Peter's tall form appear. It never occurred to Honora that had it not been for Peter those evenings would have been even less bearable than they were. To sit indoors with a light and read in a St. Louis midsummer was not to be thought of. Peter played backgammon with her on the front steps, and later on chess. Sometimes they went for a walk as far as Grand Avenue. And sometimes when Honora grew older she was permitted to go with him to Uhrig's Cave. Those were memorable occasions indeed!

What Saint Louisan of the last generation does not remember Uhrig's Cave? nor look without regret upon the thing which has replaced it, called a Coliseum? The very name, Uhrig's Cave, sent a shiver of delight down one's spine, and many were the conjectures one made as to what might be enclosed in that half a block of impassible brick wall, over which the great trees stretched their branches. Honora, from comparative infancy, had her own theory, which so possessed the mind of Edith Hanbury that she would not look at the wall when they passed in the carriage. It was a still and sombre place by day; and sometimes, if you listened, you could hear the whisperings of the forty thieves on the other side of the wall. But no one had ever dared to cry "Open, Sesâmê!" at the great wooden gates.

At night, in the warm season, when well brought up children were at home or at the seashore, strange things were said to happen at Uhrig's Cave.

Honora was a tall slip of a girl of sixteen before it was given her to know these mysteries, and the Ali Baba theory a thing of the past. Other theories had replaced it. Nevertheless she clung tightly to Peter's arm as they walked down Locust Street and came in sight of the wall. Above it, and under the big trees, shone a thousand glittering lights: there was a crowd at the gate, and instead of saying, "Open, Sesâmê," Peter slipped two bright fifty−cent pieces to the red−faced German ticket−man, and in they went.

First and most astounding of disillusions of passing childhood, it was not a cave at all! And yet the word "disillusion" does not apply. It was, after all, the most enchanting and exciting of spots, to make one's eye shine and one's heart beat. Under the trees were hundreds of tables surrounded by hovering ministering angels in white, and if you were German, they brought you beer; if American, ice−cream. Beyond the tables was a stage, with footlights already set and orchestra tuning up, and a curtain on which was represented a gentleman making decorous love to a lady beside a fountain. As in a dream, Honora followed Peter to a table, and he handed her a programme.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "it's going to be 'Pinafore'!"

Honora's eyes shone like stars, and elderly people at the neighbouring tables turned more than once to smile at her that evening. And Peter turned more than once and smiled too. But Honora did not consider Peter. He was merely Providence in one of many disguises, and Providence is accepted by his beneficiaries as a matter of fact.

The rapture of a young lady of temperament is a difficult thing to picture. The bird may feel it as he soars, on a bright August morning, high above amber cliffs jutting out into indigo seas; the novelist may feel it when the four walls of his room magically disappear and the profound secrets of the universe are on the point of revealing themselves. Honora gazed, and listened, and lost herself. She was no longer in Uhrig's Cave, but in the great world, her soul a−quiver with harmonies.

"Pinafore," although a comic opera, held something tragic for Honora, and opened the flood−gates to dizzy sensations which she did not understand. How little Peter, who drummed on the table to the tune of

"Give three cheers and one cheer more For the hearty captain of the Pinafore,"

imagined what was going on beside him! There were two factors in his pleasure; he liked the music, and he enjoyed the delight of Honora.

What is Peter? Let us cease looking at him through Honora's eyes and taking him like daily bread, to be eaten and not thought about. From one point of view, he is twenty−nine and elderly, with a sense of humour unsuspected by young persons of temperament. Strive as we will, we have only been able to see him in his rôle of Providence, or of the piper. Has he no existence, no purpose in life outside of that perpetual gentleman in waiting? If so, Honora has never considered it.

After the finale had been sung and the curtain dropped for the last time, Honora sighed and walked out of the garden as one in a trance. Once in a while, as he found a way for them through the crowd, Peter glanced down at her, and something like a smile tugged at the corners of a decidedly masculine mouth, and lit up his eyes. Suddenly, at Locust Street, under the lamp, she stopped and surveyed him. She saw a very real, very human individual, clad in a dark nondescript suit of clothes which had been bought ready−made, and plainly without the bestowal of much thought, on Fifth Street. The fact that they were a comparative fit was in itself a tribute to the enterprise of the Excelsior Clothing Company, for Honora's observation that he was too long one way had been just. He was too tall, his shoulders were too high, his nose too prominent, his eyes too deep−set; and he wore a straw hat with the brim turned up.

To Honora his appearance was as familiar as the picture of the Pope which had always stood on Catherine's bureau. But to−night, by grace of some added power of vision, she saw him with new and critical eyes. She was surprised to discover that he was possessed of a quality with which she had never associated him youth. Not to put it too strongly comparative youth.

"Peter," she demanded, "why do you dress like that?"

"Like what?" he said.

Honora seized the lapel of his coat.

"Like that," she repeated. "Do you know, if you wore different clothes, you might almost be distinguished looking. Don't laugh. I think it's horrid of you always to laugh when I tell you things for your own good."

"It was the idea of being almost distinguished looking that that gave me a shock," he assured her repentantly.

"You should dress on a different principle," she insisted.

Peter appeared dazed.

"I couldn't do that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because because I don't dress on any principle now."

"Yes, you do," said Honora, firmly. "You dress on the principle of the wild beasts and fishes. It's all in our natural history at Miss Farmer's. The crab is the colour of the seaweed, and the deer of the thicket. It's a device of nature for the protection of weak things."

Peter drew himself up proudly.

"I have always understood, Miss Leffingwell, that the king of beasts was somewhere near the shade of the jungle."

Honora laughed in spite of this apparent refutation of her theory of his apparel, and shook her head. "Do be serious, Peter. You'd make much more of an impression on people if you wore clothes that had well, a little more distinction."

"What's the use of making an impression if you can't follow it up?" he said.

"You can," she declared. "I never thought of it until to−night, but you must have a great deal in you to have risen all the way from an errand boy in the bank to a lawyer."

"Look out!" he cautioned her; "I shall become insupportably conceited."

"A little more conceit wouldn't hurt you," said Honora, critically. "You'll forgive me, Peter, if I tell you from time to time what I think. It's for your own good."

"I try to realize that," replied Peter, humbly. "How do you wish me to dress like Mr. Rossiter?"

The picture evoked of Peter arrayed like Mr. Harland Rossiter, who had sent flowers to two generations and was preparing to send more to a third, was irresistible. Every city, hamlet, and village has its Harland Rossiter. He need not be explained. But Honora soon became grave again.

"No, but you ought to dress as though you were somebody, and different from the ordinary man on the street."

"But I'm not," objected Peter.

"Oh," cried Honora, "don't you want to be? I can't understand any man not wanting to be. If I were a man, I wouldn't stay here a day longer than I had to."

Peter was silent as they went in at the gate and opened the door, for on this festive occasion they were provided with a latchkey. He turned up the light in the hall to behold a transformation quite as wonderful as any contained in the "Arabian Nights" or Keightley's "Fairy Mythology." This was not the Honora with whom he had left the house scarce three hours before! The cambric dress, to be sure, was still no longer than the tops of her ankles, and the hair still hung in a heavy braid down her back. These were positively all that remained of the original Honora, and the change had occurred in the incredibly brief space required for the production of the opera "Pinafore." This Honora was a woman in a strange and disturbing state of exaltation, whose eyes beheld a vision. And Peter, although he had been the subject of her conversation, well knew that he was not included in the vision. He smiled a little as he looked at her. It is becoming apparent that he is one of those unfortunate unimaginative beings incapable of great illusions.

"You're not going!" she exclaimed.

He glanced significantly at the hall clock.

"Why, it's long after bedtime, Honora."

"I don't want to go to bed. I feel like talking," she declared. "Come, let's sit on the steps awhile. If you go home, I shan't go to sleep for hours, Peter."

"And what would Aunt Mary say to me?" he inquired.

"Oh, she wouldn't care. She wouldn't even know it."

He shook his head, still smiling.

"I'd never be allowed to take you to Uhrig's Cave, or anywhere else, again," he replied. "I'll come to−morrow evening, and you can talk to me then."

"I shan't feel like it then," she said in a tone that implied his opportunity was now or never. But seeing him still obdurate, with startling suddenness she flung her arms around his neck a method which at times had succeeded marvellously and pleaded coaxingly: "Only a quarter of an hour, Peter. I've got so many things to say, and I know I shall forget them by to−morrow."

It was a night of wonders. To her astonishment the hitherto pliant Peter, who only existed in order to do her will, became transformed into a brusque masculine creature which she did not recognize. With a movement that was almost rough he released himself and fled, calling back a "good night" to her out of the darkness. He did not even wait to assist her in the process of locking up. Honora, profoundly puzzled, stood for a while in the doorway gazing out into the night. When at length she turned, she had forgotten him entirely.

It was true that she did not sleep for hours, and on awaking the next morning another phenomenon awaited her. The "little house under the hill" was immeasurably shrunken. Poor Aunt Mary, who did not understand that a performance of "Pinafore" could give birth to the unfulfilled longings which result in the creation of high things, spoke to Uncle Tom a week later concerning an astonishing and apparently abnormal access of industry.

"She's been reading all day long, Tom, or else shut up in her room, where Catherine tells me she is writing. I'm afraid Eleanor Hanbury is right when she says I don't understand the child. And yet she is the same to me as though she were my own."

It was true that Honora was writing, and that the door was shut, and that she did not feel the heat. In one of the bookcases she had chanced upon that immortal biography of Dr. Johnson, and upon the letters of another prodigy of her own sex, Madame d'Arblay, whose romantic debut as an authoress was an inspiration in itself. Honora actually quivered when she read of Dr. Johnson's first conversation with Miss Burney. To write a book of the existence of which even one's own family did not know, to publish it under a nom de plume, and to awake one day to fêtes and fame would be indeed to live!

Unfortunately Honora's novel no longer exists, or the world might have discovered a second Evelina. A regard for truth compels the statement that it was never finished. But what rapture while the fever lasted! Merely to take up the pen was to pass magically through marble portals into the great world itself.

The Sir Charles Grandison of this novel was, needless to say, not Peter Erwin. He was none other than Mr. Randolph Leffingwell, under a very thin disguise.

CHAPTER V. IN WHICH PROVIDENCE KEEPS FAITH

TWO more years have gone by, limping in the summer and flying in the winter, two more years of conquests. For our heroine appears to be one of the daughters of Helen, born to make trouble for warriors and others − and even for innocent bystanders like Peter Erwin. Peter was debarred from entering those brilliant lists in which apparel played so great a part. George Hanbury, Guy Rossiter, Algernon Cartwright, Eliphalet Hopper Dwyer familiarly known as "Hoppy" and other young gentlemen whose names are now but memories, each had his brief day of triumph. Arrayed like Solomon in wonderful clothes from the mysterious and luxurious East, they returned at Christmas−tide and Easter from college to break lances over Honora. Let us say it boldly she was like that: she had the world−old knack of sowing discord and despair in the souls of young men. She was as those who had known that fascinating gentleman were not slow to remark Randolph Leffingwell over again.

During the festival seasons, Uncle Tom averred, they wore out the latch on the front gate. If their families possessed horses to spare, they took Honora driving in Forest Park; they escorted her to those anomalous dances peculiar to their innocent age, which are neither children's parties nor full−fledged balls; their presents, while of no intrinsic value as one young gentleman said in a presentation speech − had an enormous, if shy, significance.

"What a beautiful ring you are wearing; Honora," Uncle Tom remarked slyly one April morning at breakfast; "let me see it."

Honora blushed, and hid her hand under the table−cloth. And the ring suffice it to say that her little finger was exactly insertable in a ten−cent piece from which everything had been removed but the milling: removed with infinite loving patience by Mr. Rossiter, and at the expense of much history and philosophy and other less important things, in his college bedroom at New Haven. Honora wore it for a whole week; a triumph indeed for Mr. Rossiter; when it was placed in a box in Honora's bedroom, which contained other gifts not all from him and many letters, in the writing of which learning had likewise suffered. The immediate cause of the putting away of this ring was said to be the renowned Clinton Howe, who was on the Harvard football eleven, and who visited Mr. George Hanbury that Easter. Fortunate indeed the tailor who was called upon to practise his art on an Adonis like Mr. Howe, and it was remarked that he scarcely left Honora's side at the garden party and dance which Mrs. Dwyer gave in honour of the returning heroes, on the Monday of Easter week.

This festival, on which we should like to linger, but cannot, took place at the new Dwyer residence. For six months the Victorian mansion opposite Uncle Tom's house had been sightless, with blue blinds drawn down inside the plate glass windows. And the yellow stone itself was not so yellow as it once had been, but had now the appearance of soiled manilla wrapping paper, with black streaks here and there where the soot had run. The new Dwyer house was of grey stone, Georgian and palatial, with a picture−gallery twice the size of the old one; a magnificent and fitting pioneer in a new city of palaces.

Westward the star of Empire away from the smoke. The Dwyer mansion, with its lawns and gardens and heavily balustraded terrace, faced the park that stretched away like a private estate to the south and west. That same park with its huge trees and black forests that was Ultima Thule in Honora's childhood; in the open places there had been real farms and hayricks which she used to slide down with Peter while Uncle Tom looked for wild flowers in the fields. It had been separated from the city in those days by an endless country road, like a Via Claudia stretching towards mysterious Germanian forests, and it was deemed a feat for Peter to ride thither on his big−wheeled bicycle. Forest Park was the country, and all that the country represented in Honora's childhood. For Uncle Tom on a summer's day to hire a surrey at Braintree's Livery Stable and drive thither was like to what shall that bliss be compared in these days when we go to Europe with indifference?

And now Lindell Road the Via Claudia of long ago had become Lindell Boulevard, with granitoid sidewalks. And the dreary fields through which it had formerly run were bristling with new houses in no sense Victorian, and

which were the first stirrings of a national sense of the artistic. The old horse−cars with the clanging chains had disappeared, and you could take an electric to within a block of the imposing grille that surrounded the Dwyer grounds. Westward the star!

Fading fast was the glory of that bright new district on top of the second hill from the river where Uncle Tom was a pioneer. Soot had killed the pear trees, the apricots behind the lattice fence had withered away; asphalt and soot were slowly sapping the vitality of the maples on the sidewalk; and sometimes Uncle Tom's roses looked as though they might advantageously be given a coat of paint, like those in Alice in Wonderland. Honora should have lived in the Dwyers' mansion − people who are capable of judging said so. People who saw her at the garden party said she had the air of belonging in such surroundings much more than Emily, whom even budding womanhood had not made beautiful. And Eliphalet Hopper Dwyer, if his actions meant anything, would have welcomed her to that house, or built her another twice as fine, had she deigned to give him the least encouragement.

Cinderella! This was what she facetiously called herself one July morning of that summer she was eighteen. Cinderella in more senses than one, for never had the city seemed more dirty or more deserted, or indeed, more stifling. Winter and its festivities were a dream laid away in moth balls. Surely Cinderella's life had held no greater contrasts! To this day the odour of matting brings back to Honora the sense of closed shutters; of a stifling south wind stirring their slats at noonday; the vision of Aunt Mary, cool and placid in a cambric sacque, sewing by the window in the upper hall, and the sound of fruit venders crying in the street, or of ragmen in the alley "Rags, bottles, old iron!" What memories of endless, burning, lonely days come rushing back with those words!

When the sun had sufficiently heated the bricks of the surrounding houses in order that he might not be forgotten during the night, he slowly departed. If Honora took her book under the maple tree in the yard, she was confronted with that hideous wooden sign "To Let" on the Dwyer's iron fence opposite, and the grass behind it was unkempt and overgrown with weeds. Aunt Mary took an unceasing and (to Honora's mind) morbid interest in the future of that house.

"I suppose it will be a boarding−house," she would say, "it's much too large for poor people to rent, and only poor people are coming into this district now."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!"

"Well, my dear, why should we complain? We are poor, and it is appropriate that we should live among the poor. Sometimes I think it is a pity that you should have been thrown all your life with rich people, my child. I am afraid it has made you discontented. It is no disgrace to be poor. We ought to be thankful that we have everything we need."

Honora put down her sewing. For she had learned to sew Aunt Mary had insisted upon that, as well as French. She laid her hand upon her aunt's.

"I am thankful," she said, and her aunt little guessed the intensity of the emotion she was seeking to control, or imagined the hidden fires. "But sometimes sometimes I try to forget that we are poor. Perhaps some day we shall not be." It seemed to Honora that Aunt Mary derived a real pleasure from the contradiction of this hope. She shook her head vigorously.

"We shall always be, my child. Your Uncle Tom is getting old, and he has always been too honest to make a great deal of money. And besides," she added, "he has not that kind of ability."

Uncle Tom might be getting old, but he seemed to Honora to be of the same age as in her childhood. Some people never grow old, and Uncle Tom was one of these. Fifteen years before he had been promoted to be the cashier of the Prairie Bank, and he was the cashier to−day. He had the same quiet smile, the same quiet humour, the same calm acceptance of life. He seemed to bear no grudge even against that ever advancing enemy, the soot, which made it increasingly difficult for him to raise his flowers. Those which would still grow he washed tenderly night and morning with his watering−pot. The greatest wonders are not at the ends of the earth, but near us. It was to take many years for our heroine to realize this.

Strong faith alone could have withstood the continued contact with such a determined fatalism as Aunt Mary's, and yet it is interesting to note that Honora's belief in her providence never wavered. A prince was to come who was to bear her away from the ragmen and the boarding−houses and the soot: and incidentally and in spite of herself, Aunt Mary was to come too, and Uncle Tom. And sometimes when she sat reading of an evening under the maple, her book would fall to her lap and the advent of this personage become so real a thing that she bounded when the gate slammed to find that it was only Peter.

It was preposterous, of course, that Peter should be a prince in disguise. Peter who, despite her efforts to teach him distinction in dress, insisted upon wearing the same kind of clothes. A mild kind of providence, Peter, whose modest functions were not unlike those of the third horse which used to be hitched on to the street car at the foot of the Seventeenth−Street hill: it was Peter's task to help pull Honora through the interminable summers. Uhrig's Cave was an old story now: mysteries were no longer to be expected in St. Louis. There was a great panorama or something to that effect in the wilderness at the end of one of the new electric lines, where they sometimes went to behold the White Squadron of the new United States Navy engaged in battle with mimic forts on a mimic sea, on the very site where the country place of Madame Clément had been. The mimic sea, surrounded by wooden stands filled with common people eating peanuts and popcorn, was none other than Madame Clément's pond, which Honora remembered as a spot of enchantment. And they went out in the open cars with these same people, who stared at Honora as though she had got in by mistake, but always politely gave her a seat. And Peter thanked them. Sometimes he fell into conversations with them, and it was noticeable that they nearly always shook hands with him at parting. Honora did not approve of this familiarity.

"But they may be clients some day," he argued a frivolous answer to which she never deigned to reply.

Just as one used to take for granted that third horse which pulled the car uphill, so Peter was taken for granted. He might have been on the highroad to a renown like that of Chief Justice Marshall, and Honora had been none the wiser.

"Well, Peter," said Uncle Tom at dinner one evening of that memorable summer, when Aunt Mary was helping the blackberries, and incidentally deploring that she did not live in the country, because of the cream one got there, "I saw Judge Brice in the bank to−day, and he tells me you covered yourself with glory in that iron foundry suit."

"The Judge must have his little joke, Mr. Leffingwell," replied Peter, but he reddened nevertheless.

Honora thought winning an iron foundry suit a strange way to cover one's self with glory. It was not, at any rate, her idea of glory. What were lawyers for, if not to win suits? And Peter was a lawyer. "In five years," said Uncle Tom, "the firm will be Brice and Erwin. You mark my words. And by that time," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "you'll be ready to marry Honora."

"Tom," reproved Aunt Mary, gently, "you oughtn't to say such things."

This time there was no doubt about Peter's blush. He fairly burned. Honora looked at him and laughed.

"Peter is meant for an old bachelor," she said.

"If he remains a bachelor," said Uncle Tom, "he'll be the greatest waste of good material I know of. And if you succeed in getting him, Honora, you'll be the luckiest young woman of my acquaintance."

"Tom," said Aunt Mary, "it was all very well to talk that way when Honora was a child. But now she may not wish to marry Peter. And Peter may not wish to marry her."

Even Peter joined in the laughter at this literal and characteristic statement of the case.

"It's more than likely," said Honora, wickedly. "He hasn't kissed me for two years."

"Why, Peter," said Uncle Tom, "you act as though it were warm to−night. It was only seventy when we came in to dinner."

"Take me out to the park," commanded Honora.

"Tom," said Aunt Mary, as she stood on the step and watched them cross the street, "I wish the child would marry him. Not now, of course," she added hastily, a little frightened by her own admission, "but later. Sometimes I worry over her future. She needs a strong and sensible man. I don't understand Honora. I never did. I always told you so. Sometimes I think she may be capable of doing something foolish like like Randolph."

Uncle Tom patted his wife on the shoulder.

"Don't borrow trouble, Mary," he said, smiling a little. "The child is only full of spirits. But she has a good heart. It is only human that she should want things that we cannot give her." "I wish," said Aunt Mary, "that she were not quite so good−looking."

Uncle Tom laughed.

"You needn't tell me you're not proud of it," he declared. "And I have given her," she continued, "a taste for dress."

"I think, my dear," said her husband, "that there were others who contributed to that."

"It was my own vanity. I should have combated the tendency in her," said Aunt Mary.

"If you had dressed Honora in calico, you could not have changed her," replied Uncle Tom, with conviction.

In the meantime Honora and Peter had mounted the electric car, and were speeding westward. They had a seat to themselves, the very first one on the "grip" that survival of the days of cable cars. Honora's eyes brightened as she held on to her hat, and the stray wisps of hair about her neck stirred in the breeze.

"Oh, I wish we would never stop, until we came to the Pacific Ocean!" she exclaimed.

"Would you be content to stop then?" he asked. He had a trick of looking downward with a quizzical expression in his dark grey eyes.

"No," said Honora. "I should want to go on and see everything in the world worth seeing. Sometimes I feel positively as though I should die if I had to stay here in St. Louis."

"You probably would die eventually," said Peter.

Honora was justifiably irritated.

"I could shake you, Peter!"

He laughed.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do any good," he answered.

"If I were a man," she proclaimed, "I shouldn't stay here. I'd go to New York I'd be somebody I'd make a national reputation for myself."

"I believe you would," said Peter sadly, but with a glance of admiration.

"That's the worst of being a woman we have to sit still until something happens to us."

"What would you like to happen?" he asked, curiously. And there was a note in his voice which she, intent upon her thoughts, did not remark.

"Oh, I don't know," she said; "anything anything to get out of this rut and be something in the world. It's dreadful to feel that one has power and not be able to use it."

The car stopped at the terminal. Thanks to the early hour of Aunt Mary's dinner, the western sky was still aglow with the sunset over the forests as they walked past the closed grille of the Dwyer mansion into the park. Children rolled on the grass, while mothers and father, tired out from the heat and labour of a city day, sat on the benches. Peter stooped down and lifted a small boy, painfully thin, who had fallen, weeping, on the gravel walk. He took his handkerchief and wiped the scratch on the child's forehead.

"There, there!" he said, smiling, "it's all right now. We must expect a few tumbles."

The child looked at him, and suddenly smiled through his tears.

The father appeared, a red−headed Irishman.

"Thank you, Mr. Erwin; I'm sure it's very kind of you, sir, to bother with him," he said gratefully. "It's that thin he is with the heat, I take him out for a bit of country air."

"Why, Tim, it's you, is it?" said Peter. "He's the janitor of our building down town," he explained to Honora, who had remained a silent witness to this simple scene. She had been, in spite of herself, impressed by it, and by the mingled respect and affection in the janitor's manner towards Peter. It was so with every one to whom he spoke. They walked on in silence for a few moments, into a path leading to a lake, which had stolen the flaming green−gold of the sky.

"I suppose," said Honora, slowly, "it would be better for me to wish to be contented where I am, as you are. But it's no use trying, I can't."

Peter was not a preacher.

"Oh," he said, "there are lots of things I want."

"What?" demanded Honora, interested. For she had never conceived of him as having any desires whatever.

"I want a house like Mr. Dwyer's," he declared, pointing at the distant imposing roof line against the fading eastern sky.

Honora laughed. The idea of Peter wishing such a house was indeed ridiculous. Then she became grave again.

"There are times when you seem to forget that I have at last grown up, Peter. You never will talk over serious things with me."

"What are serious things?" asked Peter.

"Well," said Honora vaguely, "ambitions, and what one is going to make of themselves in life. And then you make fun of me by saying you want Mr. Dwyer's house." She laughed again. "I can't imagine you in that house."

"Why not?" he asked, stopping beside the pond and thrusting his hands in his pockets. He looked very solemn, but she knew he was smiling inwardly.

"Why because I can't," she said, and hesitated. The question had forced her to think about Peter. "I can't imagine you living all alone in all that luxury. It isn't like you."

"Why 'all alone'?" asked Peter.

"Don't be ridiculous," she said; "you wouldn't build a house like that, even if you were twice as rich as Mr. Dwyer. You know you wouldn't. And you're not the marrying kind," she added, with the superior knowledge of eighteen.

"I'm waiting for you, Honora," he announced.

"You know I love you, Peter," so she tempered her reply, for Honora's feelings were tender. What man, even Peter, would not have married her if he could? Of course he was in earnest, despite his bantering tone. "but I never could−marry you."

"Not even if I were to offer you a house like Mr. Dwyer's?" he said. A remark which betrayed although not to her his knowledge of certain earthly strains in his goddess.

The colours faded from the water, and it blackened. As they walked on side by side in the twilight, a consciousness of repressed masculine force, of reserve power, which she had never before felt about Peter Erwin, invaded her; and she was seized with a strange uneasiness. Ridiculous was the thought (which she lost no time in rejecting) that pointed out the true road to happiness in marrying such a man as he. In the gathering darkness she slipped her hand through his arm.

"I wish I could marry you, Peter," she said.

He was fain to take what comfort he could from this expression of good−will. If he was not the Prince Charming of her dreams, she would have liked him to be. A little reflection on his part ought to have shown him the absurdity of the Prince Charming having been there all the time, and in ready−made clothes. And he, too, may have had dreams. We are not concerned with them.

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If we listen to the still, small voice of realism, intense longing is always followed by disappointment. Nothing should have happened that summer, and Providence should not have come disguised as the postman. It was a sultry day in early September which is to say that it was comparatively cool a blue day, with occasional great drops of rain spattering on the brick walk. And Honora was reclining on the hall sofa, reading about Mr. Ibbetson and his duchess, when she perceived the postman's grey uniform and smiling face on the far side of the screen door. He greeted her cordially, and gave her a single letter for Aunt Mary, and she carried it unsuspectingly upstairs.

"It's from Cousin Eleanor," Honora volunteered.

Aunt Mary laid down her sewing, smoothed the ruffles of her sacque, adjusted her spectacles, opened the envelope, and began to read. Presently the letter fell to her lap, and she wiped her glasses and glanced at Honora, who was deep in her book once more. And in Honora's brain, as she read, was ringing the refrain of the prisoner:

"Orléans, Beaugency! Notre Dame de Cléry! Vendôme! Vendôme! Quel chagrin, quel ennui De compter toute la nuit Les heures, les heures!" The verse appealed to Honora strangely, just as it had appealed to Ibbetson. Was she not, too, a prisoner? And how often, during the summer days and nights, had she listened to the chimes of the Pilgrim Church near by?

"One, two, three, four! One, two, three, four!"

After Uncle Tom had watered his flowers that evening, Aunt Mary followed him upstairs and locked the door of their room behind her. Silently she put the letter in his hand. Here is one paragraph of it:

"I have never asked to take the child from you in the summer, because she has always been in perfect health, and I know how lonely you would have been without her, my dear Mary. But it seems to me that a winter at Sutcliffe, with my girls, would do her a world of good just now. I need not point out to you that Honora is, to say the least, remarkably good looking, and that she has developed very rapidly. And she has, in spite of the strict training you have given her, certain ideas and ambitions which seem to me, I am sorry to say, more or less prevalent among young American women these days. You know it is only because I love her that I am so frank. Miss Turner's influence will, in my opinion, do much to counteract these tendencies."

Uncle Tom folded the letter, and handed it back to his wife.

"I feel that we ought not to refuse, Tom. And I am afraid Eleanor is right."

"Well, Mary, we've had her for seventeen years. We ought to be willing to spare her for how many months?"

"Nine," said Aunt Mary, promptly. She had counted them. "And Eleanor says she will be home for two weeks at Christmas. Seventeen years! It seems only yesterday when we brought her home, Tom. It was just about this time of day, and she was asleep in your arms, and Bridget opened the door for us." Aunt Mary looked out of the window. "And do you remember how she used to play under the maple there, with her dolls?" Uncle Tom produced a very large handkerchief, and blew his nose.

"There, there, Mary," he said, "nine months, and two weeks out at Christmas. Nine months in eighteen years."

"I suppose we ought to be very thankful," said Aunt Mary. "But, Tom, the time is coming soon −"

"Tut tut," exclaimed Uncle Tom. He turned, and his eyes beheld a work of art. Nothing less than a porcelain plate, hung in brackets on the wall, decorated by Honora at the age of ten with wild roses, and presented with much ceremony on an anniversary morning. He pretended not to notice it, but Aunt Mary's eyes were too quick. She

seized a photograph on her bureau, a photograph of Honora in a little white frock with a red sash.

"It was the year that was taken, Tom."

He nodded. The scene at the breakfast table came back to him, and the sight of Catherine standing respectfully in the hall, and of Honora, in the red sash, making the courtesy the old woman had taught her.

Honora recalled afterwards that Uncle Tom joked even more than usual that evening at dinner. But it was Aunt Mary who asked her, at length, how she would like to go to boarding−school. Such was the matter−of−fact manner in which the portentous news was announced.

"To boarding−school, Aunt Mary?"

Her aunt poured out her uncle's after−dinner coffee.

"I've spilled some, my dear. Get another saucer for your uncle."

Honora went mechanically to the china closet, her heart thumping. She did not stop to reflect that it was the rarest of occurrences for Aunt Mary to spill the coffee.

"Your Cousin Eleanor has invited you to go this winter with Edith and Mary to Sutcliffe."

Sutcliffe! No need to tell Honora what Sutcliffe was her cousins had talked of little else during the past winter; and shown, if the truth be told, just a little commiseration for Honora. Sutcliffe was not only a famous girls' school, Sutcliffe was the world that world which, since her earliest remembrances, she had been longing to see and know. In a desperate attempt to realize what had happened to her, she found herself staring hard at the open china closet, at Aunt Mary's best gold dinner set resting on the pink lace paper that had been changed only last week. That dinner set, somehow, was always an augury of festival when, on the rare occasions Aunt Mary entertained, the little dining room was transformed by it and the Leffingwell silver into a glorified and altogether unrecognizable state, in which any miracle seemed possible.

Honora pushed back her chair. Her lips were parted.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, is it really true that I am going?" she said.

"Why," said Uncle Tom, "what zeal for learning!"

"My dear," said Aunt Mary, who, you may be sure, knew all about that school before Cousin Eleanor's letter came, "Miss Turner insists upon hard work, and the discipline is very strict."

"No young men," added Uncle Tom.

"That," declared Aunt Mary, "is certainly an advantage."

"And no chocolate cake, and bed at ten o'clock," said Uncle Tom.

Honora, dazed, only half heard them. She laughed at Uncle Tom because she always had, but tears were shining in her eyes. Young men and chocolate cake! What were these privations compared to that magic word Change? Suddenly she rose, and flung her arms about Uncle Tom's neck and kissed his rough cheek, and then embraced Aunt Mary. They would be lonely.

"Aunt Mary, I can't bear to leave you but I do so want to go! And it won't be for long will it? Only until next spring."

"Until next summer, I believe," replied Aunt Mary, gently; "June is a summer month isn't it, Tom?"

"It will be a summer month without question next year," answered Uncle Tom, enigmatically.

It has been remarked that that day was sultry, and a fine rain was now washing Uncle Tom's flowers for him. It was he who had applied that term "washing" since the era of ultra−soot. Incredible as it may seem, life proceeded as on any other of a thousand rainy nights. The lamps were lighted in the sitting−room, Uncle Tom unfolded his gardening periodical, and Aunt Mary her embroidery. The gate slammed, with its more subdued, rainy−weather sound.

"It's Peter," said Honora, flying downstairs. And she caught him, astonished, as he was folding his umbrella on the step. "Oh, Peter, if you tried until to−morrow morning, you never could guess what has happened."

He stood for a moment, motionless, staring at her, a tall figure, careless of the rain.

"You are going away," he said.

"How did you guess it?" she exclaimed in surprise. "Yes to boarding−school. To Sutcliffe, on the Hudson, with Edith and Mary. Aren't you glad? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"Do I?" said Peter.

"Don't stand there in the rain," commanded Honora; "come into the parlour, and I'll tell you all about it."

He came in. She took the umbrella from him, and put it in the rack.

"Why don't you congratulate me?" she demanded.

"You'll never come back," said Peter.

"What a horrid thing to say! Of course I shall come back. I shall come back next June, and you'll be at the station to meet me."

"And what will Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary do without you?"

"Oh," said Honora, "I shall miss them dreadfully. And I shall miss you, Peter."

"Very much?" he asked, looking down at her with such a queer expression. And his voice, too, sounded queer. He was trying to smile.

Suddenly Honora realized that he was suffering, and she felt the pangs of contrition. She could not remember the time when she had been away from Peter, and it was natural that he should be stricken at the news. Peter, who was the complement of all who loved and served her, of Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom and Catherine, and who somehow embodied them all. Peter, the eternally dependable. She found it natural that the light should be temporarily removed from his firmament while she should be at boarding−school, and yet in the tenderness of her heart she pitied him. She put her hands impulsively upon his shoulders as he stood looking at her with that queer expression which he believed to be a smile.

"Peter, you dear old thing, indeed I shall miss you! I don't know what I shall do without you, and I'll write to you every single week."

Gently he disengaged her arms. They were standing under that which, for courtesy's sake, had always been called the chandelier. It was in the centre of the parlour, and Uncle Tom always covered it with holly and mistletoe at Christmas.

"Why do you say I'll never come back?" asked Honora. "Of course I shall come back, and live here all the rest of my life."

Peter shook his head slowly. He had recovered something of his customary quizzical manner.

"The East is a strange country," he said. "The first thing we know you'll be marrying one of those people we read about, with more millions than there are cars on the Olive Street line."

Honora was a little indignant.

"I wish you wouldn't talk so, Peter," she said. "In the first place, I shan't see any but girls at Sutcliffe. I could only see you for a few minutes once a week if you were there. And in the second place, it isn't exactly well dignified to compare the East and the West the way you do, and speak about people who are very rich and live there as though they were different from the people we know here. Comparisons, as Shakespeare said, are odorous."

"Honora," he declared, still shaking his head, "you're a fraud, but I can't help loving you." For a long time that night Honora lay in bed staring into the darkness, and trying to realize what had happened. She heard the whistling and the puffing of the trains in the cinder−covered valley to the southward, but the quality of these sounds had changed. They were music now.

CHAPTER VI. HONORA HAS A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD

IT is simply impossible to give any adequate notion of the industry of the days that followed. No sooner was Uncle Tom out of the house in the morning than Anne Rory marched into the sitting−room and took command, and turned it into a dressmaking establishment. Anne Rory, who deserves more than a passing mention, one of the institutions of Honora's youth, who sewed for the first families, and knew much more about them than Mr. Meeker, the dancing−master. If you enjoyed her confidence, as Aunt Mary did, she would tell you of her own accord who gave their servants enough to eat, and who didn't. Anne Rory was a sort of inquisition all by herself, and would have made a valuable chief of police. The reputations of certain elderly gentlemen of wealth might have remained to this day intact had it not been for her; she had a heaven−sent knack of discovering peccadilloes. Anne Rory knew the gentlemen by sight, and the gentlemen did not know Anne Rory. Uncle Tom she held to be somewhere in the calendar of the saints.

There is not time, alas, to linger over Anne Rory or the new histories which she whispered to Aunt Mary when Honora was out of the room. At last the eventful day of departure arrived. Honora's new trunk − her first was packed by Aunt Mary's own hands, the dainty clothes and the dresses folded in tissue paper, while old Catherine stood sniffing by. After dinner sign of a great occasion a carriage came from Braintree's Livery Stable, and Uncle Tom held the horses while the driver carried out the trunk and strapped it on. Catherine, Mary Ann, and Bridget, all weeping, were kissed good−by, and off they went through the dusk to the station. Not the old Union Depot, with its wooden sheds, where Honora had gone so often to see the Hanburys off, that grimy gateway to the fairer regions of the earth. This new station, of brick and stone and glass and tiles, would hold an army corps with ease. And when they alighted at the carriage entrance, a tall figure came forward out of the shadow. It was Peter, and he had a package under his arm. Peter checked Honora's trunk, and Peter had got the permission through

Judge Brice which enabled them all to pass through the grille and down the long walk beside which the train was standing.

They entered that hitherto mysterious conveyance, a sleeping−car, and spoke to old Mrs. Stanley, who was going East to see her married daughter, and who had gladly agreed to take charge of Honora. Afterwards they stood on the platform, but in spite of the valiant efforts of Uncle Tom and Peter, conversation was a mockery.

"Honora," said Aunt Mary, "don't forget that your trunk key is in the little pocket on the left side of your bag."

"No, Aunt Mary."

"And your little New Testament at the bottom. And your lunch is arranged in three packages. And don't forget to ask Cousin Eleanor about the walking shoes, and to give her my note."

Cries reverberated under the great glass dome, and trains pulled out with deafening roars. Honora had a strange feeling, as of pressure from within, that caused her to take deep breaths of the smoky air. She but half heard what was being said to her: she wished that the train would go, and at the same time she had a sudden, surprising, and fierce longing to stay. She had been able to eat scarcely a mouthful of that festal dinner which Bridget had spent the afternoon in preparing, comprised wholly of forbidden dishes of her childhood, for which Bridget and Aunt Mary were justly famed. Such is the irony of life. Visions of one of Aunt Mary's rare lunch−parties and of a small girl peeping covetously through a crack in the dining−room door, and of the gold china set, rose before her. But she could not eat.

"Bread and jam and tea at Miss Turner's," Uncle Tom had said, and she had tried to smile at him.

And now they were standing on the platform, and the train might start at any moment.

"I trust you won't get like the New Yorkers, Honora," said Aunt Mary. "Do you remember how stiff they were, Tom?" She was still in the habit of referring to that memorable trip when they had brought Honora home. "And they say now that they hold their heads higher than ever."

"That," said Uncle Tom, gravely, "is a local disease, and comes from staring at the tall buildings."

"Uncle Tom!"

Peter presented the parcel under his arm. It was a box of candy, and very heavy, on which much thought had been spent.

"They are some of the things you like," he said, when he had returned from putting it in the berth.

"How good of you, Peter! I shall never be able to eat all that."

"I hope there is a doctor on the train," said Uncle Tom.

"Yassah," answered the black porter, who had been listening with evident relish, "right good doctah Doctah Lov'ring."

Even Aunt Mary laughed.

"Peter," asked Honora, "can't you get Judge Brice to send you on to New York this winter on law business? Then you could come up to Sutcliffe to see me."

"I'm afraid of Miss Turner," declared Peter.

"Oh, she wouldn't mind you," exclaimed Honora. "I could say you were an uncle. It would be almost true. And perhaps she would let you take me down to New York for a matinée."

"And how about my ready−made clothes?" he said, looking down at her. He had never forgotten that.

Honora laughed.

"You don't seem a bit sorry that I'm going," she replied, a little breathlessly. "You know I'd be glad to see you, if you were in rags."

"All aboard!" cried the porter, grinning sympathetically.

Honora threw her arms around Aunt Mary and clung to her. How small and frail she was! Somehow Honora had never realized it in all her life before.

"Good−by, darling, and remember to put on your thick clothes on the cool days, and write when you get to New York."

Then it was Uncle Tom's turn. He gave her his usual vigorous hug and kiss.

"It won't be long until Christmas," he whispered, and was gone, helping Aunt Mary off the train, which had begun to move.

Peter remained a moment.

"Good−by, Honora. I'll write to you often and let you know how they are. And perhaps you'll send me a letter once in a while."

"Oh, Peter, I will," she cried. "I can't bear to leave you I didn't think it would be so hard."

He held out his hand, but she ignored it. Before he realized what had happened to him she had drawn his face to hers, kissed it, and was pushing him off the train. Then she watched from the platform the three receding figures in the yellow smoky light until the car slipped out from under the roof into the blackness of the night. Some faint, premonitory divination of what they represented of immutable love in a changing, heedless, selfish world came to her; rocks to which one might cling, successful or failing, happy or unhappy. For unconsciously she thought of them, all three, as one, a human trinity in which her faith had never been betrayed. She felt a warm moisture on her cheeks, and realized that she was crying with the first real sorrow of her life.

She was leaving them for what? Honora did not know. There had been nothing imperative in Cousin Eleanor's letter. She need not have gone if she had not wished. Something within herself, she felt, was impelling her. And it is curious to relate that, in her mind, going to school had little or nothing to do with her journey. She had the feeling of faring forth into the world, and she had known all along that it was destined she should. What was the cause of this longing to break the fetters and fly away? fetters of love, they seemed to her now − and were. And the world which she had seen afar, filled with sunlit palaces, seemed very dark and dreary to her to−night.

"The lady's asking for you, Miss," said the porter.

She made a heroic attempt to talk to Mrs. Stanley. But at the sight of Peter's candy, when she opened it, she was blinded once more. Dear Peter! That box was eloquent with the care with which he had studied her slightest

desires and caprices. Marrons glacés, and Langtrys, and certain chocolates which had received the stamp of her approval and she could not so much as eat one! The porter made the berths. And there had been a time when she had asked nothing more of fate than to travel in a sleeping−car! Far into the night she lay wide awake, dry−eyed, watching the lamp−lit streets of the little towns they passed, or staring at the cornfields and pastures in the darkness; thinking of the home she had left, perhaps forever, and wondering whether they were sleeping there; picturing them to−morrow at breakfast without her, and Uncle Tom leaving for the bank, Aunt Mary going through the silent rooms alone, and dear old Catherine haunting the little chamber where she had slept for seventeen years almost her lifetime. A hundred vivid scenes of her childhood came back, and familiar objects oddly intruded themselves; the red and green lambrequin on the parlour mantel − a present many years ago from Cousin Eleanor; the what−not, with its funny curly legs, and the bare spot near the lock on the door of the cake closet in the dining room!

Youth, however, has its recuperative powers. The next day the excitement of the journey held her, the sight of new cities and a new countryside. But when she tried to eat the lunch Aunt Mary had so carefully put up, new memories assailed her, and she went with Mrs. Stanley into the dining car. The September dusk was made lurid by belching steel furnaces that reddened the heavens; and later, when she went to bed, sharp air and towering contours told her of the mountains. Mountains which her great−grandfather had crossed on horseback, with that very family silver in his saddle−bags which shone on Aunt Mary's table. And then she awoke with the light shining in her face, and barely had time to dress before the conductor was calling out "Jersey City."

Once more the morning, and with it new and wonderful sensations that dispelled her sorrows; the ferry, the olive−green river rolling in the morning sun, alive with dodging, hurrying craft, each bent upon its destination with an energy, relentlessness, and selfishness of purpose that fascinated Honora. Each, with its shrill, protesting whistle, seemed to say: "My business is the most important. Make way for me." And yet, through them all, towering, stately, imperturbable, a great ocean steamer glided slowly towards the bay, by very might and majesty holding her way serene and undisturbed, on a nobler errand. Honora thrilled as she gazed, as though at last her dream were coming true, and she felt within her the pulse of the world's artery. That irksome sense of spectatorship seemed to fly, and she was part and parcel now of the great, moving things, with sure pinions with which to soar. Standing rapt upon the forward deck of the ferry, she saw herself, not an atom, but one whose going and coming was a thing of consequence. It seemed but a simple step to the deck of that steamer when she, too, would be travelling to the other side of the world, and the journey one of the small incidents of life.

The ferry bumped into its slip, the windlasses sang loudly as they took up the chains, the gates folded back, and Honora was forced with the crowd along the bridge−like passage to the right. Suddenly she saw Cousin Eleanor and the girls awaiting her.

"Honora," said Edith, when the greetings were over and they were all four in the carriage, which was making its way slowly across the dirty and irregularly paved open apace to a narrow street that opened between two saloons, "Honora, you don't mean to say that Anne Rory made that street dress? Mother, I believe it's better−looking than the one I got at Bremer's."

"It's very simple," said Honora.

"And she looks fairly radiant," cried Edith, seizing her cousin's hand. "It's quite wonderful, Honora; nobody would ever guess that you were from the West, and that you had spent the whole summer in St. Louis."

Cousin Eleanor smiled a little as she contemplated Honora, who sat, fascinated, gazing out of the window at novel scenes. There was a colour in her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes. They had reached Madison Square. Madison Square, on a bright morning in late September, seen for the first time by an ambitious young lady who had never been out of St. Louis! The trimly appointed vehicles, the high−stepping horses, the glittering shops, the well−dressed women and well−groomed men all had an esprit de corps which she found inspiring. On such a

morning, and amidst such a scene, she felt that there was no limit to the possibilities of life.

Until this year, Cousin Eleanor had been a conservative in the matter of hotels, when she had yielded to Edith's entreaties to go to one of the "new ones." Hotels, indeed, that revolutionized transient existence. This one, on the Avenue, had a giant in a long blue livery coat who opened their carriage door, and a hall in yellow and black onyx, and maids and valets. After breakfast, when Honora sat down to write to Aunt Mary, she described the suite of rooms in which they lived, the brass beds, the electric night lamps, the mahogany French furniture, the heavy carpets, and even the white−tiled bathroom. There was a marvellous arrangement in the walls with which Edith was never tired of playing, a circular plate covered with legends of every conceivable want, from a newspaper to a needle and thread and a Scotch whiskey highball.

At breakfast, more stimulants of a mental nature, of course. Solomon in all his glory had never broken eggs in such a dining room. It had onyx pillars, too, and gilt furniture, and table after table of the whitest napery stretched from one end of it to the other. The glass and silver was all of a special pattern, and an obsequious waiter handed Honora a menu in a silver frame, with a handle. One side of the menu was in English, and the other in French. All around them were well−dressed, well−fed, prosperous−looking people, talking and laughing in subdued tones as they ate. And Honora had a strange feeling of being one of them, of being as rich and prosperous as they, of coming into a long−deferred inheritance.

The mad excitement of that day in New York is a faint memory now, so much has Honora lived since then. We descendants of rigid Puritans, of pioneer tobacco−planters and frontiersmen, take naturally to a luxury such as the world has never seen as our right. We have abolished kings, in order that as many of us as possible may abide in palaces. In one day Honora forgot the seventeen years spent in the "little house under the hill," as though these had never been. Cousin Eleanor, with a delightful sense of wrong−doing, yielded to the temptation to adorn her; and the saleswomen, who knew Mrs. Hanbury, made indiscreet remarks. Such a figure and such a face, and just enough of height! Two new gowns were ordered, to be tried on at Sutcliffe, and as many hats, and an ulster, and heaven knows what else. Memory fails.

In the evening they went to a new comic opera, and it is the music of that which brings back the day most vividly to Honora's mind.

In the morning they took an early train to Sutcliffe Manors, on the Hudson. It is an historic place. First of all, after leaving the station, you climb through the little town clinging to the hillside; and Honora was struck by the quaint houses and shops which had been places of barter before the Revolution. The age of things appealed to her. It was a brilliant day at the very end of September, the air sharp, and here and there a creeper had been struck crimson. Beyond the town, on the slopes, were other new sights to stimulate the imagination; country houses not merely houses in the country, but mansions enticingly hidden among great trees in a way to whet Honora's curiosity as she pictured to herself the blissful quality of the life which their owners must lead. Long, curving driveways led up to the houses from occasional lodges; and once, as though to complete the impression, a young man and two women, superbly mounted, came trotting out of one of these driveways, talking and laughing gayly. Honora took a good look at the man. He was not handsome, but had, in fact, a distinguished and haunting ugliness. The girls were straight−featured and conventional to the last degree.

Presently they came to the avenue of elms that led up to the long, low buildings of the school.

Little more will be necessary, in the brief account of Honora's life at boarding−school, than to add an humble word of praise on the excellence of Miss Turner's establishment. That lady, needless to say, did not advertise in the magazines, or issue a prospectus. Parents were more or less in the situation of the candidates who desired the honour and privilege of whitewashing Tom Sawyer's fence. If you were a parent, and were allowed to confide your daughter to Miss Turner, instead of demanding a prospectus, you gave thanks to heaven, and spoke about it to your friends.

The life of the young ladies, of course, was regulated on the strictest principles. Early rising, prayers, breakfast, studies; the daily walk, rain or shine, under the watchful convoy of Miss Hood, the girls in columns of twos; tennis on the school court, or skating on the school pond. Cotton Mather himself could not have disapproved of the Sundays, nor of the discourse of the elderly Doctor Moale (which you heard if you were not a Presbyterian), although the reverend gentleman was distinctly Anglican in appearance and manners. Sometimes Honora felt devout, and would follow the service with the utmost attention. Her religion came in waves. On the Sundays when the heathen prevailed she studied the congregation, grew to distinguish the local country families; and, if the truth must be told, watched for several Sundays for that ugly yet handsome young man whom she had seen on horseback. But he never appeared, and presently she forgot him.

Had there been a prospectus (which is ridiculous!), the great secret of Miss Turner's school could not very well have been mentioned in it. The English language, it is to be feared, is not quite flexible enough to mention this secret with delicacy. Did Honora know it? Who can say? Self−respecting young ladies do not talk about such things, and Honora was nothing if not self−respecting.

"SUTCLIFFE MANORS, October 15th.

"DEAREST AUNT MARY: As I wrote you, I continue to miss you and Uncle Tom dreadfully, and dear old Peter, too; and Cathy and Bridget and Mary Ann. And I hate to get up at seven o'clock. And Miss Hood, who takes us out walking and teaches us composition, is such a ridiculously strict old maid you would laugh at her. And the Sundays are terrible. Miss Turner makes us read the Bible for a whole hour in the afternoon, and reads to us in the evening. And Uncle Tom was right when he said we should have nothing but jam and bread and butter for supper: oh, yes, and cold meat. I am always ravenously hungry. I count the days until Christmas, when I shall have some really good things to eat again. And of course I cannot wait to see you all.

"I do not mean to give you the impression that I am not happy here, and I never can be thankful enough to dear Cousin Eleanor for sending me. Some of the girls are most attractive. Among others, I have become great friends with Ethel Wing, who is tall and blond and good−looking; and her clothes, though simple, are beautiful. To hear her imitate Miss Turner or Miss Hood or Dr. Moale is almost as much fun as going to the theatre. You must have heard of her father he is the Mr. Wing who owns all the railroads and other things, and they have a house in Newport and another in New York, and a country place and a yacht.

"I like Sarah Wycliffe very much. She was brought up abroad, and we lead the French class together. Her father has a house in Paris, which they only use for a month or so in the year: an hôtel, as the French call it. And then there is Maude Capron, from Philadelphia, whose father is Secretary of War. I have now to go to my class in English composition, but I will write to you again on Saturday.

"Your loving niece, "HONORA."

The Christmas holidays came, and went by like mileposts from the window of an express train. There was a Glee Club: there were dances, and private theatricals in Mrs. Dwyer's new house, in which it was imperative that Honora should take part. There was no such thing as getting up for breakfast, and once she did not see Uncle Tom for two whole days. He asked her where she was staying. It was the first Christmas she remembered spending without Peter. His present appeared, but perhaps it was fortunate, on the whole, that he was in Texas, trying a case. It seemed almost no time at all before she was at the station again, clinging to Aunt Mary: but now the separation was not so hard, and she had Edith and Mary for company, and George, a dignified and responsible sophomore at Harvard.

Owing to the sudden withdrawal from school of little Louise Simpson, the Cincinnati girl who had shared her room during the first term, Honora had a new room−mate after the holidays, Susan Holt. Susan was not beautiful, but she was good. Her nose turned up, her hair Honora described as a negative colour, and she wore it in defiance

of all prevailing modes. If you looked very hard at Susan (which few people ever did), you saw that she had remarkable blue eyes: they were the eyes of a saint. She was neither tall nor short, and her complexion was not all that it might have been. In brief, Susan was one of those girls who go through a whole term at boarding−school without any particular notice from the more brilliant Honoras and Ethel Wings.

In some respects, Susan was an ideal room−mate. She read the Bible every night and morning, and she wrote many letters home. Her ruling passion, next to religion, was order, and she took it upon herself to arrange Honora's bureau drawers. It is needless to say that Honora accepted these ministrations and that she found Susan's admiration an entirely natural sentiment. Susan was self−effacing, and she enjoyed listening to Honora's views on all topics.

Susan, like Peter, was taken for granted. She came from somewhere, and after school was over, she would go somewhere. She lived in New York, Honora knew, and beyond that was not curious. We never know when we are entertaining an angel unawares. One evening, early in May, when she went up to prepare for supper she found Susan sitting in the window reading a letter, and on the floor beside her was a photograph. Honora picked it up. It was the picture of a large country house with many chimneys, taken across a wide green lawn.

"Susan, what's this?"

Susan looked up.

"Oh, it's Silverdale. My brother Joshua took it."

"Silverdale?" repeated Honora.

"It's our place in the country," Susan replied. "The family moved up last week. You see, the trees are just beginning to bud."

Honora was silent a moment, gazing at the picture. "It's very beautiful, isn't it? You never told me about it."

"Didn't I?" said Susan. "I think of it very often. It has always seemed much more like home to me than our house in New York, and I love it better than any spot I know."

Honora gazed at Susan, who had resumed her reading.

"And you are going there when school is over."

"Oh, yes," said Susan; "I can hardly wait." Suddenly she put down her letter, and looked at Honora.

"And you," she asked, "where are you going?"

"I don't know. Perhaps perhaps I shall go to the sea for a while with my cousins."

It was foolish, it was wrong. But for the life of her Honora could not say she was going to spend the long hot summer in St. Louis. The thought of it had haunted her for weeks: and sometimes, when the other girls were discussing their plans, she had left them abruptly. And now she was aware that Susan's blue eyes were fixed upon her, and that they had a strange and penetrating quality she had never noticed before: a certain tenderness, an understanding that made Honora redden and turn.

"I wish," said Susan, slowly, "that you would come and stay awhile with me. Your home is so far away, and I don't know when I shall see you again."

"Oh, Susan," she murmured, "it's awfully good of you, but I'm afraid I couldn't."

She walked to the window, and stood looking out for a moment at the budding trees. Her heart was beating faster, and she was strangely uncomfortable.

"I really don't expect to go to the sea, Susan," she said. "You see, my aunt and uncle are all alone in St. Louis, and I ought to go back to them. If if my father had lived, it might have been different. He died, and my mother, when I was little more than a year old."

Susan was all sympathy. She slipped her hand into Honora's.

"Where did he live?" she asked. "Abroad," answered Honora. "He was consul at Nice, and had a villa there when he died. And people said he had an unusually brilliant career before him. My aunt and uncle brought me up, and my cousin, Mrs. Hanbury, Edith's mother, and Mary's, sent me here to school."

Honora breathed easier after this confession, but it was long before sleep came to her that night. She wondered what it would be like to visit at a great country house such as Silverdale, what it would be like to live in one. It seemed a strange and cruel piece of irony on the part of the fates that Susan, instead of Honora, should have been chosen for such a life: Susan, who would have been quite as happy spending her summers in St. Louis, and taking excursions in the electric cars: Susan, who had never experienced that dreadful, vacuum−like feeling, who had no ambitious craving to be satisfied. Mingled with her flushes of affection for Susan was a certain queer feeling of contempt, of which Honora was ashamed.

Nevertheless, in the days that followed, a certain metamorphosis seemed to have taken place in Susan. She was still the same modest, self−effacing, helpful roommate, but in Honora's eyes she had changed Honora could no longer separate her image from the vision of Silverdale. And, if the naked truth must be told, it was due to Silverdale that Susan owes the honour of her first mention in those descriptive letters from Sutcliffe, which Aunt Mary has kept to this day.

Four days later Susan had a letter from her mother containing an astonishing discovery. There could be no mistake, Mrs. Holt had brought Honora to this country as a baby.

"Why, Susan," cried Honora, "you must have been the other baby."

"But you were the beautiful one," replied Susan, generously. "I have often heard mother tell about it, and how every one on the ship noticed you, and how Hortense cried when your aunt and uncle took you away. And to think we have been rooming together all these months and did not know that we were really old friends! And Honora, mother says you must come to Silverdale to pay us a visit when school closes. She wants to see you. I think," added Susan, smiling, "I think she feels responsible for you. She says that you must give me your aunt's address, and that she will write to her."

"Oh, I'd so like to go, Susan. And I don't think Aunt Mary would object for a little while."

Honora lost no time in writing the letter asking for permission, and it was not until after she had posted it that she felt a sudden, sharp regret as she thought of them in their loneliness. But the postponement of her homecoming would only be for a fortnight at best. And she had seen so little!

In due time Aunt Mary's letter arrived. There was no mention of loneliness in it, only of joy that Honora was to have the opportunity to visit such a place as Silverdale. Aunt Mary, it seems, had seen pictures of it long ago in a magazine of the book club, in an article concerning one of Mrs. Holt's charities a model home for indiscreet young women. At the end of the year, Aunt Mary added, she had bought the number of the magazine, because of

her natural interest in Mrs. Holt on Honora's account. Honora cried a little over that letter, but her determination to go to Silverdale was unshaken.

June came at last, and the end of school. The subject of Miss Turner's annual talk was worldliness. Miss Turner saw signs, she regretted to say, of a lowering in the ideals of American women: of a restlessness, of a desire for what was a false consideration and recognition; for power. Some of her own pupils, alas! were not free from this fault. Ethel Wing, who was next to Honora, nudged her and laughed, and passed her some of Maillard's chocolates, which she had in her pocket. Woman's place, continued Miss Turner, was the home, and she hoped they would all make good wives. She had done her best to prepare them to be such. Independence, they would find, was only relative: no one had it completely. And she hoped that none of her scholars would ever descend to that base competition to outdo one's neighbours, so characteristic of the country to−day.

The friends, and even the enemies, were kissed good−by, with pledges of eternal friendship. Cousin Eleanor Hanbury came for Edith and Mary, and hoped Honora would enjoy herself at Silverdale. Dear Cousin Eleanor! Her heart was large, and her charity unpretentious. She slipped into Honora's fingers, as she embraced her, a silver purse with some gold coins in it, and bade her not to forget to write home very often.

"You know what pleasure it will give them, my dear," she said, as she stepped on the train for New York.

"And I am going home soon, Cousin Eleanor," replied Honora, with a little touch of homesickness in her voice.

"I know, dear," said Mrs. Hanbury. But there was a peculiar, almost wistful expression on her face as she kissed Honora again, as of one who assents to a fiction in order to humour a child.

As the train pulled out, Ethel Wing waved to her from the midst of a group of girls on the wide rear platform of the last car. It was Mr. Wing's private car, and was going to Newport.

"Be good, Honora!" she cried.

CHAPTER VII. THE OLYMPIAN ORDER

LYING back in the chair of the Pullman and gazing over the wide Hudson shining in the afternoon sun, Honora's imagination ran riot until the seeming possibilities of life became infinite. At every click of the rails she was drawing nearer to that great world of which she had dreamed, a world of country houses inhabited by an Olympian order. To be sure, Susan, who sat reading in the chair behind her, was but a humble representative of that order but Providence sometimes makes use of such instruments. The picture of the tall and brilliant Ethel Wing standing behind the brass rail of the platform of the car was continually recurring to Honora as emblematic: of Ethel, in a blue tailor−made gown trimmed with buff braid, and which fitted her slender figure with military exactness. Her hair, the colour of the yellowest of gold, in the manner of its finish seemed somehow to give the impression of that metal; and the militant effect of the costume had been heightened by a small colonial cocked hat. If the truth be told, Honora had secretly idealized Miss Wing, and had found her insouciance, frankness, and tendency to ridicule delightful. Militant that was indeed Ethel's note militant and positive.

"You're not going home with Susan!" she had exclaimed, making a little face when Honora had told her. "They say that Silverdale is as slow as a nunnery and you're on your knees all the time. You ought to have come to Newport with me."

It was characteristic of Miss Wing that she seemed to have taken no account of the fact that she had neglected to issue this alluring invitation. Life at Silverdale slow! How could it be slow amidst such beauty and magnificence?

The train was stopping at a new little station on which hung the legend, in gold letters, "Sutton." The sun was well on his journey towards the western hills. Susan had touched her on the shoulder.

"Here we are, Honora," she said, and added, with an unusual tremor in her voice, "at last!"

On the far side of the platform a yellow, two−seated wagon was waiting, and away they drove through the village, with its old houses and its sleepy streets and its orchards, and its ancient tavern dating from stage−coach days. Just outside of it, on the tree−dotted slope of a long hill, was a modern brick building, exceedingly practical in appearance, surrounded by spacious grounds enclosed in a paling fence. That, Susan said, was the Sutton Home.

"Your mother's charity?"

A light came into the girl's eyes.

"So you have heard of it? Yes, it is the thing that interests mother more than anything else in the world."

"Oh," said Honora, "I hope she will let me go through it."

"I'm sure she will want to take you there to−morrow," answered Susan, and she smiled.

The road wound upwards, by the valley of a brook, through the hills, now wooded, now spread with pastures that shone golden green in the evening light, the herds gathering at the gate−bars. Presently they came to a gothic−looking stone building, with a mediæval bridge thrown across the stream in front of it, and massive gates flung open. As they passed, Honora had a glimpse of a blue driveway under the arch of the forest. An elderly woman looked out at them through the open half of a leaded lattice.

"That's the Chamberlin estate," Susan volunteered. "Mr. Chamberlin has built a castle on the top of that hill."

Honora caught her breath. "Are many of the places here like that?" she asked.

Susan laughed.

"Some people don't think the place is very appropriate," she contented herself with replying.

A little later, as they climbed higher, other houses could be discerned dotted about the country−side, nearly all of them varied expressions of the passion for a new architecture which seemed to possess the rich. Most of them were in conspicuous positions, and surrounded by wide acres. Each, to Honora, was an inspiration.

"I had no idea there were so many people here," she said.

"I'm afraid Sutton is becoming fashionable," answered Susan.

"And don't you want it to?" asked Honora.

"It was very nice before," said Susan, quietly.

Honora was silent. They turned in between two simple stone pillars that divided a low wall, overhung from the inside by shrubbery growing under the forest. Susan seized her friend's hand and pressed it.

"I'm always so glad to get back here," she whispered. "I hope you'll like it."

Honora returned the pressure.

The grey road forked, and forked again. Suddenly the forest came to an end in a sort of premeditated tangle of wild garden, and across a wide lawn the great house loomed against the western sky. Its architecture was of the '60's and '70's, with a wide porte−cochère that sheltered the high entrance doors. These were both flung open, a butler and two footmen were standing impassively beside them, and a neat maid within. Honora climbed the steps as in a dream, followed Susan through a hall with a black−walnut, fretted staircase, and where she caught a glimpse of two huge Chinese vases, to a porch on the other side of the house spread with wicker chairs and tables. Out of a group of people at the farther end of this porch arose an elderly lady, who came forward and clasped Susan in her arms.

"And is this Honora? How do you do, my dear? I had the pleasure of knowing you when you were much younger."

Honora, too, was gathered to that ample bosom. Released, she beheld a lady in a mauve satin gown, at the throat of which a cameo brooch was fastened. Mrs. Holt's face left no room for conjecture as to the character of its possessor. Her hair, of a silvering blend, parted in the middle, fitted tightly to her head. She wore earrings. In short, her appearance was in every way suggestive of momentum, of a force which the wise would respect.

"Where are you, Joshua?" she said. "This is the baby we brought from Nice. Come and tell me whether you would recognize her."

Mr. Holt released his daughter. He had a mild blue eye, white mutton−chop whiskers, and very thin hands, and his tweed suit was decidedly the worse for wear.

"I can't say that I should, Elvira," he replied; "although it is not hard to believe that such a beautiful baby should prove to be such a er good−looking young woman."

"I've always felt very grateful to you for bringing me back," said Honora.

"Tut, tut, child," said Mrs. Holt; "there was no one else to do it. And be careful how you pay young women compliments, Joshua. They grow vain enough. By the way, my dear, what ever became of your maternal grandfather, old Mr. Allison wasn't that his name?"

"He died when I was very young," replied Honora.

"He was too fond of the good things of this life," said Mrs. Holt.

"My dear Elvira!" her husband protested.

"I can't help it, he was," retorted that lady. "I am a judge of human nature, and I was relieved, I can tell you, my dear" (to Honora), "when I saw your uncle and aunt on the wharf that morning. I knew that I had confided you to good hands."

"They have done everything for me, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

The good lady patted her approvingly on the shoulder. "I'm sure of it, my dear," she said. "And I am glad to see you appreciate it. And now you must renew your acquaintance with the family."

A sister and a brother, Honora had already learned from Susan, had died since she had crossed the ocean with them. Robert and Joshua, Junior, remained. Both were heavy−set, with rather stern faces, both had close−cropped,

tan−coloured mustaches and wide jaws, with blue eyes like Susan's. Both were, with women at least, what the French would call difficult Robert less so than Joshua. They greeted Honora reservedly and she could not help feeling a little suspiciously. And their appearance was something of a shock to her; they did not, somehow, "go with the house," and they dressed even more carelessly than Peter Erwin. This was particularly true of Joshua, whose low, turned−down collar revealed a porous, brick−red, and extremely virile neck, and whose clothes were creased at the knees and across the back.

As for their wives, Mrs. Joshua was a merry, brown−eyed little lady already inclining to stoutness, and Honora felt at home with her at once. Mrs. Robert was tall and thin, with an olive face and dark eyes which gave the impression of an uncomfortable penetration. She was dressed simply in a shirtwaist and a dark skirt, but Honora thought her striking looking.

The grandchildren, playing on and off the porch, seemed legion, and they were besieging Susan. In reality there were seven of them, of all sizes and sexes, from the third Joshua with a tennis−bat to the youngest who was weeping at being sent to bed, and holding on to her Aunt Susan with desperation. When Honora had greeted them all, and kissed some of them, she was informed that there were two more upstairs, safely tucked away in cribs.

"I'm sure you love children, don't you?" said Mrs. Joshua. She spoke impulsively, and yet with a kind of childlike shyness.

"I adore them," exclaimed Honora.

A trellised arbour (which some years later would have been called a pergola) led from the porch up the hill to an old−fashioned summer−house on the crest. And thither, presently, Susan led Honora for a view of the distant western hills silhouetted in black against a flaming western sky, before escorting her to her room. The vastness of the house, the width of the staircase, and the size of the second−story hall impressed our heroine.

"I'll send a maid to you later, dear," Susan said. "If you care to lie down for half an hour, no one will disturb you. And I hope you will be comfortable."

Comfortable! When the door had closed, Honora glanced around her and sighed, "comfort" seemed such a strangely inadequate word. She was reminded of the illustrations she had seen of English country houses. The bed alone would almost have filled her little room at home. On the farther side, in an alcove, was a huge dressing−table; a fire was laid in the grate of the marble mantel, the curtains in the bay window were tightly drawn, and near by was a lounge with a reading−light. A huge mahogany wardrobe occupied one corner; in another stood a pier glass, and in another, near the lounge, was a small bookcase filled with books. Honora looked over them curiously. "Robert Elsmere" and a life of Christ, "Mr. Isaacs," a book of sermons by an eminent clergyman, "Innocents Abroad," Hare's "Walks in Rome," "When a Man's Single," by Barrie, a book of meditations, and "Organized Charities for Women."

Adjoining the bedroom was a bathroom in proportion, evidently all her own, with a huge porcelain tub and a table set with toilet bottles containing liquids of various colours.

Dreamily, Honora slipped on the new dressing−gown Aunt Mary had made for her, and took a book out of the bookcase. It was the volume of sermons. But she could not read: she was forever looking about the room, and thinking of the family she had met downstairs. Of course, when one lived in a house like this, one could afford to dress and act as one liked. She was aroused from her reflections by the soft but penetrating notes of a Japanese gong, followed by a gentle knock on the door and the entrance of an elderly maid, who informed her it was time to dress for dinner.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss," said that hitherto silent individual when the operation was completed, "you do look lovely."

Honora, secretly, was of that opinion too as she surveyed herself in the long glass. The simple summer silk, of a deep and glowing pink, rivalled the colour in her cheeks, and contrasted with the dark and shining masses of her hair; and on her neck glistened a little pendant of her mother's jewels, which Aunt Mary, with Cousin Eleanor's assistance, had had set in New York. Honora's figure was that of a woman of five and twenty: her neck was a slender column, her head well set, and the look of race, which had been hers since childhood, was at nineteen more accentuated. All this she saw, and went down the stairs in a kind of exultation. And when on the threshold of the drawing−room she paused, the conversation suddenly ceased. Mr. Holt and his sons got up somewhat precipitately, and Mrs. Holt came forward to meet her.

"I hope you weren't waiting for me," said Honora, timidly.

"No indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. Tucking Honora's hand under her arm, she led the way majestically to the dining−room, a large apartment with a dimly lighted conservatory at the farther end, presided over by the decorous butler and his assistants. A huge chandelier with prisms hung over the flowers at the centre of the table, which sparkled with glass and silver, while dishes of vermilion and yellow fruits relieved the whiteness of the cloth. Honora found herself beside Mr. Holt, who looked more shrivelled than ever in his evening clothes. And she was about to address him when, with a movement as though to forestall her, he leaned forward convulsively and began a mumbling grace.

The dinner itself was more like a ceremony than a meal, and as it proceeded, Honora found it increasingly difficult to rid herself of a curious feeling of being on probation. Joshua, who sat on her other side and ate prodigiously, scarcely addressed a word to her; but she gathered from his remarks to his father and brother that he was interested in cows. And Mr. Holt was almost exclusively occupied in slowly masticating the special dishes which the butler impressively laid before him. He asked her a few questions about Miss Turner's school, but it was not until she had admired the mass of peonies in the centre of the table that his eyes brightened, and he smiled.

"You like flowers?" he asked.

"I love them," said Honora.

"I am the gardener here," he said. "You must see my garden, Miss Leffingwell. I am in it by half−past six every morning, rain or shine."

Honora looked up, and surprised Mrs. Robert's eyes fixed on her with the same strange expression she had noticed on her arrival. And for some senseless reason, she flushed.

The conversation was chiefly carried on by kindly little Mrs. Joshua and by Mrs. Holt, who seemed at once to preside and to dominate. She praised Honora's gown, but left a lingering impression that she thought her overdressed, without definitely saying so. And she made innumerable and often embarrassing inquiries about Honora's aunt and uncle, and her life in St. Louis, and her friends there, and how she had happened to go to Sutcliffe to school. Sometimes Honora blushed, but she answered them all good−naturedly. And when at length the meal had marched sedately down to the fruit, Mrs. Holt rose and drew Honora out of the dining room.

"It is a little hard on you, my dear," she said, "to give you so much family on your arrival. But there are some other people coming to−morrow, when it will be gayer, I hope, for you and Susan."

"It is so good of you and Susan to want me, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "I am enjoying it so much. I have never been in a big country house like this, and I am glad there is no one else here. I have heard my aunt speak of you so often, and tell how kind you were to take charge of me, that I have always hoped to know you sometime or other. And it seems the strangest of coincidences that I should have roomed with Susan at Sutcliffe."

"Susan has grown very fond of you," said Mrs. Holt, graciously. "We are very glad to have you, my dear, and I must own that I had a curiosity to see you again. Your aunt struck me as a good and sensible woman, and it was a positive relief to know that you were to be confided to her care." Mrs. Holt, however, shook her head and regarded Honora, and her next remark might have been taken as a clew to her thoughts. "But we are not very gay at Silverdale, Honora."

Honora's quick intuition detected the implication of a frivolity which even her sensible aunt had not been able to eradicate.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she cried, "I shall be so happy here, just seeing things and being among you. And I am so interested in the little bit I have seen already. I caught a glimpse of your girls' home on my way from the station. I hope you will take me there."

Mrs. Holt gave her a quick look, but beheld in Honora's clear eyes only eagerness and ingenuousness.

The change in the elderly lady's own expression, and incidentally in the atmosphere which enveloped her, was remarkable.

"Would you really like to go, my dear?"

"Oh, yes indeed," cried Honora. "You see, I have heard so much of it, and I should like to write my aunt about it. She is interested in the work you are doing, and she has kept a magazine with an article in it, and a picture of the institution."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady, now visibly pleased. "It is a very modest little work, my dear. I had no idea that out in St. Louis that the beams of my little candle had carried so far. Indeed you shall see it, Honora. We will go down the first thing m the morning."

Mrs. Robert, who had been sitting on the other side of the room, rose abruptly and came towards them. There was something very like a smile on her face, although it wasn't really a smile as she bent over and kissed her mother−in−law on the cheek.

"I am glad to hear you are interested in charities, Miss Leffingwell," she said.

Honora's face grew warm.

"I have not so far had very much to do with them, I am afraid," she answered.

"How should she?" demanded. Mrs. Holt. "Gwendolen, you're not going up already?"

"I have some letters to write," said Mrs. Robert.

"Gwen has helped me immeasurably," said Mrs. Holt, looking after the tall figure of her daughter−in−law, "but she has a curious, reserved character. You have to know her, my dear. She is not at all like Susan, for instance."

Honora awoke the next morning to a melody, and lay for some minutes in a delicious semi−consciousness, wondering where she was. Presently she discovered that the notes were those of a bird on a tree immediately outside of her window a tree of wonderful perfection, the lower branches of which swept the ground. Other symmetrical trees, of many varieties, dotted a velvet lawn, which formed a great natural terrace above the forested valley of Silver Brook. On the grass, dew−drenched cobwebs gleamed in the early sun, and the breeze that stirred the curtains was charged with the damp, fresh odours of the morning. Voices caught her ear, and two figures appeared in the distance. One she recognized as Mr. Holt, and the other was evidently a gardener. The gilt clock on the mantel pointed to a quarter of seven.

It is far too late in this history to pretend that Honora was, by preference, an early riser, and therefore it must have been the excitement caused by her surroundings that made her bathe and dress with alacrity that morning. A housemaid was dusting the stairs as she descended into the empty hall. She crossed the lawn, took a path through the trees that bordered it, and came suddenly upon an old−fashioned garden in all the freshness of its early morning colour. In one of the winding paths she stopped with a little exclamation. Mr. Holt rose from his knees in front of her, where he had been digging industriously with a trowel. His greeting, when contrasted with his comparative taciturnity at dinner the night before, was almost effusive − and a little pathetic.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "up so early?"

He held up forbiddingly a mould−covered palm. "I can't shake hands with you."

Honora laughed.

"I couldn't resist the temptation to see your garden," she said.

A gentle light gleamed in his blue eyes, and he paused before a trellis of June roses. With his gardening knife he cut three of them, and held them gallantly against her white gown. Her sensitive colour responded as she thanked him, and she pinned them deftly at her waist.

"You like gardens?" he said.

"I was brought up with them," she answered; "I mean," she corrected herself swiftly, "in a very modest way. My uncle is passionately fond of flowers, and he makes our little yard bloom with them all summer. But of course," Honora added, "I've never seen anything like this."

"It has been a life work," answered Mr. Holt, proudly, "and yet I feel as though I had not yet begun. Come, I will show you the peonies they are at their best before I go in and make myself respectable for breakfast."

Ten minutes later, as they approached the house in amicable and even lively conversation, they beheld Susan and Mrs. Robert standing on the steps under the porte−cochère, watching them.

"Why, Honora," cried Susan, "how energetic you are! I actually had a shock when I went to your room and found you'd gone. I'll have to write Miss Turner."

"Don't," pleaded Honora; "you see, I had every inducement to get up."

"She has been well occupied," put in Mr. Holt. "She has been admiring my garden."

"Indeed I have," said Honora. "Oh, then, you have won father's heart!" cried Susan. Gwendolen Holt smiled. Her eyes were fixed upon the roses in Honora's belt.

"Good morning, Miss Leffingwell," she said, simply.

Mr. Holt having removed the loam from his hands, the whole family, excepting Joshua, Junior, and including an indefinite number of children, and Carroll, the dignified butler, and Martha, the elderly maid, trooped into the library for prayers. Mr. Holt sat down before a teak−wood table at the end of the room, on which reposed a great, morocco−covered Bible. Adjusting his spectacles, he read, in a mild but impressive voice, a chapter of Matthew, while Mrs. Joshua tried to quiet her youngest. Honora sat staring at a figure on the carpet, uncomfortably aware that Mrs. Robert was still studying her. Mr. Holt closed the Bible reverently, and announced a prayer, whereupon the family knelt upon the floor and leaned their elbows on the seats of their chairs. Honora did likewise, wondering at the facility with which Mr. Holt worded his appeal, and at the number of things he found to pray for. Her knees had begun to ache before he had finished.

At breakfast such a cheerful spirit prevailed that Honora began almost to feel at home. Even Robert indulged occasionally in raillery.

"Where in the world is Josh?" asked Mrs. Holt, after they were seated.

"I forgot to tell you, mother," little Mrs. Joshua chirped up, "that he got up at an unearthly hour, and went over to Grafton to look at a cow."

"A cow!" sighed Mrs. Holt. "Oh, dear, I might have known it. You must understand, Honora, that every member of the Holt family has a hobby. Joshua's is Jerseys."

"I'm sure I should adore them if I lived in the country," Honora declared.

"If you and Joshua would only take that Sylvester farm, and build a house, Annie," said Mr. Holt, munching the dried bread which was specially prepared for him, "I should be completely happy. Then," he added, turning to Honora, "I should have both my sons settled on the place. Robert and Gwen are sensible in building."

"It's cheaper to live with you, granddad," laughed Mrs. Joshua. "Josh says if we do that, he has more money to buy cows."

At this moment a footman entered, and presented Mrs. Holt with some mail on a silver tray.

"The Vicomte de Toqueville is coming this afternoon, Joshua," she announced, reading rapidly from a sheet on which was visible a large crown. "He landed in New York last week, and writes to know if I could have him."

"Another of mother's menagerie," remarked Robert.

"I don't think that's nice of you, Robert," said his mother. "The Vicomte was very kind to your father and me in Paris, and invited us to his château in Provence."

Robert was sceptical.

"Are you sure he had one?" he insisted.

Even Mr. Holt laughed.

"Robert," said his mother, "I wish Gwen could induce you to travel more. Perhaps you would learn that all foreigners aren't fortune−hunters."

"I've had an opportunity to observe the ones who come over here, mother."

"I won't have a prospective guest discussed," Mrs. Holt declared, with finality. "Joshua, you remember my telling you last spring that Martha Spence's son called on me?" she asked. "He is in business with a man named Dallam, I believe, and making a great deal of money for a young man. He is just a year younger than you, Robert."

"Do you mean that fat, tow−headed boy that used to come up here and eat melons and ride my pony?" inquired Robert. "Howard Spence?"

Mrs. Holt smiled.

"He isn't fat any longer, Robert. Indeed, he's quite good−looking. Since his mother died, I had lost trace of him. But I found a photograph of hers when I was clearing up my desk some months ago, and sent it to him, and he came to thank me. I forgot to tell you that I invited him for a fortnight any time he chose, and he has just written to ask if he may come now. I regret to say that he's on the Stock Exchange but I was very fond of his mother. It doesn't seem to me quite a legitimate business."

"Why!" exclaimed little Mrs. Joshua, unexpectedly, "I'm given to understand that the Stock Exchange is quite aristocratic in these days."

"I'm afraid I am old−fashioned, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, rising. "It has always seemed to me little better than a gambling place. Honora, if you still wish to go to the Girls' Home, I have ordered the carriage in a quarter of an hour."

CHAPTER VIII. A CHAPTER OF CONQUESTS

HONORA's interest in the Institution was so lively, and she asked so many questions and praised so highly the work with which the indiscreet young women were occupied that Mrs. Holt patted her hand as they drove homeward.

"My dear," she said, "I begin to wish I'd adopted you myself. Perhaps, later on, we can find a husband for you, and you will marry and settle down near us here at Silverdale, and then you can help me with the work."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she replied, "I should so like to help you, I mean. And it would be wonderful to live in such a place. And as for marriage, it seems such a long way off that somehow I never think of it."

"Naturally," ejaculated Mrs. Holt, with approval, "a young girl of your age should not. But, my dear, I am afraid you are destined to have many admirers. If you had not been so well brought up, and were not naturally so sensible, I should fear for you."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt!" exclaimed Honora, deprecatingly, and blushing very prettily.

"Whatever else I am," said Mrs. Holt, vigorously, "I am not a flatterer. I am telling you something for your own good which you probably know already."

Honora was discreetly silent. She thought of the proud and unsusceptible George Hanbury, whom she had cast down from the tower of his sophomore dignity with such apparent ease; and of certain gentlemen at home, young and middle−aged, who had behaved foolishly during the Christmas holidays.

At lunch both the Roberts and the Joshuas were away. Afterwards they romped with the children she and Susan.

They were shy at first, especially the third Joshua, but Honora captivated him by playing two sets of tennis in the broiling sun, at the end of which exercise he regarded her with a new−born admiration in his eyes. He was thirteen.

"I didn't think you were that kind at all," he said.

"What kind did you think I was?" asked Honora, passing her arm around his shoulder as they walked towards the house.

The boy grew scarlet.

"Oh, I didn't think you you could play tennis," he stammered.

Honora stopped, and seized his chin and tilted his face upward.

"Now, Joshua," she said, "look at me and say that over again."

"Well," he replied desperately, "I thought you wouldn't want to get all mussed up and hot."

"That's better," said Honora. "You thought I was vain, didn't you?"

"But I don't think so any more," he avowed passionately. "I think you're a trump. And we'll play again to−morrow, won't we?"

"We'll play any day you like," she declared.

It is unfair to suppose that the arrival of a real vicomte and of a young, good−looking, and successful member of the New York Stock Exchange were responsible for Honora's appearance, an hour later, in the embroidered linen gown which Cousin Eleanor had given her that spring. Tea was already in progress on the porch, and if a hush in the conversation and the scraping of chairs is any sign of a sensation, this happened when our heroine appeared in the doorway. And Mrs. Holt, in the act of lifting the hot−water kettle, put it down again. Whether or not there was approval in the lady's delft−blue eye, Honora could not have said. The Vicomte, with the graceful facility of his race, had differentiated himself from the group and stood before her. As soon as the words of introduction were pronounced, he made a bow that was a tribute in itself, exaggerated in its respect.

"It is a pleasure, Mademoiselle," he murmured, but his eyes were more eloquent.

A description of him in his own language leaped into Honora's mind, so much did he appear to have walked out of one of the many yellow−backed novels she had read. He was not tall, but beautifully made, and his coat was quite absurdly cut in at the waist; his mustache was en−croc, and its points resembled those of the Spanish bayonets in the conservatory: he might have been three and thirty, and he was what the novels described as un pen fané which means that he had seen the world: his eyes were extraordinarily bright, black, and impenetrable.

A greater contrast to the Vicomte than Mr. Howard Spence would have been difficult to find. He was Honora's first glimpse of Finance, of the powers that travelled in private cars and despatched ships across the ocean. And in our modern mythology, he might have stood for the god of Prosperity. Prosperity is pink, and so was Mr. Spence, in two places, his smooth−shaven cheeks and his shirt. His flesh had a certain firmness, but he was not stout; he was merely well fed, as Prosperity should be. His features were comparatively regular, his mustache a light brown, his eyes hazel. The fact that he came from that mysterious metropolis, the heart of which is Wall Street, not only excused but legitimized the pink shirt and the neatly knotted green tie, the pepper−and−salt check suit that was loose and at the same time well−fitting, and the jewelled ring on his plump little finger. On the whole,

Mr. Spence was not only prepossessing, but he contrived to give Honora, as she shook his hand, the impression of being brought a step nearer to the national source of power. Unlike the Vicomte, he did not appear to have been instantly and mortally wounded upon her arrival on the scene, but his greeting was flattering, and he remained by her side instead of returning to that of Mrs. Robert.

"When did you come up?" he asked.

"Only yesterday," answered Honora.

"New York," said Mr. Spence, producing a gold cigarette case on which his monogram was largely and somewhat elaborately engraved, "New York is played out this time of year isn't it? I dropped in at Sherry's last night for dinner, and there weren't thirty people there."

Honora had heard of Sherry's as a restaurant where one dined fabulously, and she tried to imagine the cosmopolitan and blissful existence which permitted "dropping in at" such a place. Moreover, Mr. Spence was plainly under the impression that she too "came up" from New York, and it was impossible not to be a little pleased. "It must be a relief to get into the country," she ventured.

Mr. Spence glanced around him expressively, and then looked at her with a slight smile. The action and the smile to which she could not refrain from responding seemed to establish a tacit understanding between them. It was natural that he should look upon Silverdale as a slow place, and there was something delicious in his taking for granted that she shared this opinion. She wondered a little wickedly what he would say when he knew the truth about her, and this was the birth of a resolution that his interest should not flag.

"Oh, I can stand the country when it is properly inhabited," he said, and their eyes met in laughter.

"How many inhabitants do you require?" she asked.

"Well," he said brazenly, "the right kind of inhabitant is worth a thousand of the wrong kind. It is a good rule in business, when you come across a gilt−edged security, to make a specialty of it."

Honora found the compliment somewhat singular. But she was prepared to forgive New York a few sins in the matter of commercial slang: New York, which evidently dressed as it liked, and talked as it liked. But not knowing any more of a gilt−edged security than that it was something to Mr. Spence's taste, a retort was out of the question. Then, as though she were doomed that day to complicity, her eyes chanced to encounter an appealing glance from the Vicomte, who was searching with the courage of despair for an English word, which his hostess awaited in stoical silence. He was trying to give his impressions of Silverdale, in comparison to country places abroad, while Mrs. Robert regarded him enigmatically, and Susan sympathetically. Honora had an almost irresistible desire to laugh.

"Ah, Madame," he cried, still looking at Honora, "will you have the kindness to permit me to walk about ever so little?"

"Certainly, Vicomte, and I will go with you. Get my parasol, Susan. Perhaps you would like to come, too, Howard," she added to Mr. Spence; "it has been so long since you were here, and we have made many changes."

"And you, Mademoiselle," said the Vicomte to Honora, "you will come − yes? You are interested in landscape?"

"I love the country," said Honora.

"It is a pleasure to have a guest who is so appreciative," said Mrs. Holt. "Miss Leffingwell was up at seven this morning, and in the garden with my husband."

"At seven!" exclaimed the Vicomte; "you American young ladies are wonderful. For example −" and he was about to approach her to enlarge on this congenial theme when Susan arrived with the parasol, which Mrs. Holt put in his hands.

"We'll begin, I think, with the view from the summer house," she said. "And I will show you how our famous American landscape architect, Mr. Olmstead, has treated the slope."

There was something humorous, and a little pathetic in the contrasted figures of the Vicomte and their hostess crossing the lawn in front of them. Mr. Spence paused a moment to light his cigarette, and he seemed to derive infinite pleasure from this juxtaposition.

"Got left, didn't he?" he said.

To this observation there was, obviously, no answer.

"I'm not very strong on foreigners," he declared. "An American is good enough for me. And there's something about that fellow which would make me a little slow in trusting him with a woman I cared for."

"If you are beginning to worry over Mrs. Holt," said Honora, "we'd better walk a little faster."

Mr. Spence's delight at this sally was so unrestrained as to cause the couple ahead to turn. The Vicomte's expression was reproachful.

"Where's Susan?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"I think she must have gone in the house," Honora answered.

"You two seem to be having a very good time."

"Oh, we're hitting it off fairly well," said Mr. Spence, no doubt for the benefit of the Vicomte. And he added in a confidential tone, "Aren't we?"

"Not on the subject of the Vicomte," she replied promptly. "I like him. I like French people."

"What!" he exclaimed, halting in his steps, "you don't take that man seriously?"

"I haven't known him long enough to take him seriously," said Honora.

"There's a blindness about women," he declared, "that's incomprehensible. They'll invest in almost any old thing if the certificates are beautifully engraved. If you were a man, you wouldn't trust that Frenchman to give you change for five dollars."

"French people," proclaimed Honora, "have a light touch of which we Americans are incapable. We do not know how to relax."

"A light touch!" cried Mr. Spence, delightedly, "that about describes the Vicomte."

"I'm sure you do him an injustice," said Honora.

"We'll see," said Mr. Spence. "Mrs. Holt is always picking up queer people like that. She's noted for it." He turned to her.

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I came with Susan," she replied, amusedly, "from boarding−school at Sutcliffe."

"From boarding−school!"

She rather enjoyed his surprise.

"You don't mean to say you are Susan's age?"

"How old did you think I was?" she asked.

"Older than Susan," he said surveying her.

"No, I'm a mere child, I'm nineteen."

"But I thought −" he began, and paused and lighted another cigarette.

Her eyes lighted mischievously.

"You thought that I had been out several years, and that I'd seen a good deal of the world, and that I lived in New York, and that it was strange you didn't know me. But New York is such an enormous place I suppose one can't know everybody there." "And where do you come from, if I may ask?" he said.

"St. Louis. I was brought to this country before I was two years old, from France. Mrs. Holt brought me. And I have never been out of St. Louis since, except to go to Sutcliffe. There you have my history. Mrs. Holt would probably have told it to you, if I hadn't."

"And Mrs. Holt brought you to this country?"

Honora explained, not without a certain enjoyment.

"And how do you happen to be here?" she demanded. "Are you a member of of the menagerie?"

He had the habit of throwing back his head when he laughed. This, of course, was a thing to laugh over, and now he deemed it audacity. Five minutes before he might have given it another name. There is no use in saying that the recital of Honora's biography had not made a difference with Mr. Howard Spence, and that he was not a little mortified at his mistake. What he had supposed her to be must remain a matter of conjecture. He was, however, by no means aware how thoroughly this unknown and inexperienced young woman had read his thoughts in her regard. And, if the truth be told, he was on the whole relieved that she was nobody. He was just an ordinary man, provided with no sixth sense or premonitory small voice to warn him that masculine creatures are often in real danger at the moment when they feel most secure.

It is certain that his manner changed, and during the rest of the walk she listened demurely when he talked about Wall Street, with casual references to the powers that be. It was evident that Mr. Howard Spence was one who had his fingers on the pulse of affairs. Ambition leaped in him.

They reached the house in advance of Mrs. Holt and the Vicomte, and Honora went to her room.

At dinner, save for a little matter of a casual remark when Mr. Holt had assumed the curved attitude in which he asked grace, Mr. Spence had a veritable triumph. Self−confidence was a quality which Honora admired. He was undaunted by Mrs. Holt, and advised Mrs. Robert, if she had any pin−money, to buy New York Central; and he predicted an era of prosperity which would be unexampled in the annals of the country. Among other powers, he quoted the father of Honora's schoolmate, Mr. James Wing, as authority for this prophecy. He sat next to Susan, who maintained her usual maidenly silence, but Honora, from time to time, and as though by accident, caught his eye. Even Mr. Holt, when not munching his dried bread, was tempted to make some inquiries about the market.

"So far as I am concerned," Mrs. Holt announced suddenly, "nothing can convince me that it is not gambling."

"My dear Elvira!" protested Mr. Holt.

"I can't help it," said that lady, stoutly; "I'm old−fashioned, I suppose. But it seems to me like legalized gambling."

Mr. Spence took this somewhat severe arraignment of his career in admirable good nature. And if there be such a thing as an implied wink, Honora received one as he proceeded to explain what he was pleased to call the bona−fide nature of the transactions of Dallam and Spence. A discussion ensued in which, to her surprise, even the ordinarily taciturn Joshua took a part, and maintained that the buying and selling of blooded stock was equally gambling. To this his father laughingly agreed. The Vicomte, who sat on Mrs. Holt's right, and who apparently was determined not to suffer a total eclipse without a struggle, gallantly and unexpectedly came to his hostess' rescue, though she treated him as a doubtful ally. This was because he declared with engaging frankness that in France the young men of his monde had a jeunesse: he, who spoke to them, had gambled; everybody gambled in France, where it was regarded as an innocent amusement. He had friends on the Bourse, and he could see no difference in principle between betting on the red at Monte Carlo and the rise and fall of the shares of la Compagnie des Métaux, for example. After completing his argument, he glanced triumphantly about the table, until his restless black eyes encountered Honora's, seemingly seeking a verdict. She smiled impartially.

The subject of finance lasted through the dinner, and the Vicomte proclaimed himself amazed with the evidences of wealth which confronted him on every side in this marvellous country. And once, when he was at a loss for a word, Honora astonished and enchanted him by supplying it.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "I was sure when I first beheld you that you spoke my language! And with such an accent!"

"I have studied it all my life, Vicomte," she said, modestly, "and I had the honour to be born in your country. I have always wished to see it again."

Monsieur de Toqueville ventured the fervent hope that her wish might soon be gratified, but not before he returned to France. He expressed himself in French, and in a few moments she found herself deep in a discussion with him in that tongue. While she talked, her veins seemed filled with fire; and she was dimly and automatically aware of the disturbance about her, as though she were creating a magnetic storm that interfered with all other communication. Mr. Holt's nightly bezique, which he played with Susan, did not seem to be going as well as usual, and elsewhere conversation was a palpable pretence. Mr. Spence, who was attempting to entertain the two daughters−in−law, was clearly distrait if his glances meant anything. Robert and Joshua had not appeared, and Mrs. Holt, at the far end of the room under the lamp, regarded Honora from time to time over the edge of the evening newspaper.

In his capacity as a student of American manners, an unsuspected if scattered knowledge on Honora's part of that portion of French literature included between Théophile Gautier and Gyp at once dumfounded and delighted the Vicomte de Toqueville. And he was curious to know whether, amongst American young ladies, Miss Leffingwell

was the exception or the rule. Those eyes of his, which had paid to his hostess a tender respect, snapped when they spoke to our heroine, and presently he boldly abandoned literature to declare that the fates alone had sent her to Silverdale at the time of his visit.

It was at this interesting juncture that Mrs. Holt rattled her newspaper a little louder than usual, arose majestically, and addressed Mrs. Joshua.

"Annie, perhaps you will play for us," she said, as she crossed the room, and added to Honora: "I had no idea you spoke French so well, my dear. What have you and Monsieur de Toqueville been talking about?"

It was the Vicomte who, springing to his feet, replied nimbly:

"Mademoiselle has been teaching me much of the customs of your country."

"And what," inquired Mrs. Holt, "have you been teaching Mademoiselle?"

The Vicomte laughed and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Ah, Madame, I wish I were qualified to be her teacher. The education of American young ladies is truly extraordinary."

"I was about to tell Monsieur de Toqueville," put in Honora, wickedly, "that he must see your Institution as soon as possible, and the work your girls are doing."

"Madame," said the Vicomte, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "I await my opportunity and your kindness."

"I will take you to−morrow," said Mrs. Holt.

At this instant a sound closely resembling a sneeze caused them to turn. Mr. Spence, with his handkerchief to his mouth, had his back turned to them, and was studiously regarding the bookcases.

After Honora had gone upstairs for the night she opened her door in response to a knock, to find Mrs. Holt on the threshold.

"My dear," said that lady, "I feel that I must say a word to you. I suppose you realize that you are attractive to men."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt."

"You're no fool, my dear, and it goes without saying that you do realize it in the most innocent way, of course. But you have had no experience in life. Mind you, I don't say that the Vicomte de Toqueville isn't very much of a gentleman, but the French ideas about the relations of young men and young women are quite different and, I regret to say, less innocent than ours. I have no reason to believe that the Vicomte has come to this country to to mend his fortunes. I know nothing about his property. But my sense of responsibility towards you has led me to tell him that you have no dot, for you somehow manage to give the impression of a young woman of fortune. Not purposely, my dear I did not mean that." Mrs. Holt tapped gently Honora's flaming cheek. "I merely felt it my duty to drop you a word of warning against Monsieur de Toqueville because he is a Frenchman."

"But, Mrs. Holt, I had no idea of of falling in love with him," protested Honora, as soon as she could get her breath. "He seemed so kind and so interested in everything."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Holt, dryly. "And I have always been led to believe that that is the most dangerous sort. I am sure, Honora, after what I have said, you will give him no encouragement."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," cried Honora again, "I shouldn't think of such a thing!"

"I am sure of it, Honora, now that you are forewarned. And your suggestion to take him to the Institution was not a bad one. I meant to do so anyway, and I think it will be good for him. Good night, my dear."

After the good lady had gone, Honora stood for some moments motionless. Then she turned out the light.

CHAPTER IX. IN WHICH THE VICOMTE CONTINUES HIS STUDIES

MR. ROBERT HOLT, Honora learned at breakfast, had two hobbies. She had never heard of what is called Forestry, and had always believed the wood of her country to be inexhaustible. It had never occurred to her to think of a wild forest as an example of nature's extravagance, and so flattering was her attention while Robert explained the primary principles of caring for trees that he actually offered to show her one of the tracts on the estate which he was treating. He could not, he regretted to say, take her that morning.

His other hobby was golf. He was president of the Sutton Golf Club, and had arranged to play a match with Mr. Spence. This gentleman, it appeared, was likewise an enthusiast, and had brought to Silverdale a leather bag filled with sticks.

"Won't you come, too, Miss Leffingwell?" he said, as he took a second cup of coffee.

Somewhat to the astonishment of the Holt family, Robert seconded the invitation.

"I'll bet, Robert," said Mr. Spence, gallantly, "that Miss Leffingwell can put it over both of us."

"Indeed, I can't play at all," exclaimed Honora in confusion. "And I shouldn't think of spoiling your match. And besides, I am going to drive with Susan."

"We can go another day, Honora," said Susan.

But Honora would not hear of it.

"Come over with me this afternoon, then," suggested Mr. Spence, "and I'll give you a lesson."

She thanked him gratefully. "But it won't be much fun for you, I'm afraid," she added, as they left the dining room.

"Don't worry about me," he answered cheerfully. He was dressed in a checked golf costume, and wore a pink shirt of a new pattern. And he stood in front of her in the hall, glowing from his night's sleep, evidently in a high state of amusement.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"You did for the Vicomte all right," he said. "I'd give a good deal to see him going through the Institution."

"It wouldn't have hurt you, either," she retorted, and started up the stairs. Once she glanced back and saw him looking after her.

At the far end of the second story hall she perceived the Vicomte, who had not appeared at breakfast, coming out of his room. She paused with her hand on the walnut post and laughed a little, so ludicrous was his expression as he approached her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, que vous êtes mechante!" he exclaimed. "But I forgive you, if you will not go off with that stock−broker. It must be that I see the Home sometime, and if I go now it is over. I forgive you. It is in the Bible that we must forgive our neighbour how many times?"

"Seventy times seven," said Honora.

"But I make a condition," said the Vicomte, "that my neighbour shall be a woman, and young and beautiful. Then I care not how many times. Mademoiselle, if you would but have your portrait painted as you are, with your hand on the post, by Sargent or Carolus Duran, there would be some noise in the Salon."

"Is that you, Vicomte?" came a voice from the foot of the stairs Mrs. Holt's voice.

"I come this instant, Madame," he replied, looking over the banisters, and added: "Malheureux que je suis! Perhaps, when I return, you will show me a little of the garden."

The duty of exhibiting to guests the sights of Silverdale and the neighbourhood had so often devolved upon Susan, who was methodical, that she had made out a route, or itinerary, for this purpose. There were some notes to leave and a sick woman and a child to see, which caused her to vary it a little that morning; and Honora, who sat in the sunlight and held the horse, wondered how it would feel to play the lady bountiful.

"I am so glad to have you all to myself for a little while, Honora," Susan said to her. "You are so popular that I begin to fear that I shall have to be unselfish, and share you."

"Oh, Susan," she said, "every one has been so kind. And I can't tell you how much I am enjoying this experience, which I feel I owe to you."

"I am so happy, dear, that it is giving you pleasure," said Susan.

"And don't think," exclaimed Honora, "that you won't see lots of me, for you will."

Her heart warmed to Susan, yet she could not but feel a secret pity for her, as one unable to make the most of her opportunities in the wonderful neighbourhood in which she lived. As they drove through the roads and in and out of the well−kept places, everybody they met had a bow and a smile for her friend a greeting such as people give to those for whom they have only good−will. Young men and girls waved their racquets at her from the tennis−courts; and Honora envied them and wished that she, too, were a part of the gay life she saw, and were playing instead of being driven decorously about. She admired the trim, new houses in which they lived, set upon the slopes of the hills. Pleasure houses, they seemed to her, built expressly for joys which had been denied her.

"Do you see much of of these people, Susan?" she asked.

"Not so much as I'd like," replied Susan, seriously. "I never seem to get time. We nearly always have guests at Silverdale, and then there are so many things one has to attend to. Perhaps you have noticed," she added, smiling a little, "that we are very serious and old−fashioned."

"Oh, no indeed," protested Honora. "It is such a wonderful experience for me to be here!"

"Well," said Susan, "we're having some young people to dinner to−night, and others next week that's why I'm leaving these notes. And then we shall be a little livelier."

"Really, Susan, you mustn't think that I'm not having a good time. It is exciting to be in the same house with a real French Vicomte, and I like Mr. Spence tremendously."

Her friend was silent.

"Don't you?" demanded Honora.

To her surprise, the usually tolerant Susan did not wholly approve of Mr. Spence.

"He is a guest, and I ought not to criticise him," she answered. "But since you ask me, Honora, I have to be honest. It seems to me that his ambitions are a little sordid that he is too intent upon growing rich."

"But I thought all New Yorkers were that way," exclaimed Honora, and added hastily, "except a few, like your family, Susan."

Susan laughed.

"You should marry a diplomat, my dear," she said. "After all, perhaps I am a little harsh. But there is a spirit of selfishness and and of vulgarity in modern, fashionable New York which appears to be catching, like a disease. The worship of financial success seems to be in every one's blood."

"It is power," said Honora.

Susan glanced at her, but Honora did not remark the expression on her friend's face, so intent was she on the reflections which Susan's words had aroused. They had reached the far end of the Silverdale domain, and were driving along the shore of the lake that lay like a sapphire set amongst the green hills. It was here that the new house of the Robert Holts was building. Presently they came to Joshua's dairy farm, and Joshua himself was standing in the doorway of one of his immaculate barns. Honora put her hand on Susan's arm.

"Can't we see the cows?" she asked.

Susan looked surprised.

"I didn't know you were interested in cows, Honora."

"I am interested in everything," said Honora. "And I think your brother is so attractive."

It was at this moment that Joshua, with his hands in his pockets, demanded what his sister was doing there.

"Miss Leffingwell wants to look at the cattle, Josh," called Susan.

"Won't you show them to me, Mr. Holt," begged Honora. "I'd like so much to see some really good cattle, and to know a little more about them."

Joshua appeared incredulous. But, being of the male sex, he did not hide the fact that he was pleased.

"It seems strange to have somebody really want to see them," he said. "I tried to get Spence to come back this way, but the idea didn't seem to appeal to him. Here are some of the records."

"Records?" repeated Honora, looking at a mass of type−written figures on the wall. "Do you mean to say you keep such an exact account of all the milk you get?"

Joshua laughed, and explained. She walked by his side over the concrete paving to the first of the varnished stalls.

"That," he said, and a certain pride had come into his voice, "is Lady Guinevere, and those ribbons are the prizes she has taken on both sides of the water."

"Isn't she a dear!" exclaimed Honora; "why, she's actually beautiful. I didn't know cows could be so beautiful."

"She isn't bad," admitted Joshua. "Of course the good points in a cow aren't necessarily features of beauty for instance, these bones here," he added, pointing to the hips.

"But they seem to add, somehow, to the thoroughbred appearance," Honora declared.

"That's absolutely true," replied Joshua, whereupon he began to talk. And Honora, still asking questions, followed him from stall to stall. "There are some more in the pasture," he said, when they had reached the end of the second building.

"Oh, couldn't I see them?" she asked.

"Surely," replied Joshua, with more of alacrity than one would have believed him capable. "I'll tell Susan to drive on, and you and I will walk home across the fields, if you like."

"I should love to," said Honora.

It was not without astonishment that the rest of the Holt family beheld them returning together as the gongs were sounding for luncheon. Mrs. Holt, upon perceiving them, began at once to shake her head and laugh.

"My dear, it can't be that you have captivated Joshua!" she exclaimed, in a tone that implied the carrying of a stronghold hitherto thought impregnable.

Honora blushed, whether from victory or embarrassment, or both, it is impossible to say.

"I'm afraid it's just the other way, Mrs. Holt," she replied; "Mr. Holt has captivated me."

"We'll call it mutual, Miss Leffingwell," declared Joshua, which was for him the height of gallantry.

"I only hope he hasn't bored you," said the good−natured Mrs. Joshua.

"Oh, dear, no," exclaimed Honora. "I don't see how any one could be bored looking at such magnificent animals as that Hardicanute."

It was at this moment that her eyes were drawn, by a seemingly resistless attraction, to Mrs. Robert's face. Her comment upon this latest conquest, though unexpressed, was disquieting. And in spite of herself, Honora blushed again.

At luncheon, in the midst of a general conversation, Mr. Spence made a remark sotto voce which should, in the ordinary course of events, have remained a secret.

"Susan," he said, "your friend Miss Leffingwell is a fascinator. She's got Robert's scalp, too, and he thought it a pretty good joke because I offered to teach her to play golf this afternoon." It appeared that Susan's eyes could flash indignantly. Perhaps she resented Mr. Spence's calling her by her first name.

"Honora Leffingwell is the most natural and unspoiled person I know," she said.

There is, undoubtedly, a keen pleasure and an ample reward in teaching a pupil as apt and as eager to learn as Honora. And Mr. Spence, if he attempted at all to account for the swiftness with which the hours of that long afternoon slipped away, may have attributed their flight to the discovery in himself of hitherto latent talent for instruction. At the little Casino, he had bought, from the professional in charge of the course, a lady's driver; and she practised with exemplary patience the art of carrying one's hands through and of using the wrists in the stroke.

"Not quite, Miss Leffingwell," he would say, "but so."

Honora would try again.

"That's unusually good for a beginner, but you are inclined to chop it off a little still. Let it swing all the way round."

"Oh, dear, how you must hate me!"

"Hate you?" said Mr. Spence, searching in vain for words with which to obliterate such a false impression. Anything but that!"

"Isn't it a wonderful spot?" she exclaimed, gazing off down the swale, emerald green in the afternoon light between its forest walls. In the distance, Silver Brook was gleaming amidst the meadows. They sat down on one of the benches and watched the groups of players pass. Mr. Spence produced his cigarette case, and presented it to her playfully.

"A little quiet whiff," he suggested. "There's not much chance over at the convent," and she gathered that it was thus he was pleased to designate Silverdale.

In one instant she was doubtful whether or not to be angry, and in the next grew ashamed of the provincialism which had caused her to suspect an insult. She took a cigarette, and he produced a gold match case, lighted a match, and held it up for her. Honora blew it out. "You didn't think seriously that I smoked?" she asked, glancing at him.

"Why not?" he asked; "any number of girls do."

She tore away some of the rice paper and lifted the tobacco to her nose, and made a little grimace.

"Do you like to see women smoke?" she asked.

Mr. Spence admitted that there was something cosey about the custom, when it was well done.

"And I imagine," he added, "that you'd do it well."

"I'm sure I should make a frightful mess of it," she protested modestly.

"You do everything well," he said.

"Even golf?" she inquired mischievously.

"Even golf, for a beginner and and a woman; you've got the swing in an astonishingly short time. In fact, you've been something of an eye−opener to me," he declared. "If I had been betting, I should have placed the odds about twenty to one against your coming from the West."

This Eastern complacency, although it did not lower Mr. Spence in her estimation, aroused Honora's pride.

"That shows how little New Yorkers know of the West," she replied, laughing. "Didn't you suppose there were any gentlewomen there?"

"Gentlewomen," repeated Mr. Spence, as though puzzled by the word, "gentlewomen, yes. But you might have been born anywhere."

Even her sense of loyalty to her native place was not strong enough to override this compliment.

"I like a girl with some dash and go to her," he proclaimed, and there could be no doubt about the one to whom he was attributing these qualities. "Savoir faire, as the French call it, and all that. I don't know much about that language, but the way you talk it makes Mrs. Holt's French and Susan's sound silly. I watched you last night when you were stringing the Vicomte."

"Oh, did you?" said Honora, demurely.

"You may have thought I was talking to Mrs. Robert," he said. "I wasn't thinking anything about you," replied Honora, indignantly. "And besides, I wasn't 'stringing' the Vicomte. In the West we don't use anything like so much slang as you seem to use in New York."

"Oh, come now!" he exclaimed, laughingly, and apparently not the least out of countenance, "you made him think he was the only pebble on the beach. I have no idea what you were talking about."

"Literature," she said. "Perhaps that was the reason why you couldn't understand it."

"He may be interested in literature," replied Mr. Spence, "but it wouldn't be a bad guess to say that he was more interested in stocks and bonds."

"He doesn't talk about them, at any rate," said Honora.

"I'd respect him more if he did," he announced. "I know those fellows they make love to every woman they meet. I saw him eying you at lunch."

Honora laughed.

"I imagine the Vicomte could make love charmingly," she said.

Mr. Spence suddenly became very solemn.

"Merely as a fellow−countryman, Miss Leffingwell −" he began, when she sprang to her feet, her eyes dancing, and finished the sentence.

"You would advise me to be on my guard against him, because, although I look twenty−five and experienced, I am only nineteen and inexperienced. Thank you."

He paused to light another cigarette before he followed her across the turf. But she had the incomprehensible feminine satisfaction of knowing, as they walked homeward, that the usual serenity of his disposition was slightly ruffled.

A sudden caprice impelled her, in the privacy of her bedroom that evening, to draw his portrait for Peter Erwin. The complacency of New York men was most amusing, she wrote, and the amount of slang they used would have been deemed vulgar in St. Louis. Nevertheless, she liked people to be sure of themselves, and there was something "insolent" about New York which appealed to her. Peter, when he read that letter, seemed to see Mr. Howard Spence in the flesh; or arrayed, rather, in the kind of cloth alluringly draped in the show−windows of fashionable tailors. For Honora, all unconsciously, wrote literature. Literature was invented before phonographs, and will endure after them. Peter could hear Mr. Spence talk, for a part of that gentleman's conversation − a characteristic part was faithfully transcribed. And Peter detected a strain of admiration running even through the ridicule.

Peter showed that letter to Aunt Mary, whom it troubled, and to Uncle Tom, who laughed over it. There was also a lifelike portrait of the Vicomte, followed by the comment that he was charming, but very French; but the meaning of this last, but quite obvious, attribute remained obscure. He was possessed of one of the oldest titles and one of the oldest châteaux in France. (Although she did not say so, Honora had this on no less authority than that of the Vicomte himself.) Mrs. Holt with her Victorian brooch and ear−rings and her watchful delft−blue eyes that somehow haunted one even when she was out of sight, with her ample bosom and the really kind heart it contained was likewise depicted; and Mr. Holt, with his dried bread, and his garden which Honora wished Uncle Tom could see, and his prayers that lacked imagination. Joshua and his cows, Robert and his forest, Susan and her charities, the Institution, jolly Mrs. Joshua and enigmatical Mrs. Robert all were there: and even a picture of the dinner−party that evening, when Honora sat next to a young Mr. Patterson with glasses and a studious manner, who knew George Hanbury at Harvard. The other guests were a florid Miss Chamberlin, whose person loudly proclaimed possessions, and a thin Miss Longman, who rented one of the Silverdale cottages and sketched.

Honora was seeing life. She sent her love to Peter, and begged him to write to her.

The next morning a mysterious change seemed to have passed over the members of the family during the night. It was Sunday. Honora, when she left her room, heard a swishing on the stairs Mrs. Joshua, stiffly arrayed for the day. Even Mrs. Robert swished, but Mrs. Holt, in a bronze−coloured silk, swished most of all as she entered the library after a brief errand to the housekeeper's room. Mr. Holt was already arranging his book−marks in the Bible, while Joshua and Robert, in black cutaways that seemed to have the benumbing and paralyzing effect of strait−jackets, wandered aimlessly about the room, as though its walls were the limit of their movements. The children had a subdued and touch−me−not air that reminded Honora of her own youth.

It was not until prayers were over and the solemn gathering seated at the breakfast table that Mr. Spence burst upon it like an aurora. His flannel suit was of the lightest of grays; he wore white tennis shoes and a red tie, and it was plain, as he cheerfully bade them good morning, that he was wholly unaware of the enormity of his costume. There was a choking, breathless moment before Mrs. Holt broke the silence.

"Surely, Howard," she said, "you're not going to church in those clothes."

"I hadn't thought of going to church," replied Mr. Spence, helping himself to cherries.

"What do you intend to do?" asked his hostess.

"Read the stock reports for the week as soon as the newspapers arrive."

"There is no such thing as a Sunday newspaper in my house," said Mrs. Holt.

"No Sunday newspapers!" he exclaimed. And his eyes, as they encountered Honora's, who sought to avoid them, expressed a genuine dismay.

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Holt, "that I was right when I spoke of the pernicious effect of Wall Street upon young men. Your mother did not approve of Sunday newspapers."

During the rest of the meal, although he made a valiant attempt to hold his own, Mr. Spence was, so to speak, outlawed. Robert and Joshua must have had a secret sympathy for him. One of them mentioned the Vicomte.

"The Vicomte is a foreigner," declared Mrs. Holt. "I am in no sense responsible for him."

The Vicomte was at that moment propped up in bed, complaining to his valet about the weakness of the coffee. He made the remark (which he afterwards repeated to Honora) that weak coffee and the Protestant religion seemed inseparable; but he did not attempt to discover the whereabouts, in Sutton, of the Church of his fathers. He was not in the best of humours that morning, and his toilet had advanced no further when, an hour or so later, he perceived from behind his lace curtains Mr. Howard Spence, dressed with comparative soberness, handing Honora into the omnibus. The incident did not serve to improve the cynical mood in which the Vicomte found himself.

Indeed, the Vicomte, who had a theory concerning Mr. Spence's churchgoing, was not far from wrong. As may have been suspected, it was to Honora that credit was due. It was Honora whom Mr. Spence sought after breakfast, and to whom he declared that her presence alone prevented him from leaving that afternoon. It was Honora who told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. And it was to Honora, after church was over and they were walking homeward together along the dusty road, that Mr. Spence remarked by way of a delicate compliment that "the morning had not been a total loss, after all!"

The little Presbyterian church stood on a hillside just outside of the village and was, as far as possible, the possession of the Holt family. The morning sunshine illuminated the angels in the Holt memorial window, and the inmates of the Holt Institution occupied all the back pews. Mrs. Joshua played the organ, and Susan, with several young women and a young man with a long coat and plastered hair, sang in the choir. The sermon of the elderly minister had to do with beliefs rather than deeds, and was the subject of discussion at luncheon. "It is very like a sermon I found in my room," said Honora.

"I left that book in your room, my dear, in the hope that you would not overlook it," said Mrs. Holt, approvingly. "Joshua, I wish you would read that sermon aloud to us."

"Oh, do, Mr. Holt!" begged Honora.

The Vicomte, who had been acting very strangely during the meal, showed unmistakable signs of a futile anger. He had asked Honora to walk with him.

"Of course," added Mrs. Holt, "no one need listen who doesn't wish to. Since you were good enough to reconsider your decision and attend divine service, Howard, I suppose I should be satisfied."

The reading took place in the library. Through the open window Honora perceived the form of Joshua asleep in the hammock, his Sunday coat all twisted under him. It worried her to picture his attire when he should wake up. Once Mrs. Robert looked in, smiled, said nothing, and went out again. At length, in a wicker chair under a distant tree on the lawn, Honora beheld the dejected outline of the Vicomte. He was trying to read, but every once in a while would lay down his book and gaze protractedly at the house, stroking his mustache. The low song of the bees around the shrubbery vied with Mr. Holt's slow reading. On the whole, the situation delighted Honora, who bit her lip to refrain from smiling at M. de Toqueville. When at last she emerged from the library, he rose

precipitately and came towards her across the lawn, lifting his hands towards the pitiless puritan skies.

"Enfin!" he exclaimed tragically. "Ah, Mademoiselle, never in my life have I passed such a day!"

"Are you ill, Vicomte?" she asked.

"Ill! Were it not for you, I would be gone. You alone sustain me it is for the pleasure of seeing you that I suffer. What kind of a ménage is this, then, where I am walked around Institutions, where I am forced to listen to the exposition of doctrines, where the coffee is weak, where Sunday, which the bon Dieu set aside for a jour de fête resembles to a day in purgatory?"

"But, Vicomte," Honora laughed, "you must remember that you are in America, and that you have come here to study our manners and customs."

"Ah, no," he cried, "ah, no, it cannot all be like this! I will not believe it. Mr. Holt, who sought to entertain me before luncheon, offered to show me his collection of Chinese carvings! I, who might be at Trouville or Cabourg! If it were not for you, Mademoiselle, I should not stay here not one little minute," he said, with a slow intensity. "Behold what I suffer for your sake!"

"For my sake?" echoed Honora.

"For what else?" demanded the Vicomte, gazing upon her with the eyes of martyrdom. "It is not for my health, alas! Between the coffee and this dimanche I have the vertigo."

Honora laughed again at the memory of the dizzy Sunday afternoons of her childhood, when she had been taken to see Mr. Isham's curios.

"You are cruel," said the Vicomte; "you laugh at my tortures."

"On the contrary, I think I understand them," she replied. "I have often felt the same way."

"My instinct was true, then," he cried triumphantly; "the first time my eyes fell on you, I said to myself, 'ah, there is one who understands.' And I am seldom mistaken."

"Your experience with the opposite sex," ventured Honora, "must have made you infallible."

He shrugged and smiled, as one whose modesty forbade the mention of conquests.

"You do not belong here either, Mademoiselle," he said. "You are not like these people. You have temperament, and a future believe me. Why do you waste your time?"

"What do you mean, Vicomte?"

"Ah, it is not necessary to explain what I mean. It is that you do not choose to understand you are far too clever. Why is it, then, that you bore yourself by regarding Institutions and listening to sermons in your jeunesse? It is all very well for Mademoiselle Susan, but you are not created for a religieuse. And again, it pleases you to spend hours with the stock−broker, who is as lacking in esprit as the bull of Joshua. He is no companion for you."

"I am afraid," she said reprovingly, "that you do not understand Mr. Spence."

"Par exemple!" cried the Vicomte; "have I not seen hundreds like him? Do not they come to Paris and live in the great hotels and demand cocktails and read the stock reports and send cablegrams all the day long? and go to the Folies Bergères, and yawn? Nom de nom, of what does his conversation consist? Of the price of railroads, is it not so? I, who speak to you, have talked to him. Does he know how to make love?"

"That accomplishment is not thought of very highly in America," Honora replied.

"It is because you are a new country," he declared. "And you are mad over money. Money has taken the place of love."

"Is money so despised in France?" she asked. "I have heard that you married for it!"

"Touché!" cried the Vicomte, laughing. "You see, I am frank with you. We marry for money, yes, but we do not make a god of it. It is our servant. You make it, and we enjoy it. Yes, and you, Mademoiselle you, too, were made to enjoy. You do not belong here," he said, with a disdainful sweep of the arm. "Ah, I have solved you. You have in you the germ of the Riviera. You were born there."

Honora wondered if what he said were true. Was she different? She was having a great deal of pleasure at Silverdale; even the sermon reading, which would have bored her at home, had interested and amused her. But was it not from the novelty of these episodes, rather than from their special characters, that she received the stimulus? She glanced curiously towards the Vicomte, and met his eye.

They had been walking the while, and had crossed the lawn and entered one of the many paths which it had been Robert's pastime to cut through the woods. And at length they came out at a rustic summer−house set over the wooded valley. Honora, with one foot on the ground, sat on the railing gazing over the tree−tops; the Vicomte was on the bench beside her. His eyes sparkled and snapped, and suddenly she tingled with a sense that the situation was not without an element of danger.

"I had a feeling about you, last night at dinner," he said; "you reminded me of a line of Marcel Prévost, 'Cette femme ne sera pas aimée que parmi des drames.'"

"Nonsense," said Honora; "last night at dinner you were too much occupied with Miss Chamberlin to think of me."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have read me strangely if you think that. I talked to her with my lips, yes but it was of you I was thinking. I was thinking that you were born to play a part in many dramas, that you have the fatal beauty which is rare in all ages." The Vicomte bent towards her, and his voice became caressing. "You cannot realize how beautiful you are," he sighed.

Suddenly he seized her hand, and before she could withdraw it she had the satisfaction of knowing the sensation of having it kissed. It was a strange sensation indeed. And the fact that she did not tingle with anger alone made her all the more angry. Trembling, her face burning, she leaped down from the railing and fled into the path. And there, seeing that he did not follow, she turned and faced him. He stood staring at her with eyes that had not ceased to sparkle.

"How cowardly of you!" she cried.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he answered fervently, "I would risk your anger a thousand times to see you like that once more. I cannot help my feelings they were dead indeed if they did not respond to such an inspiration. Let them plead for my pardon."

Honora felt herself melting a little. After all, there might have been some excuse for it, and he made love divinely. When he had caught up with her, his contriteness was such that she was willing to believe he had not meant to insult her. And then, he was a Frenchman. As a proof of his versatility, if not of his good faith, he talked of neutral matters on the way back to the house, with the charming ease and lightness that was the gift of his race and class. On the borders of the wood they encountered the Robert Holts, walking with their children.

"Madame," said the Vicomte to Gwendolen, "your Silverdale is enchanting. We have been to that little summer−house which commands the valley."

"And are you still learning things about our country, Vicomte?" she asked, with a glance at Honora.

CHAPTER X. IN WHICH HONORA WIDENS HER HORIZON

IF it were not a digression, it might be interesting to speculate upon the reason why, in view of their expressed opinions of Silverdale, both the Vicomte and Mr. Spence remained during the week that followed. Robert, who went off in the middle of it with his family to the seashore, described it to Honora as a normal week. During its progress there came and went a missionary from China, a pianist, an English lady who had heard of the Institution, a Southern spinster with literary gifts, a youthful architect who had not built anything, and a young lawyer interested in settlement work.

The missionary presented our heroine with a book he had written about the Yang−tse−kiang; the Southern lady suspected her of literary gifts; the architect walked with her through the woods to the rustic shelter where the Vicomte had kissed her hand, and told her that he now comprehended the feelings of Christopher Wren when he conceived St. Paul's Cathedral, of Michael Angelo when he painted the Sistine Chapel. Even the serious young lawyer succumbed, though not without a struggle. When be had first seen Miss Leffingwell, he confessed, he had thought her frivolous. He had done her an injustice, and wished to acknowledge it before he left. And, since she was interested in settlement work, he hoped, if she were going through New York, that she would let him know. It would be a real pleasure to show her what he was doing.

Best of all, Honora, by her unselfishness, endeared herself to her hostess.

"I can't tell you what a real help you are to me, my dear," said that lady. "You have a remarkable gift with people for so young a girl, and I do you the credit of thinking that it all springs from a kind heart."

In the meantime, unknown to Mrs. Holt, who might in all conscience have had a knowledge of what may be called social chemistry, a drama was slowly unfolding itself. By no fault of Honora's, of course. There may have been some truth in the quotation of the Vicomte as applied to her that she was destined to be loved only amidst the play of drama. If experience is worth anything, Monsieur de Toqueville should have been an expert in matters of the sex. Could it be possible, Honora asked herself more than once, that his feelings were deeper than her feminine instinct and the knowledge she had gleaned from novels led her to suspect?

It is painful to relate that the irregularity and deceit of the life the Vicomte was leading amused her, for existence at Silverdale was plainly not of a kind to make a gentleman of the Vicomte's temperament and habits ecstatically happy. And Honora was filled with a strange and unaccountable delight when she overheard him assuring Mrs. Wellfleet, the English lady of eleemosynary tendencies, that he was engaged in a study at first hand of Americans.

The time has come to acknowledge frankly that it was Honora he was studying Honora as the type of young American womanhood. What he did not suspect was that young American womanhood was studying him. Thanks to a national System, she had had an apprenticeship; the heart−blood of Algernon Cartwright and many others had not been shed in vain. And the fact that she was playing with real fire, that this was a duel with the buttons off,

lent a piquancy and zest to the pastime which it had hitherto lacked.

The Vicomte's feelings were by no means hidden processes to Honora, and it was as though she could lift the lid of the furnace at any time and behold the growth of the flame which she had lighted. Nay, nature had endowed her with such a gift that she could read the daily temperature as by a register hung on the outside, without getting scorched. Nor had there been any design on her part in thus tormenting his soul. He had not meant to remain more than four days at Silverdale, that she knew; he had not meant to come to America and fall in love with a penniless beauty that she knew also. The climax would be interesting, if perchance uncomfortable.

It is wonderful what we can find the time to do, if we only try. Monsieur de Toqueville lent Honora novels, which she read in bed; but being in the full bloom of health and of a strong constitution, this practice did not prevent her from rising at seven to take a walk through the garden with Mr. Holt a custom which he had come insensibly to depend upon. And in the brief conversations which she vouchsafed the Vicomte, they discussed his novels. In vain he pleaded, in caressing undertones, that she should ride with him. Honora had never been on a horse, but she did not tell him so. If she would but drive, or walk only a little way he would promise faithfully not to forget himself. Honora intimated that the period of his probation had not yet expired. If he waylaid her on the stairs, he got but little satisfaction.

"You converse by the hour with the missionaries, and take long promenades with the architects and charity workers, but to me you will give nothing," he complained.

"The persons of whom you speak are not dangerous," answered Honora, giving him a look.

The look, and being called dangerous, sent up the temperature several degrees. Frenchmen are not the only branch of the male sex who are complimented by being called dangerous. The Vicomte was desolated, so he said.

"I stay here only for you, and the coffee is slowly deranging me," he declared in French, for most of their conversations were in that language. If there were duplicity in this, Honora did not recognize it. "I stay here only for you, and how you are cruel! I live for you how, the good God only knows. I exist to see you for ten minutes a day."

"Oh, Vicomte, you exaggerate. If you were to count it up, I am sure you would find that we talk an hour at least, altogether. And then, although I am very young and inexperienced, I can imagine how many conquests you have made by the same arts."

"I suffer," he cried; "ah, no, you cannot look at me without perceiving it you who are so heartless. And when I see you play at golf with that Mr. Spence −!"

"Surely," said Honora, "you can't object to my acquiring a new accomplishment when I have the opportunity, and Mr. Spence is so kind and good−natured about it."

"Do you think I have no eyes?" he exclaimed. "Have I not seen him look at you like the great animal of Joshua when he wants his supper? He is without esprit, without soul. There is nothing inside of him but money−making machinery."

"The most valuable of all machinery," she replied, laughingly.

"If I thought you believed that, Mademoiselle, if I thought you were like so many of your countrywomen in this respect, I should leave to−morrow," he declared.

"Don't be too sure, Vicomte," she cautioned him.

If one possessed a sense of humour and a certain knowledge of mankind, the spectacle of a young and successful Wall Street broker at Silverdale that week was apt to be diverting. Mr. Spence held his own. He advised the architect to make a specialty of country houses, and promised some day to order one: he disputed boldly with the other young man as to the practical uses of settlement work, and even measured swords with the missionary. Needless to say, he was not popular with these gentlemen. But he was also good−natured and obliging, and he did not object to repeating for the English lady certain phrases which she called "picturesque expressions," and which she wrote down with a gold pencil.

It is evident, from the Vicomte's remarks, that he found time to continue Honora's lessons in golf or rather that she found time, in the midst of her manifold and self−imposed duties, to take them. And in this diversion she was encouraged by Mrs. Holt herself. On Saturday morning, the heat being unusual, they ended their game by common consent at the fourth hole and descended a wood road to Silver Brook, to a spot which they had visited once before and had found attractive. Honora, after bathing her face in the pool, perched herself on a boulder. She was very fresh and radiant.

This fact, if she had not known it, she might have gathered from Mr. Spence's expression. He had laid down his coat; his sleeves were rolled up and his arms were tanned, and he stood smoking a cigarette and gazing at her with approbation. She lowered her eyes.

"Well, we've had a pretty good time, haven't we?" he remarked.

Lightning sometimes fails in its effect, but the look she flashed back at him from under her blue lashes seldom misses.

"I'm afraid I haven't been a very apt pupil," she replied modestly.

"You're on the highroad to a cup," he assured her. "If I could take you on for another week −" He paused, and an expression came into his eyes which was not new to Honora, nor peculiar to Mr. Spence. "I have to go back to town on Monday."

If Honora felt any regret at this announcement, she did not express it.

"I thought you couldn't stand Silverdale much longer," she replied.

"You know why I stayed," he said, and paused again rather awkwardly, for Mr. Spence. But Honora was silent. "I had a letter this morning from my partner, Sidney Dallam, calling me back."

"I suppose you are very busy," said Honora, detaching a copper−green scale of moss from the boulder.

"The fact is," he explained, "that we have received an order of considerable importance, for which I am more or less responsible. Something of a compliment since we are, after all, comparatively young men."

"Sometimes," said Honora, "sometimes I wish I were a man. Women are so hampered and circumscribed, and have to wait for things to happen to them. A man can do what he wants. He can go into Wall Street and fight 129

"WELL, WE'VE HAD A PRETTY GOOD TIME, HAVEN'T WE?"

130 until he controls miles of railroads and thousands and thousands of men. That would be a career!"

"Yes," he agreed, smilingly, "it's worth fighting for."

Her eyes were burning with a strange light as she looked down the vista of the wood road by which they had come. He flung his cigarette into the water and took a step nearer her.

"How long have I known you?" he asked.

She started.

"Why, it's only a little more than a week," she said.

"Does it seem longer than that to you?"

"Yes," admitted Honora, colouring; "I suppose it's because we've been staying in the same house."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Spence, "that I have known you always."

Honora sat very still. It passed through her brain, without comment, that there was a certain haunting familiarity about this remark; some other voice, in some other place, had spoken it, and in very much the same tone.

"You're the kind of girl I admire," he declared. "I've been watching you more than you have any idea of. You're adaptable. Put you down any place, and you take hold. For instance, it's a marvellous thing to me how you've handled all the curiosities up there this week."

"Oh, I like people," said Honora, "they interest me." And she laughed a little, nervously. She was aware that Mr. Spence was making love, in his own manner: the New York manner, undoubtedly; though what he said was changed by the new vibrations in his voice. He was making love, too, with a characteristic lack of apology and with assurance. She stole a glance at him, and beheld the image of a dominating man of affairs. He did not, it is true, evoke in her that extreme sensation which has been called a thrill. She had read somewhere that women were always expecting thrills, and never got them. Nevertheless, she had not realized how close a bond of sympathy had grown between them until this sudden announcement of his going back to New York. In a little while she too would be leaving for St. Louis. The probability that she would never see him again seemed graver than she would have believed.

"Will you miss me a little?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said breathlessly, "and I shall be curious to know how your your enterprise succeeds."

"Honora," he said, "it is only a week since I first met you, but I know my own mind. You are the woman I want, and I think I may say without boasting that I can give you what you desire in life after a while. I love you. You are young, and just now I felt that perhaps I should have waited a year before speaking, but I was afraid of missing altogether what I know to be the great happiness of my life. Will you marry me?"

She sat silent upon the rock. She heard him speak, it is true; but, try as she would, the full significance of his words would not come to her. She had, indeed, no idea that he would propose, no notion that his heart was involved to such an extent. He was very near her, but he had not attempted to touch her. His voice, towards the end of his speech, had trembled with passion a true note had been struck. And she had struck it, by no seeming effort! He wished to marry her!

He aroused her again.

"I have frightened you," he said.

She opened her eyes. What he beheld in them was not fright it was nothing he had ever seen before. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he was awed. And, seeing him helpless, she put out her hands to him with a gesture that seemed to enhance her gift a thousand−fold. He had not realized what he was getting.

"I am not frightened," she said. "Yes, I will marry you."

He was not sure whether so brief was the moment! he had held and kissed her cheek. His arms were empty now, and he caught a glimpse of her poised on the road above him amidst the quivering, sunlit leaves, looking back at him over her shoulder. He followed her, but she kept nimbly ahead of him until they came out into the open golf course. He tried to think, but failed. Never in his orderly life had anything so precipitate happened to him. He caught up with her, devoured her with his eyes, and beheld in marriage a delirium.

"Honora," he said thickly, "I can't grasp it."

She gave him a quick look, and a smile quivered at the corners of her mouth.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I am thinking of Mrs. Holt's expression when we tell her," said Honora. "But we shan't tell her yet, shall we, Howard? We'll have it for our own secret a little while."

The golf course being deserted, he pressed her arm.

"We'll tell her whenever you like, dear," he replied.

In spite of the fact that they drove Joshua's trotter much too rapidly in the heat of the day, they were late to lunch.

"I shall never be able to go in there and not give it away," he whispered to her on the stairs.

"You look like the Cheshire cat in the tree," whispered Honora, laughing, "only more purple, and not so ghost−like."

"I know I'm smiling," replied Howard, "I feel like it, but I can't help it. It won't come off. I want to blurt out the news to every one in the dining−room to that little Frenchman, in particular."

Honora laughed again. Her imagination easily summoned up the tableau which such a proceeding would bring forth. The incredulity, the chagrin, the indignation, even, in some quarters. He conceived the household, with the exception of the Vicomte, precipitating themselves into his arms.

Honora, who was cool enough herself (no doubt owing to the superior training which women receive in matters of deportment), observed that his entrance was not a triumph of dissimulation. His colour was high, and his expression, indeed, a little idiotic; and he declared afterwards that he felt like a sandwich−man, with the news printed in red letters before and behind. Honora knew that the intense improbability of the truth would save them, and it did. Mrs. Holt remarked, slyly, that the game of golf must have hidden attractions, and regretted that she was too old to learn it.

"We went very slowly on account of the heat," Howard declared.

"I should say that you had gone very rapidly, from your face," retorted Mrs. Holt. In relaxing moods she indulged in banter.

Honora stepped into the breach. She would not trust her newly acquired fiance to extricate himself.

"We were both very much worried, Mrs. Holt," she explained, "because we were late for lunch once before."

"I suppose I'll have to forgive you, my dear, especially with that colour. I am modern enough to approve of exercise for young girls, and I am sure your Aunt Mary will think Silverdale has done you good when I send you back to her."

"Oh, I'm sure she will," said Honora.

In the meantime Mr. Spence was concentrating all of his attention upon a jellied egg. Honora glanced at the Vicomte. He sat very stiff, and his manner of twisting his mustache reminded her of an animal sharpening its claws. It was at this moment that the butler handed her a telegram, which, with Mrs. Holt's permission, she opened and read twice before the meaning of it came to her.

"I hope it is no bad news, Honora," said Mrs. Holt.

"It's from Peter Erwin," she replied, still a little dazed. "He's in New York. And he's coming up on the five o'clock train to spend an hour with me."

"Oh," said Susan; "I remember his picture on your bureau at Sutcliffe. He had such a good face. And you told me about him."

"He is like my brother," Honora explained, aware that Howard was looking at her. "Only he is much older than I. He used to wheel me up and down when I was a baby. He was an errand boy in the bank then, and Uncle Tom took an interest in him, and now he is a lawyer. A very good one, I believe."

"I have a great respect for any man who makes his own way in life," said Mrs. Holt. "And since he is such an old friend, my dear, you must ask him to spend the night."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Holt," Honora answered.

It was, however, with mingled feelings that she thought of Peter's arrival at this time. Life, indeed, was full of strange coincidences!

There was a little door that led out of the house by the billiard room, Honora remembered, and contrived, after luncheon, to slip away and reach it. She felt that she must be alone, and if she went to her room she was likely to be disturbed by Susan or Mrs. Joshua or indeed Mrs. Holt herself. Honora, meant to tell Susan the first of all. She crossed the great lawn quickly, keeping as much as possible the trees and masses of shrubbery between herself and the house, and reached the forest. With a really large fund of energy at her disposal, Honora had never been one to believe in the useless expenditure of it; nor did she feel the intense desire which a girl of another temperament might have had, under the same conditions, to keep in motion. So she sat down on a bench within the borders of the wood.

It was not that she wished to reflect, in the ordinary meaning of the word, that she had sought seclusion, but rather to give her imagination free play. The enormity of the change that was to come into her life did not appall her in the least; but she had, in connection with it, a sense of unreality which, though not unpleasant, she sought unconsciously to dissipate. Howard Spence, she reflected with a smile, was surely solid and substantial enough, and she thought of him the more tenderly for the possession of these attributes. A castle founded on such a rock was not a castle in Spain!

It did not occur to Honora that her thoughts might be more of the castle than of the rock: of the heaven he was to hold on his shoulders than of the Hercules she had chosen to hold it.

She would write to her Aunt Mary and her Uncle Tom that very afternoon one letter to both. Tears came into her eyes when she thought of them, and of their lonely life without her. But they would come on to New York to visit her often, and they would be proud of her. Of one thing she was sure she must go home to them at once on Tuesday. She would tell Mrs. Holt to−morrow, and Susan to−night. And, while pondering over the probable expression of that lady's amazement, it suddenly occurred to her that she must write the letter immediately, because Peter Erwin was coming.

What would he say? Should she tell him? She was surprised to find that the idea of doing so was painful to her. But she was aroused from these reflections by a step on the path, and raised her head to perceive the Vicomte. His face wore an expression of triumph.

"At last," he cried, "at last!" And he sat down on the bench beside her. Her first impulse was to rise, yet for some inexplicable reason she remained.

"I always suspected in you the qualities of a Monsieur Lecoq," she remarked. "You have an instinct for the chase."

"Mon dieu!" he said. "I have risked a stroke of the sun to find you. Why should you so continually run away from me?"

"To test your ingenuity, Vicomte."

"And that other one the stock−broker you do not avoid him. Diable, I am not blind, Mademoiselle. It is plain to me at luncheon that you have made boil the sluggish blood of that one. As for me −"

"Your boiling−point is lower," she said, smiling.

"Listen, Mademoiselle," he pursued, bending towards her. "It is not for my health that I stay here, as I have told you. It is for the sight of you, for the sound of the music of that low voice. It is in the hope that you will be a little kinder, that you will understand me a little better. And to−day, when I learn that still another is on his way to see you, I could sit still no longer. I do not fear that Spence, no. But this other what is he like?"

"He is the best type of American," replied Honora. "I am sure you will be interested in him, and like him."

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not in America that you will find your destiny, Mademoiselle. You are made to grace a salon, a court, which you will not find in this country. Such a woman as you is thrown away here. You possess qualities you will pardon me in which your countrywomen are lacking, esprit, imagination, elan, the power to bind people to you. I have read you as you have not read yourself. I have seen how you have served yourself by this famille Holt, and how at the same time you have kept their friendship."

"Vicomte!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, do not get angry," he begged; "such gifts are rare they are sublime. They lead," he added, raising his arms, "to the heights."

Honora was silent. She was, indeed, not unmoved by his voice, into which there was creeping a vibrant note of passion. She was a little frightened, but likewise puzzled and interested. This was all so different from what she had expected of him. What did he mean? Was she indeed like that?

She was aware that he was speaking again, that he was telling her of a château in France which his ancestors had owned since the days of Louis XII; a grey pile that stood upon a thickly wooded height, a château with a banquet hall, where kings had dined, with a chapel where kings had prayed, with a flowering terrace high above a gleaming river. It was there that his childhood had been passed. And as he spoke, she listened with mingled feelings, picturing the pageantry of life in such a place.

"I tell you this, Mademoiselle," he said, "that you may know I am not what you call an adventurer. Many of these, alas! come to your country. And I ask you to regard with some leniency customs which must be strange to Americans. When we marry in France, it is with a dot, and especially is it necessary amongst the families of our nobility."

Honora rose, the blood mounting to her temples.

"Mademoiselle," he cried, "do not misunderstand me. I would die rather than hurt your feelings. Listen, I pray. It was to tell you frankly that I came to this country for that purpose, in order that I might live as my ancestors have lived, with a hôtel in Paris. But the château, grace a dieu, is not mortgaged, nor am I wholly impoverished. I have soixante quinze mille livres de rente, which is fifteen thousand dollars a year in your money, and which goes much farther in France. At the proper time, I will present these matters to your guardians. I have lived, but I have a heart, and I love you madly. Rather would I dwell with you in Provence, where I will cultivate the soil of my forefathers, than a palace on the Champs Elysées with another. We can come to Paris for two months, at least. For you I can throw my prospects out of the window with a light heart. Honore how sweet is your name in my language I love you to despair."

He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips, but she drew it gently away. It seemed to her that he had made the very air quiver with feeling, and she let herself wonder, for a moment, what life with him would be. Incredible as it seemed, he had proposed to her, a penniless girl! Her own voice was not quite steady as she answered him, and her eyes were filled with compassion. "Vicomte," she said, "I did not know that you cared for me that way. I thought I thought you were amusing yourself."

"Amusing myself!" he exclaimed bitterly. "And you were you amusing yourself?"

"I I tried to avoid you," she replied, in a low voice. "I am engaged."

"Engaged!" He sprang to his feet. "Engaged! Ah, no, I will not believe it. You were engaged when you came here?"

She was no little alarmed by the violence which he threw into his words. At the same time, she was indignant. And yet a mischievous sprite within her led her on to tell him the truth.

"No, I am going to marry Mr. Howard Spence, although I do not wish it announced."

For a moment he stood motionless, speechless, staring at her, and then he seemed to sway a little and to choke.

"No, no," he cried, "it cannot be! My ears have deceived me. I am not sane. You are going to marry him −? Ah, you have sold yourself."

"Monsieur de Toqueville," she said, "you forget yourself. Mr. Spence is an honourable man, and I love him."

The Vicomte appeared to choke again. And then, suddenly, he became himself, although his voice was by no means natural. His elaborate and ironic bow she remembered for many years.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, "and adieu. You will be good enough to convey my congratulations to Mr. Spence."

With a kind of military "about face" he turned and left her abruptly, and she watched him as he hurried across the lawn until he had disappeared behind the trees near the house. When she sat down on the bench again, she found that she was trembling a little. Was the unexpected to occur to her from now on? Was it true, as the Vicomte had said, that she was destined to beloved amidst the play of drama?

She felt sorry for him because he had loved her enough to fling to the winds his chances of wealth for her sake a sufficient measure of the feelings of one of his nationality and caste. And she permitted, for an instant, her mind to linger on the supposition that Howard Spence had never come into her life; might she not, when the Vicomte had made his unexpected and generous avowal, have accepted him? She thought of the romances of her childish days, written at fever heat, in which ladies with titles moved around and gave commands and rebuked lovers who slipped in through wicket gates. And to think that she might have been a Vicomtesse and have lived in a castle!

A poor Vicomtesse, it is true.

CHAPTER XI. WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

HONORA sat still upon the bench. After an indefinite period she saw through the trees a vehicle on the driveway, and in it a single passenger. And suddenly it occurred to her that the passenger must be Peter, for Mrs. Holt had announced her intention of sending for him. She arose and approached the house, not without a sense of agitation.

She halted a moment at a little distance from the porch, where he was talking with Howard Spence and Joshua, and the fact that he was an unchanged Peter came to her with a shock of surprise. So much, in less than a year, had happened to Honora! And the sight of him, and the sound of his voice, brought back with a rush memories of a forgotten past. How long it seemed since she had lived in St. Louis!

Yes, he was the same Peter, but her absence from him had served to sharpen her sense of certain characteristics. He was lounging in his chair with his long legs crossed, with one hand in his pocket, and talking to these men as though he had known them always. There was a quality about him which had never struck her before, and which eluded exact definition. It had never occurred to her, until now, when she saw him out of the element with which she had always associated him, that Peter Erwin had a personality. That personality was a mixture of simplicity and self−respect and common sense. And, as Honora listened to his cheerful voice, she perceived that he had the gift of expressing himself clearly and forcibly and withal modestly; nor did it escape her that the other two men were listening with a certain deference. In her sensitive state she tried to evade the contrast thus suddenly presented to her between Peter and the man she had promised, that very morning, to marry.

Howard Spence was seated on the table, smoking a cigarette. Never, it seemed, had he more distinctly typified to her Prosperity. An attribute which she had admired in him, of strife without the appearance of strife, lost something of its value. To look at Peter was to wonder whether there could be such a thing as a well−groomed combatant; and until to−day she had never thought of Peter as a combatant. The sight of his lean face summoned, all undesired, the vague vision of an ideal, and perhaps it was this that caused her voice to falter a little as she came forward and called his name. He rose precipitately.

"What a surprise, Peter!" she said, as she took his hand. "How do you happen to be in the East?"

"An errand boy," he replied. "Somebody had to come, so they chose me. Incidentally," he added, smiling down at her, "it is a part of my education."

"We thought you were lost," said Howard Spence, significantly.

"Oh, no," she answered lightly, evading his look. "I was on the bench at the edge of the wood." She turned again to Peter. "How good of you to come up and see me!"

"I couldn't have resisted that," he declared, "if it were only for an hour."

"I've been trying to persuade him to stay a while with us," Joshua put in with unusual graciousness. "My mother will be disappointed not to see you."

"There is nothing I should like better, Mr. Holt," said Peter, simply, gazing off across the lawn. "Unfortunately I have to leave for the West to−night."

"Before you go," said Honora, "you must see this wonderful place. Come, we'll begin with the garden."

She had a desire now to take him away by himself, something she had wished, an hour ago, to avoid. "Wouldn't you like a runabout?" suggested Joshua, hospitably.

Honora thanked him.

"I'm sure Mr. Erwin would rather walk," she replied. "Come, Peter, you must tell me all the news of home."

Spence accepted his dismissal with a fairly good grace, and gave no evidence of jealousy. He put his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"If you're ever in New York, Erwin," said he, "look me up Dallam and Spence. We're members of the Exchange, so you won't have any trouble in finding us. I'd like to talk to you sometime about the West."

Peter thanked him.

For a little while, as they went down the driveway side by side, he was meditatively silent. She wondered what he thought of Howard Spence, until suddenly she remembered that her secret was still her own, that Peter had as yet no particular reason to single out Mr. Spence for especial consideration. She could not, however, resist saying,

"New Yorkers are like that."

Like what?" he asked.

She coloured.

"Like Mr. Spence. A little self−assertive, sure of themselves." She strove to keep out of her voice any suspicion of the agitation which was the result of the events of an extraordinary day, not yet ended. She knew that it would have been wiser not to have mentioned Howard; but Peter's silence, somehow, had impelled her to speak. "He has made quite an unusual success for so young a man."

Peter looked at her and shook his head.

"New York success! What is to become of poor old St. Louis?" he inquired.

"Oh, I'm going back next week," Honora cried. "I wish I were going with you."

"And leave all this," he said incredulously, "for trolley rides and Forest Park and and me?"

He stopped in the garden path and looked upon the picture she made standing in the sunlight against the blazing borders, her wide hat casting a shadow on her face. And the smile which she had known so well since childhood, indulgent, quizzical, with a touch of sadness, was in his eyes. She was conscious of a slight resentment. Was there, in fact, no change in her as the result of the events of those momentous ten months since she had seen him? And rather than a tolerance in which there was neither antagonism nor envy, she would have preferred from Peter an open disapproval of luxury, of the standards which he implied were hers. She felt that she had stepped into another world, but he refused to be dazzled by it. He insisted upon treating her as the same Honora.

"How did you leave Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary?" she asked.

They were counting the days, he said, until she should return, but they did not wish to curtail her visit. They did not expect her next week, he knew.

Honora coloured again.

"I feel that I ought to go to them," she said.

He glanced at her as though her determination to leave Silverdale so soon surprised him.

"They will be very happy to see you, Honora," he said. "They have been very lonesome."

She softened. Some unaccountable impulse prompted her to ask:

"And you? Have you missed me a little?"

He did not answer, and she saw that he was profoundly affected. She laid a hand upon his arm.

"Oh, Peter, I didn't mean that," she cried. "I know you have. And I have missed you terribly. It seems so strange seeing you here," she went on hurriedly. "There are so many things I want to show you. Tell me how it happened that you came on to New York."

"Somebody in the firm had to come," he said.

"In the firm!" she repeated. She did not grasp the full meaning of this change in his status, but she remembered that Uncle Tom had predicted it one day, and that it was an honour. "I never knew any one so secretive about their own affairs! Why didn't you write me you had been admitted to the firm? So you are a partner of Judge Brice."

"Brice, Graves, and Erwin," said Peter; "it sounds very grand, doesn't it? I can't get used to it myself."

"And what made you call yourself an errand boy?" she exclaimed reproachfully. "When I go back to the house I intend to tell Joshua Holt and and Mr. Spence that you are a great lawyer."

Peter laughed.

"You'd better wait a few years before you say that," said he.

He took an interest in everything he saw, in Mr. Holt's flowers, in Joshua's cow barn, which they traversed, and declared, if he were ever rich enough, he would live in the country. They walked around the pond, − fringed now with yellow water−lilies on their floating green pads, through the woods, and when the shadows were lengthening came out at the little summer−house over the valley of Silver Brook the scene of that first memorable encounter with the Vicomte. At the sight of it the episode, and much else of recent happening, rushed back into Honora's mind, and she realized with suddenness that she had, in his companionship, unconsciously been led far afield and in pleasant places. Comparisons seemed inevitable.

She watched him with an unwonted tugging at her heart as he stood for a long time by the edge of the railing, gazing over the tree−tops of the valley towards the distant hazy hills. Nor did she understand what it was in him that now, on this day of days when she had definitely cast the die of life, when she had chosen her path, aroused this strange emotion. Why had she never felt it before? She had thought his face homely now it seemed to shine with a transfiguring light. She recalled, with a pang, that she had criticised his clothes: to−day they seemed the expression of the man himself. Incredible is the range of human emotion! She felt a longing to throw herself into his arms, and to weep there.

He turned at length from the view. "How wonderful!" he said.

"I didn't know you cared for nature so much, Peter."

He looked at her strangely and put out his hand and drew her, unresisting, to the bench beside him.

"Are you in trouble, Honora?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried, "oh, no, I am very happy."

"You may have thought it odd that I should have come here without knowing Mrs. Holt," he said gravely, "particularly when you were going home so soon. I do not know myself why I came. I am a matter−of−fact person, but I acted on an impulse."

"An impulse!" she faltered, avoiding the troubled, searching look in his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "an impulse. I can call it by no other name. I should have taken a train that leaves New York at noon; but I had a feeling this morning, which seemed almost like a presentiment, that I might be of some use to you."

"This morning?" She felt herself trembling, and she scarcely recognized Peter with such words on his lips. "I am happy indeed I am. Only I am overwrought seeing you again and you made me think of home."

"It was no doubt very foolish of me," he declared. "And if my coming has upset you −"

"Oh, no," she cried. "Please don't think so. It has given me a sense of of security. That you were ready to help me if if I needed you."

"You should always have known that," he replied. He rose and stood gazing off down the valley once more, and she watched him with her heart beating, with a sense of an impending crisis which she seemed powerless to stave off. And presently he turned to her. "Honora, I have loved you for many years," he said. "You were too young for me to speak of it. I did not intend to speak of it when I came here to−day. For many years I have hoped that some day you might be my wife. My one fear has been that I might lose you. Perhaps perhaps it has been a dream. But I am willing to wait, should you wish to see more of the world. You are young yet, and I am offering myself for all time. There is no other woman for me, and never can be."

He paused and smiled down at her. But she did not speak. She could not.

"I know," he went on, "that you are ambitious. And with your gifts I do not blame you. I cannot offer you great wealth, but I say with confidence that I can offer you something better, something surer. I can take care of you and protect you, and I will devote my life to your happiness. Will you marry me?"

Her eyes were sparkling with tears, tears, he remembered afterwards, that were like blue diamonds.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "I wish I could! I have always wished that I could. I can't."

"You can't?"

She shook her head.

"I I have told no one yet not even Aunt Mary. I am going to marry Mr. Spence."

For a long time he was silent, and she did not dare to look at the suffering in his face.

"Honora," he said at last, "my most earnest wish in life will be for your happiness. And whatever may come to you I hope that you will remember that I am your friend, to be counted on. And that I shall not change. Will you remember that?"

"Yes," she whispered. She looked at him now, and through the veil of her tears she seemed to see his soul shining in his eyes. The tones of a distant church bell were borne to them on the valley breeze.

Peter glanced at his watch.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I haven't time to go back to the house my train goes at seven. Can I get down to the village through the valley?"

Honora pointed out the road, faintly perceptible through the trees beneath them.

"And you will apologize for my−departure to Mrs. Holt?"

She nodded. He took her hand, pressed it, and was gone. And presently, in a little clearing far below, he turned and waved his hat at her bravely.

CHAPTER XII. WHICH CONTAINS A SURPRISE FOR MRS. HOLT

HOW long she sat gazing with unseeing eyes down the valley Honora did not know. Distant mutterings of thunder aroused her; the evening sky had darkened, and angry−looking clouds of purple were gathering over the hills. She rose and hurried homeward. She had thought to enter by the billiard−room door, and so gain her own chamber without encountering the household; but she had reckoned without her hostess. Beyond the billiard room, in the little entry filled with potted plants, she came face to face with that lady, who was inciting a footman to further efforts in his attempt to close a recalcitrant skylight. Honora proved of more interest, and Mrs. Holt abandoned the skylight.

"Why, my dear," she said, "where have you been all afternoon?"

"I I have been walking with Mr. Erwin, Mrs. Holt. I have been showing him Silverdale."

"And where is he? It seems to me I invited him to stay all night, and Joshua tells me he extended the invitation."

"We were in the little summer−house, and suddenly he discovered that it was late and he had to catch the seven o'clock train," faltered Honora, somewhat disconnectedly. "Otherwise he would have come to you himself and told you how much he regretted not staying. He has to go to St. Louis to−night."

"Well," said Mrs. Holt, "this is an afternoon of surprises. The Vicomte has gone off, too, without even waiting to say good−by." "The Vicomte!" exclaimed Honora.

"Didn't you see him, either, before he left?" inquired Mrs. Holt; "I thought perhaps you might be able to give me some further explanation of it."

"I?" exclaimed Honora. She felt ready to sink through the floor, and Mrs. Holt's delft−blue eyes haunted her afterwards like a nightmare.

"Didn't you see him, my dear? Didn't he tell you anything?"

"He he didn't say he was going away."

"Did he seem disturbed about anything?" Mrs. Holt insisted.

"Now I think of it, he did seem a little disturbed."

"To save my life," said Mrs. Holt, "I can't understand it. He left a note for me saying that he had received a telegram, and that he had to go at once. I was at a meeting of my charity board. It seems a very strange proceeding for such an agreeable and polite man as the Vicomte, although he had his drawbacks, as all Continentals have. And at times I thought he was grave and moody, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, he was moody," Honora agreed eagerly.

"You noticed it, too," said Mrs. Holt. "But he was a charming man, and so interested in America and in the work we are doing. But I can't understand about the telegram. I had Carroll inquire of every servant in the house, and there is no knowledge of a telegram having come up from the village this afternoon."

"Perhaps the Vicomte might have met the messenger in the grounds," hazarded Honora.

At this point their attention was distracted by a noise that bore a striking resemblance to a suppressed laugh. The footman on the step−ladder began to rattle the skylight vigorously.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Woods?" said Mrs. Holt.

"It must have been some dust off the skylight, Madam, that got into my throat," he stammered, the colour of a geranium. "Nonsense," said Mrs. Holt, "there is no dust on the skylight."

"It may be I swallowed the wrong way, looking up like, as I was, Madam," he ventured, rubbing the frame and looking at his finger to prove his former theory.

"You are very stupid not to be able to close it," she declared; "in a few minutes the place will be flooded. Tell Carroll to come and do it."

Honora suffered herself to be led limply through the library and up the stairs into Mrs. Holt's own boudoir, where a maid was closing the windows against the first great drops of the storm, which the wind was pelting against them. She drew the shades deftly, lighted the gas, and retired. Honora sank down in one of the upholstered light blue satin chairs and gazed at the shining brass of the coal grate set in the marble mantel, above which hung an engraving of Sir Joshua Reynolds' cherubs. She had an instinct that the climax of the drama was at hand.

Mrs. Holt sat down in the chair opposite.

"My dear," she began, "I told you the other day what an unexpected and welcome comfort and help you have been to me. You evidently inherit" (Mrs. Holt coughed slightly) "the art of entertaining and pleasing, and I need not warn you, my dear, against the dangers of such a gift. Your aunt has evidently brought you up with strictness and religious care. You have been very fortunate."

"Indeed I have, Mrs. Holt," echoed Honora, in bewilderment.

"And Susan," continued Mrs. Holt, "useful and willing as she is, does not possess your gift of taking people off my hands and entertaining them."

Honora could think of no reply to this. Her eyes to which no one could be indifferent were riveted on the face of her hostess, and how was the good lady to guess that her brain was reeling?

"I was about to say, my dear, that I expect to have a great deal of − well, of rather difficult company this summer. Next week, for instance, some prominent women in the Working Girls' Relief Society are coming, and on July the twenty−third I give a garden party for the delegates to the Charity Conference in New York. The Japanese Minister has promised to pay me a visit, and Sir Rupert Grant, who built those remarkable tuberculosis homes in England, you know, is arriving in August with his family. Then there are some foreign artists."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora; "how many interesting people you see!"

"Exactly, my dear. And I thought that, in addition to the fact that I have grown very fond of you, you would be very useful to me here, and that a summer with me might not be without its advantages. As your aunt will have you until you are married, which, I may say, without denying your attractions, is likely to be for some time, I intend to write to her to−night with your consent and ask her to allow you to remain with me all summer."

Honora sat transfixed, staring painfully at the big pendant ear−rings.

"It is so kind of you, Mrs. Holt −" she faltered.

"I can realize, my dear, that you would wish to get back to your aunt. The feeling does you infinite credit. But, on the other hand, besides the advantages which would accrue to you, it might, to put the matter delicately, be of a little benefit to your relations, who will have to think of your future."

"Indeed, it is good of you, but I must go back, Mrs. Holt."

"Of course," said Mrs. Holt, with a touch of dignity for ere now people had left Silverdale before she wished them to "of course, if you do not care to stay, that is quite another thing."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt, don't say that!" cried Honora, her face burning; "I cannot thank you enough for the pleasure you have given me. If if things were different, I would stay with you gladly, although I should miss my family. But now, now I feel that I must be with them. I I am engaged to be married." Honora still remembers the blank expression which appeared on the countenance of her hostess when she spoke these words. Mrs. Holt's cheeks

twitched, her ear−rings quivered, and her bosom heaved once.

"Engaged to be married!" she gasped.

"Yes," replied our heroine, humbly, "I was going to tell you to−morrow."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Holt, after a silence, "it is to the young man who was here this afternoon, and whom I did not see. It accounts for his precipitate departure. But I must say, Honora, since frankness is one of my faults, that I feel it my duty to write to your aunt and disclaim all responsibility."

"It is not to Mr. Erwin," said Honora, meekly; "it is it is to Mr. Spence."

Mrs. Holt seemed to find difficulty in speaking. Her former symptoms, which Honora had come to recognize as indicative of agitation, returned with alarming intensity. And when at length her voice made itself heard, it was scarcely recognizable.

"You are engaged to Howard Spence?"

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora, "it was as great a surprise to me believe me as it is to you."

But even the knowledge that they shared a common amazement did not appear, at once, to assuage Mrs. Holt's emotions.

"Do you love him?" she demanded abruptly.

Whereupon Honora burst into tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she sobbed, "how can you ask?"

From this time on the course of events was not precisely logical. Mrs. Holt, setting in abeyance any ideas she may have had about the affair, took Honora in her arms, and against that ample bosom was sobbed out the pent−up excitement and emotion of an extraordinary day.

"There, there, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, stroking the dark hair, "I should not have asked you that forgive me." And the worthy lady, quivering with sympathy now, remembered the time of her own engagement to Joshua. And the fact that the circumstances of that event differed somewhat from those of the present in regularity, at least, increased rather than detracted from Mrs. Holt's sudden access of tenderness. The perplexing questions as to the probable result of such a marriage were swept away by a flood of feeling. "There, there, my dear, I did not mean to be harsh. What you told me was such a shock such a surprise, and marriage is such a grave and sacred thing."

"I know it," sobbed Honora.

"And you are very young."

"Yes, Mrs. Holt."

"And it happened in my house."

"No," said Honora, "it happened near the golf course."

Mrs. Holt smiled, and wiped her eyes.

"I mean, my dear, that I shall always feel responsible for bringing you together for your future happiness. That is a great deal. I could have wished that you both had taken longer to reflect, but I hope with all my heart that you will be happy."

Honora lifted up a tear−stained face.

"He said it was because I was going away that that he spoke," she said. "Oh, Mrs. Holt, I knew that you would be kind about it."

"Of course I am kind about it, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. "As I told you, I have grown to have an affection for you. I feel a little as though you belonged to me. And after this this event, I expect to see a great deal of you. Howard Spence's mother was a very dear friend of mine. I was one of the first who knew her when she came to New York, from Troy, a widow, to educate her son. She was a very fine and a very courageous woman." Mrs. Holt paused a moment. "She hoped that Howard would be a lawyer."

"A lawyer!" Honora repeated.

"I lost sight of him for several years," continued Mrs. Holt, "but before I invited him here I made some inquiries about him from friends of mine in the financial world. I find that he is successful for so young a man, and well thought of. I have no doubt he will make a good husband, my dear, although I could wish he were not on the Stock Exchange. And I hope you will make him happy."

Whereupon the good lady kissed Honora, and dismissed her to dress for dinner.

"I shall write to your aunt at once," she said.

Requited love, unsettled condition that it is supposed to bring, did not interfere with Howard Spence's appetite at dinner. His spirits, as usual, were of the best, and from time to time Honora was aware of his glance. Then she lowered her eyes. She sat as in a dream; and, try as she might, her thoughts would not range themselves. She seemed to see him but dimly, to hear what he said faintly; and it conveyed nothing to her mind.

This man was to be her husband! Over and over she repeated it to herself. His name was Howard Spence, and he was on the highroad to riches and success, and she was to live in New York. Ten days before he had not existed for her. She could not bring herself to believe that he existed now. Did she love him? How could she love him, when she did not realize him? One thing she knew, that she had loved him that morning.

The fetters of her past life were broken, and this she would not realize. She had opened the door of the cage for what? These were the fragments of thoughts that drifted through her mind like tattered clouds across an empty sky after a storm. Peter Erwin appeared to her more than once, and he was strangely real. But he belonged to the past. Course succeeded course, and she talked subconsciously to Mr. Holt and Joshua such is the result of feminine training.

After dinner she stood on the porch. The rain had ceased, a cool damp breeze shook the drops from the leaves, and the stars were shining. Presently, at the sound of a step behind her, she started. He was standing at her shoulder. "Honora!" he said.

She did not move.

"Honora, I haven't seen you alone since morning. It seems like a thousand years. Honora?"

"Yes."

Did you mean it?

"Did I mean what?"

"When you said you'd marry me." His voice trembled a little. "I've been thinking of nothing but you all day. You're not sorry? You haven't changed your mind?"

She shook her head.

"At dinner when you wouldn't look at me, and this afternoon −"

"No, I'm not sorry," she said, cutting him short. "I'm not sorry."

He put his arm about her with an air that was almost apologetic. And, seeing that she did not resist, he drew her to him and kissed her. Suddenly, unaccountably to her, she clung to him.

"You love me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she whispered, "but I am tired. I I am going upstairs, Howard. I am tired."

He kissed her again.

"I can't believe it!" he said. "I'll make you a queen. And we'll be married in the autumn, Honora." He nodded boyishly towards the open windows of the library. "Shall I tell them?" he asked. "I feel like shouting it. I can't hold on much longer. I wonder what the old lady will say!"

Honora disengaged herself from his arms and fled to the screen door. As she opened it, she turned and smiled back at him.

"Mrs. Holt knows already," she said.

And catching her skirt, she flew quickly up the stairs.