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A Black Adonis, by Linn Boyd Porter

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Title: A Black Adonis

Author: Linn Boyd Porter

Release Date: September 12, 2008 [eBook #26599]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

***START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A BLACK
ADONIS***

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A BLACK ADONIS.

by

ALBERT ROSS.

* * * * *

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Giddy

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* * * * *

A BLACK ADONIS.

by

ALBERT ROSS.

Author of "Out of Wedlock," "Speaking of Ellen," "Thou Shalt Not," "Why I'm Single," "Love at Seventy," Etc., Etc.

"You see!" he answered, bitterly. "Because I am black I cannot touch the hand of a woman that is white. And yet you say the Almighty made of one blood all nations of the earth!"--Page 212.

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TO MY READERS.

I do not know how better to use the space that the printer always leaves me in this part of the book than to redeem the promise I made at the end of my last novel, and tell you in a few words what became of Blanche Brixton Fantelli and her husband.

But, do you really need to be told?

Could they have done anything else than live in connubial felicity, after the man had proved himself so noble and the woman had learned to appreciate him at his true worth?

Well, whether they could or not, they didn't. Blanche is the happiest of wedded wives. She still holds to her theory that marriage is based on wrong principles, and that the contract as ordinarily made is frightfully immoral; but she says if all men were like "her Jules" there would be no trouble.

In this she proves herself essentially feminine. She is learning, albeit a little late, that man was not made to live alone, and that the love a mother feels for her child is not the only one that brings joy to a woman's breast.

Fantelli does not claim that Blanche is his property. He is her lover still, even though he has gained the law's permission to be her master. He recognizes that she has rights in herself that are inviolable. This is why they live together so contentedly. She would not be his mate on any other terms.

If it is not the ideal existence, it is very near it. As near as a man and woman who care for the world's opinion can live it in these days.

And now, with heartfelt thanks for the continued favor of the reading public, which I am conscious is far beyond my desert, I bid a temporary farewell to American shores. By the time this book is on the shelves of the dealers I shall be on European soil, there to remain, I trust, for the better part of a year. Wherever I am, my thoughts will always turn to you who have made these journeys possible, and there as here my pen will continue devoted to your service.

ALBERT ROSS.

Cambridge, Mass., *June 1, 1895.*

A BLACK ADONIS.

CHAPTER I.

A REJECTED MANUSCRIPT.

"A letter for Mr. Roseleaf," he heard his landlady say to the chambermaid. And he was quite prepared to hear the girl reply, in a tone of surprise:

"For Mr. Roseleaf! This is the first letter he has had since he came."

The young man referred to stood just within his chamber door, waiting with some anxiety for the letter to be brought to him. He was about twenty years of age, of medium height, with rather dark complexion, curling hair and expressive eyes, and with a natural delicacy of manner that made him seem almost feminine at first view.

He had the greatest possible interest in the letter that the postman had just brought, but he was far too polite to disturb the landlady or her servant, who were not yet through with it.

"You can see that it is from a publishing house," commented Mrs. Ranning, inspecting the envelope with care. "It is from Cutt & Slashem, who bring out more novels than any other firm in the city. I told you he was some kind of a writer. Perhaps they are going to publish a book for him! If they do he will leave us for finer quarters. Novelists make a mint of money, I have heard. We must do our best to keep him as long as we can. Be very polite to him, Nellie. He appears to be an excellent young man."

Shirley Roseleaf's anxiety to get possession of his letter was not lessened by this conversation. It seemed as if his entire future hung on the contents of that envelope tarrying so long in Nellie's hands. The great publishers, Cutt & Slashem, had had a manuscript of his in their hands for nearly a fortnight. When they had definitely accepted it, his path would be perfectly clear. If they rejected it--but he had not got so far as that.

The manuscript was a romance--a romance of love! Its author had spent a great deal of time upon it. He had rewritten it with care, and finally made a

neat copy, of which he was very proud. Then he had thought a long time over the question of a publishing firm. Cutt & Slashem stood at the top of their profession, and they finally received the preference. With the MSS. Roseleaf sent a pretty note, in which he included a delicate compliment on their success. The MSS. and the note were arranged tastefully in a neat white package and tied with pink twine.

After all of those precautions it is no wonder that the novelist felt surprise when days passed and no reply was sent to him. But never at any time was he discouraged. Had they intended to reject the novel, he reasoned, they could as easily have done so in three days as ten.

He pictured the members of the firm hugging themselves over their good fortune, passing the manuscript from one to the other, all eager for a taste of such a marvelous work. He did not think it egotism to believe they did not get stories like that every day.

His thoughts flew rapidly as Nellie slowly climbed the stairs. Now he would be famous, he would be courted, he would be envied! He would also be very, very rich, though that was not of so much account.

As Nellie handed him the letter he responded to her pleasant smile with one of his own, and even pressed a twenty-five cent piece into her hand. Then he closed his door behind him, bolting it in his eagerness to be alone. The morning was foggy, and he sank into a chair by the window, the only part of the room where he could see to read distinctly.

There was an attraction about the envelope. It was light buff in color, bearing the address of Cutt & Slashem in large letter on one side of the front face, besides the names of several of the most famous authors whose publishers the firm had the happiness to be.

"Shirley Roseleaf!" It would not look so badly in print.

So lost was he in the pleasant pictures which these thoughts conjured up that it was some minutes before he tore open the envelope. Then his

astounded eyes rested upon these lines:

"Messrs. Cutt & Slashem regret to be obliged to decline with thanks the MSS. of M. Shirley Roseleaf, and request to be informed what disposition he desires made of the same."

Roseleaf read this dizzily. For some moments he could not understand what that sentence meant. "Obliged to decline" was plain enough; but his confused mind found some grains of comfort in the request of the firm to know what he wished done with his manuscript. They must, he reasoned, consider it of value, or they would not respond in that courteous manner. Still, he could not comprehend how they had had the asininity to "decline" it at all.

Were they unwilling to add another star to their galaxy?

Could they actually have read the tale?

A firm of their reputation, too!

When Roseleaf emerged from his temporary stupor it was into a state of great indignation. Why, the men were fools! He wished heartily he had never gone to them. They would yet see the day when, with tears in their eyes, they would regret their lack of judgment. His first act should be to go to their office and express his opinion of their stupidity, and then he would take his MSS. to some rival house. And never, never in the world--after he had become famous, and when every publisher on both sides of the Atlantic were besieging him--never, he said, should these ignorant fellows get a scrap of his writing, not even if they offered its weight in gold!

He was too excited for delay, and donning his hat, he took his way with all speed to Cutt & Slashem's office. At that instant he had more faith in his novel than ever. As he walked rapidly along he compared it with some of the stories issued by the firm that had rejected it, to the great disadvantage of the latter.

"I wish to see Mr. Cutt or Mr. Slashem," he said, imperiously, as he entered the counting room.

"Both are in," said the office boy, imperturbably. "Which will you have?"

"I will see them together."

Had they been tigers, fresh from an Indian jungle, it would have made no difference to him.

The boy asked for his card, vanished with it, returned and bade him follow. Up a flight of stairs they went, then to the left, then to the right, then across a little hall. A door with the name of the house and the additional word "Private" loomed before them.

"Come in!" was heard in response to the knock of the office boy.

Roseleaf entered, something slower than a cannon ball, and yet considerably faster than a snail. The two principal members of the firm were sitting together, with lighted cigars in their mouths, examining a lot of paper samples that lay upon a table. They did no more at first than glance up and nod, not having finished the business upon which they were engaged.

"Is it any better than the last?" asked Mr. Slashem, referring to the sample his partner was examining.

"It's just as good, at least," was the answer. "And an eighth of a cent a pound less. I think we had better order five hundred reams."

"Five hundred reams," repeated the other, slowly, making a memorandum in a little book that he carried. "And the other lot we'll wait about, eh? Paper is not very steady. It's gone off a sixteenth since Thursday."

This conversation only served to infuriate still more the visitor who stood waiting to pour out his wrath. Were these men wasting time over fractions

of a cent in the price of stock, just after they had rejected one of the greatest romances of modern times!

With the precision of a duplex machine both partners finally looked up from the table at the young man.

"Mr. Shirley Roseleaf?" said Mr. Slashem, interrogatively, glancing at the card that the office boy had brought.

"Yes, sir!" was the sharp and disdainful reply.

"We need nothing in your line," interrupted Mr. Cutt. "I suppose Mr. Trimm has our other order well under way?"

The look of indignant protest that appeared in Roseleaf's face caused Mr. Slashem to speak.

"This is not Mr. Roseberg," he explained. "My partner took you for an agent of our bookbinder," he added.

The novelist thought his skin would burst.

"I am quite complimented," he said, in an icy tone. "Let me introduce myself. I am the author of 'Evelyn's Faith.'"

The partners consulted each other.

"The similarity of names confused me," said Mr. Cutt. "Is your book one that we have published?"

Saints and angels!

"It is one that was sent to you *for* publication," replied Roseleaf, with much heat, "and has been returned this morning--*rejected!*"

"Ah!" said Mr. Cutt.

"We have nothing to do with that department," said Mr. Slashem, coming to the rescue. "You should see Mr. Gouger, on the second floor above; though if he has rejected your story a visit would be quite useless. He never decides a matter without sufficient reason."

"Oh, dear, no!" added Mr. Cutt, feeling again of the paper samples.

Shirley Roseleaf listened with wild incredulity.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you, the members of the firm of Cutt & Slashem, have rejected my story without even reading it?"

The partners glanced at each other again.

"We never read books," said Mr. Cutt.

"Never," said Mr. Slashem, kindly. "We have things much more important to attend to. We pay Mr. Gouger a large salary. Why, my young friend, there are probably a dozen manuscripts received at our office every week. If we were to try to *read* them, who do you think would attend to the *essential* points of our business?"

Roseleaf's contempt for the concern was increasing at lightning speed. He did not care to mince his words, for it could make no difference now.

"I should imagine that the selection of the books you are to print would be at least as important as the paper you are to use," he retorted.

Mr. Cutt looked at him in great astonishment.

"You are much mistaken," said he.

"Entirely mistaken," confirmed Mr. Slashem.

The author had no desire to remain longer, as it was evident he was losing his temper to no purpose. If it was Mr. Gouger who had rejected his work,

it was Mr. Gouger that he must see.

Bowing with ironical grace to the examiners of printing paper, he took leave of them, and mounted to the sanctum of the man who he had been told was the arbiter of his fate. A girl with soiled hands pointed out the room, for there was nothing to indicate it upon the dingy panel of the door; and presently Roseleaf stood in the presence of the individual he believed at that moment his worst enemy.

There were two men in the room. One of them indicated with a motion of his hand that the other was the one wanted, and with a second motion that the caller might be seated. Mr. Gouger was partly hidden behind a desk, engaged in turning over a heap of manuscript, and it appeared from the manner of his companion that he did not wish to be disturbed.

Somewhat cooled down by this state of affairs, the young novelist took the chair indicated and waited several minutes.

"What d--d nonsense they are sending me these days!" exclaimed Mr. Gouger at last, thrusting the sheets he had been scanning back into the wrapper in which they had come, without, however, raising his eyes from his desk. "Out of a hundred stories I read, not three are fit to build a fire with! This thing is written by a girl who ought to take a term in a grammar school. She has no more idea of syntax than a lapdog. Her father writes that he is willing to pay a reasonable sum to have it brought out. Why, Cutt & Slashem couldn't afford to put their imprint on that rot for fifty thousand dollars!"

He had finished saying this before he learned that a third person was in the room. Upon making this discovery he lowered his voice, as if regretting having exhibited too great warmth before a stranger. The novelist rose and handed him a card, and as Mr. Gouger glanced at the name a gleam of recognition lit up his face.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Roseleaf," he said. "I had half a notion to ask you to call, when I felt obliged to send you that note yesterday. There are

several things I would like to say to you. Archie, perhaps you would let us have the room for a few minutes."

The last remark was addressed familiarly to the man who occupied the third chair, and who looked so disheartened at the prospect of having to rise therefrom that Roseleaf hastened to express a hope that he would not do so on his account.

"Very well," said Mr. Gouger, abruptly. "You heard what I said about this copy I have just read, though it was not my intention that you should. I supposed I was talking only to Mr. Weil, who is not in the profession and does not expect to be. Now, let me say at once, Mr. Roseleaf, that your contribution is not open to any of the objections I have cited. You have evidently been well educated. Your English is pure and forcible. It is a real delight to read your pages. Every line shows the greatest care in construction. I did with your story what I have not done with another for a long time--I read it through. Why then did I reject it?"

The question was too great for the one most interested to answer, but in the glow of pleasure that the compliment brought he forgot for the moment his bitter feelings.

"Possibly," he suggested, "Cutt & Slashem have more novels on hand than they feel like producing at present."

"No," responded Mr. Gouger, disposing of that theory in one breath. "A house like ours would never reject a really desirable manuscript. If you will reflect that only one or two of this description are produced each year you will the more readily understand me. Your story has a cardinal fault for which no excellence of style or finish can compensate. Shall I tell you what it is, and before this gentleman?"

He indicated Mr. Weil as he spoke. Roseleaf's heart sank. For the first time he felt a deadly fear.

"Tell me, by all means," he responded, faintly.

Mr. Gouger's face bore its gentlest expression at that moment. He was taking valuable time, time that belonged to his employers, to say something that must temporarily disappoint, though in the end it might benefit his hearer.

"Let me repeat," he said, "that your work is well written, and that I have read it with the greatest interest. Its fault--an insuperable one--is that it lacks fidelity to nature. Mr. Roseleaf, I think I could gauge your past life with tolerable accuracy merely from what that manuscript reveals."

The novelist shook his head. There was not a line of autobiography in those pages, and he told his critic so.

"Oh, I understand," replied Mr. Gouger. "But this I have learned: Your life has been marvelously colorless. Yet, in spite of that, you have undertaken to write of things of which you know nothing, and about which, I may add, you have made very poor guesses."

Mr. Weil, leaning back in his chair, began to show a decided interest. Mr. Roseleaf, sitting upright, in an attitude of strained attention, inquired what Mr. Gouger meant.

"Well, for instance, this," responded the critic: "You attempt to depict the sensations of love, though you have never had a passion. Can you expect to know how it feels to hold a beautiful girl in your arms, when you never had one there? You put words of temptation into the mouth of your villain which no real scamp would think of using, for their only effect would be to alarm your heroine. You talk of a planned seduction as if it were part of an oratorio. And you make your hero so superlatively pure and sweet that no woman formed of flesh and blood could endure him for an hour."

The color mounted to Roseleaf's face. He felt that this criticism was not without foundation. But presently he rallied, and asked if it were necessary for a man to experience every sensation before he dared write about them.

"Do you suppose," he asked, desperately, "that Jules Verne ever traveled sixty thousand leagues under the sea or made a journey to the moon?"

Mr. Weil could not help uttering a little laugh. Mr. Gouger struck his hands together and clinched them.

"No," said he. "But he could have written neither of those wonderful tales without a knowledge of the sciences of which they treat."

"He has read, and I have read," responded Roseleaf. "What is the difference?"

"He has studied, and you have not," retorted the critic. "That makes all the difference in the world. He has a correct idea of the structure of the moon and what should be found in the unexplored caverns of the ocean; while you, in total ignorance, have attempted to deal in a science to which these are the merest bagatelles! You know as little of the tides that control the heart of a girl as you do of the personal history of the inhabitants of Jupiter! Your powers of description are good; those of invention feeble. Either throw yourself into a love affair, till you have learned it root and branch, or never again try to depict one."

Mr. Archie Weil smiled and nodded, as if he entirely agreed with the speaker.

"What a novel *I* could make, my dear fellow!" he exclaimed, "if I only had the talent. I have had experiences enough, but I could no more write them out than I could fly."

"It is quite as well," was the response, "your women would all be Messalinas and fiction has too many now."

"Not *all* of them, Lawrence," was the quick and meaning reply.

"In that case," said Gouger, "I wish heartily you could write. The world is famishing for a real love story, based on modern lines, brought up to date. I

tell you, there has been nothing satisfactory in that line since Goethe's day."

Mr. Weil suggested Balzac and Sand.

"Why don't you include George William Reynolds?" inquired Gouger, with a sneer. "Neither of them wrote until they were depraved by contract with humanity. If we could get a young man of true literary talent to see life and write of it as he went along, what might we not secure? But I have no more time to spare, Mr. Roseleaf. I was sorry to be obliged to reject your story. Some day, when you have seen just a little of the world, begin again on the lines I have outlined, and come here with the result."

Quite dispirited, now that the last plank had slipped from under him, the novelist walked slowly down the stairs. He did not even ask for his manuscript. After what he had heard, it did not seem worth carrying to his lodgings. His plans were shipwrecked. Instead of the fame and fortune he had hoped for, he felt the most bitter disappointment. All his bright dreams had vanished.

A step behind him quicker than his own, made him aware that some one was following him, and presently a voice called his name. It was Mr. Archie Weil, who had put himself to unusual exertion, and required some seconds to recover his breath before he could speak further.

"I want you to come over to my hotel and have a little talk with me," he said. "Gouger has interested me in you immensely. I believe, as he says, that you have the making of a distinguished author, and I want to arrange a plan by which you can carry out his scheme."

Mr. Roseleaf stared doubtfully at his companion.

"What scheme?" he said, briefly.

"Why, of imparting to you that knowledge of the world which will enable you to draw truthful portraits. You have the art, he says, the talent, the capacity--whatever you choose to call it. All you lack is experience. Given

that, you would make a reputation second to none. What can be plainer than that you should acquire the thing you need without delay?"

"The 'thing I need'?" repeated Roseleaf, dolefully.

Mr. Weil laughed, delightfully.

"Yes!" he explained. "What you need is a friend able to interest you, to begin with. Pardon me if I say I may be described by that phrase. Come to my hotel a little while and let us talk it over."

It was not an opportunity to be refused, in Roseleaf's depressed condition, and the two men walked together to the Hoffman House, where Mr. Weil at that time made his home.

CHAPTER II.

"WAS MY STORY TOO BOLD?"

"Well, Millie, your letter has come," said Mr. Wilton Fern, as he entered the parlor of his pleasant residence, situated about twenty miles from the limits of New York City. "Open it as quick as you can, and learn your fate."

His daughter started nervously from her seat near the window, where she had been spending the previous hour in speculations regarding the very missive that was now placed in her hands. She was a handsome girl, neither blonde nor brunette, with eyes of hazel gray and hair of that color that moderns call Titian red. She took the envelope that her father gave her, and though she wanted intensely to know the contents she hesitated to open it.

"Read it, Millie," smiled Mr. Fern. "Let us learn whether we have an authoress in our house who is destined to become famous."

But this remark made Miss Millicent less willing than before to open the letter in her father's presence. She slowly left the room without answering and did not break the seal of her communication till she was in the seclusion of her chamber.

And it was quite a while, even then, before she summoned the necessary courage. Some days previous she had sent a MSS. to the great publishing house of Cutt & Slashem. The writing had taken up the best of her time for a year. She had high hopes that it was destined to lay the foundation of an artistic success. Her plot was novel, not to say startling. It was entirely out of the conventional order. It would be certain to arouse talk and provoke comment, if it got into print; and to make sure that it *would* get into print she had persuaded her father to write a little note, which she enclosed with the MSS., saying that he would pay a cash bonus, if the firm demanded it, to guarantee them against possible loss.

With this note in her mind, Miss Millicent had felt little doubt that her story would be accepted and printed. She only wondered how warmly they

would praise her work. It was not enough to have them print it; she wanted something to justify her in saying to her father, "There, you see I was not wrong after all in thinking I could have a literary career!"

At last the envelope was removed, and the girl's astonished eyes lit upon this cold, dry statement:

"Messrs. Cutt & Slashem regret to be obliged to decline with thanks the MSS. of Miss M. Fern, and request to be informed what disposition she desires made of the same."

Millicent felt a ringing in her ears. Her hands grew clammy. A dull pain pressed on her forehead. She felt a faintness, a sinking at the heart. Was it possible she had read aright? Rejected, in this cruel way, without even a reference to her father's offer! It was atrocious, and, girl-like, she burst into a spasm of weeping.

How could she ever face her father? The sacrifices she had made came back to her, sacrifices of which she had thought little at the time, but which now seemed gigantic. There had been nights when she had not gone to bed till three, other nights when she had been too full of her subject to sleep and had risen in the small hours to finish some particularly interesting chapter. Twelve hundred pages there were in all, note size, in her large, round, almost masculine hand. And this time was all lost! She had mistaken her vocation. The greatest publishing house in the country had decided against her.

Gradually she dried her eyes. It would do no good to weep. She read the curt answer that had come in the mail, a dozen times. Why could not the firm have sent her a reason, an excuse that meant something? She wanted to know wherein her fault lay. It might be possible to correct it. Perhaps the state of business was to blame. The more she thought, the more determined she grew to investigate this strange affair, and within an hour she had donned her street clothes and started, without saying anything to the rest of the household of her intention, for the office of Cutt & Slashem in the city.

She knew that each large concern had one or more "readers," on whose judgment they relied in such matters. She, therefore, paused only long enough at the counting-room to get directed to Mr. Gouger. Her knock on the critic's door brought forth a loud "Come in," and as she entered she saw two men standing with hats in their hand, as if about to take their departure.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but I wish to see Mr. Gouger."

"That is my name," responded one of the men, stepping forward.

"I am Miss Fern."

Mr. Gouger did not seem very glad to hear it. The hour of one had just struck, and he was about to go to his lunch. He recognized the girl's name, as that of the author of the MSS. he had criticized so severely to his friend, Weil, who was, by-the-way, the third person in the room at this moment. Had she sent up her card, as is usual with women, he would have avoided seeing her at any hazard.

Mr. Weil took a long survey of the young lady, and then retired to the vicinity of the front windows. He pretended to interest himself in the rush of traffic that was going on in the street below, but he missed nothing of what was said, and stole from time to time a glance at his two companions, particularly the younger one.

"A mighty pretty girl," was his mental comment. "I hope Lawrence isn't going to be nasty with her."

Mr. Gouger motioned Miss Fern rather stiffly to a seat.

"I do not wish to detain you," she said, with feminine inconsistency, as she accepted it. "I only want to know, if you will be so kind as to tell me, what is the trouble with my story."

The critic was pleased at one thing. Miss Fern's voice was reasonably clear. She had finished her weeping at home. There was to be no scene,

something he dreaded, and in the course of his connection with this house he had experienced scores of them. He inspected his caller critically in the few seconds that elapsed while she was asking this question, and when she paused he decided to answer her with as much of the truth as he dared use.

"The fact is," he began, "a firm like ours is unable to use more than one novel out of fifty that is submitted to it. Of our friends who send us manuscripts, the vast majority must, therefore, be disappointed. Now, your story--shall I be frank?"

"By all means," answered Miss Fern.

"Your story, though written with spirit and power, needs a great deal of revision from a--from a rhetorical standpoint. It is, in fact, carelessly put together. That is a cardinal fault in a literary production, and one for which no amount of talent, or even of genius, can compensate."

The girl listened with deep interest. She tried to think where the blemishes alluded to could be, for she had read the story twenty times. To say nothing of several girl friends, who had listened with evident wonder and delight, to various parts of the tale, as it progressed.

"If that is true," answered Miss Fern, slowly--, "could not the trouble be remedied by sending the MSS. to some very competent person and having the errors made right?"

Mr. Gouger smiled.

"Hardly," he said. "A novel is like a painting. The *ensemble*--do you understand?--is the thing. Can you conceive a painting being 'done over'? Your book would lose its quality if subjected to that process."

A look of discouragement crossed the features of the young woman.

"Of course, you know best," she stammered. "What would you advise me--try again?"

Mr. Gouger raised both his hands.

"It is difficult to say, in such a case," he replied. "But--if you want my best opinion--"

"That is just what I want," said the girl, with ill-concealed impatience.

"You are not dependent upon your exertions, I suppose, for a living?"

Millicent shook her head, almost sorry at the moment that she could not reply in the affirmative.

"Then--I should give up the idea of being an authoress."

This was very unpalatable medicine, and the critic realized it as he looked at the sombre face before him.

"Is your rejection of my story based at all," asked Miss Fern, after a pause, "on the--boldness of its subject?"

Mr. Gouger smiled again.

"We publish the works of Hall Caine and George Moore," he said. "I should not consider your story overbold, if there was nothing else against it. It is a wonder to me, and always will be, why such young girls as you choose *risqué* themes, but if the work is well done the public will pay for it."

There was a slight blush on Miss Fern's face, partly at the insinuation and partly at the adverse criticism that had crept thoughtlessly into the sentence.

"For my part," she explained, "I wanted to write something that would attract attention--that would put my name prominently before the public and keep it there. The girls I read it to thought the scenes just lovely, though some said perhaps their mothers would not feel that way. And I told them that the mothers of to-day were very old-fashioned, and that the

public taste was changing rapidly. If the story is too bold, there are things I could cut out of it, but if you say that would make no difference, I would rather let them stand. I intend to try some other concern before I give up."

Mr. Archie Weil had abandoned all pretence of looking out the window. He stood with his eyes fastened on the pretty girl, as she made these statements in such a matter-of-fact way. He wondered what the dickens the story was about, and made up his mind that he would try to get possession of it.

"All the same," responded Mr. Gouger, who had apparently forgotten his lunch in his growing interest in the conversation, "I don't see where girls like you obtain such an intimate knowledge of things. You are not over twenty--excuse me, I am old enough to tell you this without offence. It is not you alone, but a hundred others who have made me ask myself this question. As soon as the modern girl gets a bottle of ink and a pen and begins to let her thoughts flow over paper, it transpires that she knows everything--more than everything, almost. Why, I was twenty-five before I was as wise as the heroine of sixteen, in this story of yours!"

Miss Fern reddened again, all the more because she had glanced up and encountered the bright eyes of Mr. Weil fixed upon her.

"Why, Archie," pursued the literary man--he turned toward Mr. Weil--"you remember Lelia Danté, you have seen her here. Five or six years ago I got a letter from that young girl's mother asking me to come to their residence and hear a story she had written. It was her first one, and the child was not a day over seventeen. I couldn't believe it when she came into the room, with her hair tumbled about her shoulders, and began to read to me the first chapter of 'Zaros.' 'Did *she* write that?' I asked her mother, incredulously. 'Certainly,' she replied. 'Without aid from any one?' 'Absolutely alone.' My hair stood on end. I could not keep it down for the next week with a brush. You know the story. We printed it, and it sold well, and that is all that C. & S. cared about it; but I never understood how that infant could conceive it. No more than I can understand your ability to write this story of yours, Miss Fern," he added, pointedly.

The young woman bridled a little.

"It does not matter much, if you are not going to print it," she said, raising her eyes to his.

He bowed low to express whatever apology might be necessary.

"I would have accepted it if I could," he said. "My entire life is spent in reading manuscripts in the hope of discovering one that will make a hit with the public to whom we cater. When successful I am as pleased as a South African who fishes a diamond of the first water out of the mine. Your story, Miss Fern, shows decided talent. You have a greater knowledge of some of the important things of life, I will wager, than your grandmother had at eighty, if she lived so long. As I am obliged to go now, let me add, without mincing matters, that you are very deficient in English grammar, and that nothing you can write will be acceptable to any first-class house until that fault is remedied. Are you ready, Archie?"

Mr. Weil felt indignant. He could not have spoken to any girl as pretty as this one in such language, and he thought it quite inexcusable on the part of his friend to do so. Mr. Gouger, though feeling that it was best to use little circumlocution, had not meant to wound his caller. But her countenance showed that he *had* wounded her, and the natural gallantry of his younger companion came to the rescue.

"I am not ready yet," said Mr. Weil, telegraphing at the same time a series of signals with his eyes. "I want a few minutes' talk with Miss Fern, if you will introduce me. I think I can say something she will like to hear."

Mr. Gouger, who now stood in such a position that Miss Fern could not see him, shook his head to imply that he did not fancy this arrangement; but he ended by saying, "Very well." He then abruptly made the presentation, put on his hat, said good-by, and vanished.

Miss Millicent, who had risen, turned with an air of puzzled inquiry toward Mr. Weil.

"Be seated again, for a moment," he said, politely. "I want your permission to read your story."

"Why, I don't know," she answered. "Are you one of the employes of Cutt & Slashem?"

He smilingly denied the imputation.

"I have not that felicity," he added, "but I am much interested in things literary, and have a rather wide acquaintance in this line of business. If I could be allowed to read your MSS. perhaps I should form a milder opinion of its faults than my unbending friend. And in that case a word from me, to another house, would certainly do you no harm."

A brighter light came into Miss Millicent's eyes.

"I shall be only too glad to have you read it," she answered. "It is hard to believe that I have wasted almost a year in something entirely worthless. You may take it with pleasure."

Mr. Weil went to Mr. Gouger's desk, from which he soon came with the parcel in question. He untied the string and for a moment his gaze rested on the handwriting.

"Do you live far from here?" he began; and then added, as he noticed the address on an enclosed card, "Ah, I see! At Midlands."

She explained herself rather more to him, giving the full address of her father, and some particulars about the manner in which she had been drawn into attempting literary work. He listened intently, all the time engaged in rapid thought.

"The best way for me to get a thoroughly correct impression of this novel," he said, when she came to a pause, "is to hear you read it aloud. In that manner," he added, as he saw that she was about to interrupt, "a hundred meanings would come to the surface that a mere inspection of the pages

might fail to show. Beside, there would be an opportunity for discussion. If convenient to you I would gladly come to your residence for this purpose."

The eyes of the young girl brightened. She was greatly pleased at the idea and said so without delay.

"Very well," said Mr. Weil, more than delighted with the success of his experiment. "To-day is Tuesday; shall I come for the first time, say, Thursday evening?"

"That would suit me perfectly; or to-morrow, if you wish. I shall put aside everything and have my time free for you."

Mr. Weil nodded.

"Let it be Thursday then. And the hour--shall we call it eight?"

The time was promptly agreed to.

"In the meantime, I will take the MSS. and look it over, to form a general idea of the plot. Here is my card. By-the-way, you will of course arrange it so that we shall not be interrupted during our conference. It disturbs anything of that kind to have people coming in and out. We want to be entirely alone so as to give our full attention to the work in hand."

Miss Fern smilingly acquiesced, saying that it was exactly what she would wish.

"And do you think there may be hope for it yet--that poor little manuscript?" she asked, as she stood by the door ready to take her departure.

"That is a question I can hardly answer," he replied. "I shall be better able to tell you in a week or two, I trust."

She lingered, with her hand on the door knob.

"My father is willing to take all the financial risks," she said. "That ought to make a difference, don't you think so?"

"It would, with many houses," he admitted. "I am glad to know these things. Thursday, then, Miss--Miss Fern."

He wanted to call her "Millicent," for he had read the name on the package he still held in his hand; but on the whole he concluded that this would be a little premature.

CHAPTER III.

"HER FEET WERE PINK."

When Miss Millicent Fern entered the office of Lawrence Gouger, as detailed in the preceding chapter, it will be remembered that she found that gentleman and his friend, Archie Weil, with their hats in their hands. The fact was that Mr. Weil had but just entered the room, and that Mr. Gouger had accepted an invitation to take lunch with him, an arrangement that was by no means an infrequent one between them. The entrance of Miss Fern, and the subsequent proceedings, compelled the literary critic to go out alone, as has been seen. When he returned he found Mr. Weil still there.

"Haven't you been to lunch yet!" exclaimed Mr. Gouger.

"I have not been out of this office," was the reply, "and all appetite for anything to eat has left me. Lawrence, that is one of the most interesting girls I ever met."

Mr. Gouger pursed up his lips, and uttered an impatient, "Pah!" He then remarked that Mr. Weil had a habit of finding such a quality in the latest women of his acquaintance.

"What does she amount to?" he asked. "An overgrown schoolgirl, who did not half learn her lessons. Read that MSS. she left here, and get disillusionized in short order. Why, she doesn't even know how to spell, and her periods and commas are in a hopeless tangle."

His companion eyed him quizzically.

"Are periods and commas, even a correct spelling of the English language, the only things you can see in a bright, handsome girl?" he demanded. "For shame, Lawrence! You are a dried-up old mummy. Your senses are numb. A lively wind will come in at the keyhole some day and blow you out of that chimney."

Mr. Gouger heaved a sigh, as if to say that discussion with such a nonsensical fellow was useless, and took his seat at his desk, where an unfinished pile of MSS. awaited his reading.

"She's given me leave to take her story home," said Mr. Weil, with a mischievous expression.

The critic stared at his friend.

"Given it to you?" he repeated. "How did that happen?"

"I asked her for it, naturally. You were so severe on the poor child, that I couldn't help putting in a cheering word. We talked of the whole business, and she was willing I should see if my opinion agreed with yours."

"*Your* opinion!" echoed Gouger, testily. "What is that worth? But take the stuff, if you want it, and when you are done, send it to her; it will make less rubbish in this confounded hole. One thing I'll tell you, though, in advance. You'll never be able to make sense of it, unless you get some one to straighten it out."

"That's all right," replied the other. "After I have read it through, I am going to Miss Fern's house, where she will read it to me."

Mr. Gouger started from his chair.

"You don't mean that!" he exclaimed.

"But I do. She asked me, and I'm going. I understand that it's a rather bold tale, and I can conceive nothing more entertaining than to hear that kind of thing from the red lips of such a pretty piece of flesh and blood as has just left here."

There was an uneasy expression on the face of the critic as he heard these words. He liked Weil, although they were as different in their natures as two men could well be. He wanted to please him, but the aspect of this

affair was not agreeable.

"Look here, Archie," he said, earnestly, "there are some things that I can't permit, you know. My office must not be made a starting-place for one of your lawless adventures. You met Miss Fern here. Now, I protest against your going to her house, pretending that you are interested in that novel, when your real purpose is of a much more questionable kind."

Mr. Weil put on the air of one whose feelings are lacerated by an unjust suspicion.

"My dear Lawrence--" he began.

"That's all right," growled the critic. "I may or may not be your 'dear Lawrence,' but I know you like--like a book," he added, hitting by accident on a very excusable simile. "You are an old dog that is not likely to learn new tricks. I shall send this MSS. back to Miss Fern, myself, enclosing a letter warning her to have nothing to do with you."

A laugh escaped the lips of Archie Weil at this proposition.

"If you knew the feminine mind half as well as you do modern literature," he answered, "you would see how little that would avail. I have met Miss Fern and made a distinctly favorable impression. Her address is in my pocket, and I have received a pressing invitation to call. If you choose to send the MSS. by another messenger you will relieve me of the task of carrying a bundle, but you will accomplish nothing more."

Mr. Gouger's mouth opened in astonishment at the evident advantage which his friend had gained in so short a time.

"You must have convinced her that your literary opinions are of value," he said, presently. "If I write that you are a charletan and entirely unworthy of attention, what will happen then?"

The smiling gentleman opposite crossed his hands over his left knee, and did not delay his answer.

"I will tell you," he said. "In the same mail she will receive a letter from me, warning her that a certain party, who has given an adverse judgment on her writings, may attempt to influence her against others more likely to decide in her favor. She will be told that, having rejected a book, this certain party does not wish any one else to print it. Send the severest note you can construct, Lawrence. I have few talents, but I know how to write letters."

The critic could hardly believe that fate had thrown so many cords around his neck in the brief space of one hour, but the more he thought the more he became convinced that his best course was to shut his eyes.

"Well, gang your gait," he said, after a long pause, during which the look of triumph deepened on his companion's face. "You will have to answer for your own sins. But I'll tell you one thing, that may save your time. Women who write racy novels are almost without exception remarkably correct in their own lives."

Mr. Weil inquired if his friend was certain of this, and there was a suspicion of disappointment in his tone.

"Absolutely," said Mr. Gouger, refreshing his memory. "I can think of a dozen instances to prove the point. There is Lelia Danté, for instance, who writes like a--like a--well, you know how she writes. She sticks to her mother's apron strings like a four-year-old child. They never are seen apart, I am told. Then there is Mrs. Helen Walker Wilbur, the poetess. We have a volume of her verse that is positively combustible from its own heat. The sheets had to be run off the press soaked in water to keep them from igniting. The room was full of steam all the time the work was going on. Warm! I should say so! Now, that woman is vain, and she dresses foolishly, and she does odd things for the sake of being talked about--but nobody questions her loyalty to her husband. You would think by some of her poems that an East Indian regiment would not suffice for her, and yet she is

the straightest wife on Manhattan Island. Oh, I know so many cases. You remember that girl who wrote, 'Love's Extremities,' a work as passionate as Sappho. She is a little Quaker-like maiden,[A] who dresses and talks like a sister of one of the Episcopal guilds. These women are on fire at the brain only. They would repel a physical advance with more indignation than those endowed with less esthetic perceptions. So, see Miss Fern as much as you like. Should you attempt anything improper you will prove the truth of my assertions."

[Footnote A: Now dead, alas!--A. R.]

Mr. Weil changed the knee he had been nursing, but the quiet smile did not leave his countenance.

"What an inconsistent fellow you are, Lawrence," he said. "I could convict you of a hundred errors of logic. Do you remember telling Mr. Roseleaf that a man should have a passion before he attempts to depict one."

"And I say so still," retorted Gouger. "*You* don't call the ravings of these poetesses and female novelists real life, do you? *You* know the actual lover isn't content with kissing the hair and the feet of his divinity! There is more about women's *feet* in these poems and novels than all the rest of their anatomy put together. And what is a woman's foot? Did you ever see one that was pretty--that you wanted to put to your lips?"

"Yes," interrupted Archie, dreamily, "once. At Capri. She was fifteen. Her feet were pink, like a shell. She was walking along the shore in the early evening."

"With the dirt of the soil on them!" exclaimed Mr. Gouger, in disgust.

"No, she had just emerged from her bath. The sand there was clean as a carpet, cleaner, in fact. Gods! They were exquisite!"

The critic uttered an exclamation.

"I waste time talking to you," he said, sharply. "You are like the rest of the imaginative crowd. It is a pity you were not gifted with the divine afflatus, that you could have added your volumes to the nonsense they print."

"And which you are always glad to get," interpolated Mr. Weil.

"Because it will sell. *Cutt & Slashem* are in this business to make money, and my thoughts must be directed to the saleable quality of the manuscripts submitted. If *I* was running the concern, though, I would touch the mooney, maundering mess. It makes my flesh creep, sometimes, to read it."

Archie Weil uttered another of his winsome laughs.

"How would you like to be a serpent," he asked, "and have your flesh creep all the time? But before we dismiss this matter of Miss Fern, I want you to clear your mind, if you can, of the haunting suspicions you always have when a woman is concerned. You know there are concerns in the city who would print her book, with a proper amount paid down, if it had neither sense, syntax nor orthography. If she wants it fixed up, I can find tailors to help her out; and if her papa wants it on the market, why shouldn't he be able to get it there? Now, let us talk a little about Roseleaf."

Mr. Gouger brightened at the change of subject. His interest in Mr. Roseleaf was genuine, and he had already learned that Archie had formed a sort of copartnership with the novelist, in the hope of making his future work a success. While the critic could not be said to have any real faith in the arrangement, it certainly interested him.

"What strange freak will you take to next?" he asked. "And do you really expect to make a novelist out of that young man?"

Mr. Weil's eyes had a twinkle in them.

"Didn't you say, yourself, that it could be done?" he inquired. "If I have made any mistake in my investment, I shall charge the loss to you."

The critic reflected a minute.

"I'm not so certain it *can't* be done," he said. "But that's quite different from investing money in it, as you are doing. A man wants pretty near a certainty before he puts up the stuff."

"You greedy fellow!" exclaimed Weil. "Will you never think of anything but gain? I have to spend about so much money every year, in a continual attempt to amuse myself, and it might as well be this way as another. I have a document, signed and solemnly sealed, by which I am to back him against the field in the interest of romantic and realistic literature, and in return he is to give me a third of the net profits of his writings. I don't know that I have done so badly. Perhaps you may live to see Cutt & Slashem pay us a handsome sum in royalties."

Mr. Gouger looked oddly at his friend, whose face was perfectly serious.

"What are you going to begin with?" he asked.

"Love, of course. It is the A B C, as well as the X Y Z of the whole business."

"What kind of love?"

"The best that can be got," replied Weil, now laughing in spite of himself. "The very finest quality in the market. Oh, we shall do this up brown, I tell you."

"What have you done so far?" asked Gouger.

"You want to know it all, eh?" responded Mr. Weil. "I don't think I am justified in letting you too deeply into our secrets. However, you are too honorable to betray us, and so here goes: I have instructed my protégé that he must fall violently under the tender passion before next Saturday night."

"With a lady whom you have selected, of course?"

"By no means. He must catch his own sweethearts."

Mr. Gouger played with his watchchain.

"And this is Tuesday," he commented. "Do you think he will succeed?"

"He must," laughed Weil. "It's like the case of the boy who was digging out the woodchuck. 'The minister's coming to dinner.'"

"You might at least have got an introduction for him," said Gouger, reflectively.

"Not I. There's nothing in our agreement that puts such a task on me. Besides, there's no romance in an introduction. He would write a story as prosy as one of Henry James' if he started off like that."

Mr. Gouger nodded his head slowly.

"That would be something to avoid at all hazards," he assented.

And at this juncture, to the surprise of both the parties to this conversation, the young man of whom they were speaking entered the room.

"I was telling Mr. Gouger of our agreement," said Mr. Weil, as soon as the greetings were over. "How do you get along? Have you discovered your heroine yet?"

Mr. Roseleaf answered, with an air of timidity, in the negative.

"I don't quite know where to find one," he said.

Mr. Weil spread out his arms to their fullest capacity.

"There are thirty millions of them in the United States alone," he exclaimed. "Out of that number you ought to find a few whom you can study. What a pity that *I* cannot write! I would go out of that door and in

ten minutes I would have a subject ready for vivisection."

The younger man raised his eyebrows slightly.

"But, that kind of a woman--would be what you would want--the kind that would let you talk to her on a mere street acquaintance!"

Mr. Weil leaned back in his chair and stretched his legs.

"Oh, yes," he said. "She would do for a beginning. Don't imagine that none of these easy going girls are worth the attention of a novelist. Sometimes they are vastly more interesting than the bread and butter product of the drawing rooms. It won't do, in your profession, to ignore any sort of human being."

Roseleaf breathed a sigh as soft as his name.

"You were right, Mr. Gouger," he said, turning to that gentleman. "I do not know anything. I have judged by appearances, and I now see that truth cannot be learned in that way."

"All the better!" broke in Archie. "The surest progress is made by the man who has learned his deficiencies. You remember the hare and the tortoise. I have read somewhere that the race is not always to the swift. You must treat your fellow men and women as if you had just arrived on this earth from the planet Mars. You must dig through the strata of conventionality to the virgin soil beneath. The great human passions are lust and avarice, though they take a thousand forms, in many of which they have more polite names. For instance, the former, when kept within polite boundaries, is usually known as Love. As Avarice makes but a sorry theme for the romantic writer, Love is the subject that must principally claim your attention. All the world loves a lover, while the miser is despised even by those who cringe beneath the power of his gold. Study the women, my lad, and when you know them thoroughly begin your great novel in earnest."

Roseleaf listened with rapt attention.

"And the men?" he asked.

"The men," was the quick reply, "are too transparent to require study. It is the women, with their ten million tricks to cajole and wheedle us, that afford the best field for your efforts."

Mr. Gouger, who had never been known to take so much time from his work during business hours, tried to begin his reading, but without success. When at his usual occupation he would not have been disturbed by the conversation of a room full of people, so preoccupied was he with what he had to do; but on this occasion he was too much entertained with his companions to do anything but hear them through.

"Is there no such thing as unselfish love--in a woman--love that sacrifices itself for its object?" asked Roseleaf, with a trace of anxiety in his tone.

"M---m, possibly," drawled Mr. Weil. "A female animal with young sometimes evinces the possession of that sort of thing, and women may have touches of it on occasions. That will be a good point for you to remember when you are deeper in your investigations. However, I ought not to fill your head with ideas of my own. I think what we most desire in our friend," he added, turning to the critic, "is complete originality."

The young man shifted his feet nervously.

"Pardon me," he said, "would it not be well to talk with people and learn their impressions? Then I can compare these with my own experiences, when they come. You would not send a blind man out on the street unled."

Archie Weil laughed deliciously.

"You are ingenious, when you should only be ingenuous," he replied. "You do not act at all like the young man from Mars that I have in mind. Perhaps, nevertheless, you are not wholly wrong, for even my traveler from that planet might have to ask his way to the nearest town. Supposing you had just reached the earth, and had met me with a thousand questions. What

could I answer that would be of any use?"

Mr. Roseleaf reflected a moment.

"You could tell me your idea of a perfect woman," he suggested.

"Well, I will," said Weil, glancing meaningly at Mr. Gouger. "The perfect woman is about nineteen years of age. She is neither very light nor very dark. Her eyes are hazel, with a touch of gray in them. She measures, say, five feet, four inches in height, and--about--twenty-two inches around the waist. She has a plump arm, not too fleshy, a well-made leg, a head set on her shoulders with enough neck to give it freedom and grace of movement, but not sufficient to warrant comparison with a swan, or even a goose. Her hands match her feet, being not too slender nor too dainty. Her hips are medium, but not bulging. She weighs in the vicinity of a hundred and twenty-five pounds. And her hair--there is but one color for a woman's hair--is Titian red."

The young man had taken out his note-book and rapidly sketched this list of attractions.

"Every woman cannot have Titian hair," remarked Mr. Gouger. "Would you condemn one with all the other attributes on account of missing that?"

"I would, decidedly," was the reply, "when it is obtained so easily. I think it only costs two dollars a bottle, for the finest shade. Have you written it all down, Mr. Roseleaf?"

The young man ran over his notes.

"I have it--all but the hair," he said. "Of course I could not forget that."

"Very well. And this hair must be long enough, but not too long, remember, for everything unduly accentuated spoils a woman. It should hang about five inches below the waist, when unfastened, and be thick enough to make a noticeable coil. There should be sufficient to hide her face and her lover's

when he takes her in his arms."

Mr. Roseleaf started slightly.

"Then she should have a lover?" he remarked, curiously.

"Undoubtedly. Else why the hair and the arms, and the five feet four! It is a woman's business to be loved and to make herself lovable. When you have found this woman, if she has no lover, you will be expected to officiate in that capacity. If she has one, you must supplant him as soon as possible. And when you have fallen desperately, ravingly in love with such a creature, you will not have to come to me for further advice."

The young man surveyed the speaker with the utmost gravity.

"Have *you* ever been in love?" he inquired.

"Never."

"Why?"

"It was not necessary; *I* did not intend to write novels," said Archie, with a laugh. "But, come, we have bothered Lawrence enough. Let us go."

He took the package containing Miss Fern's story, and sauntered out, paying no attention to the peculiar glances that his friend, the critic, threw at him as he was leaving.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH TITIAN TRESSES.

Mr. Weil deciphered the MSS. of Miss Fern with some difficulty. Not that the handwriting was particularly illegible, though it did not in the least resemble copperplate engraving; but, as Mr. Gouger had intimated, the sentences were so badly constructed, and the punctuation so different from that prescribed by the usual authorities, that he was continually obliged to go back over his tracks and hunt for meanings. Nevertheless, within an hour from the time when he sat down in his room at the Hoffman House and opened the package he had brought, he had to confess himself deeply interested.

Miss Fern had conceived some entertaining characters, and some very unconventional situations. Her people were virile; her hero was strong if not always grammatical; her heroine did and said things not common in real life, and yet that were quite reasonable when her peculiar nature and environment were considered.

Archie paused once in awhile to wonder how much of all this record was within the direct knowledge of the young authoress; which expressions conveyed her own ideas and which sentiments she would personally endorse. Gouger might be right as to the exceeding purity of most of the ladies who dealt in eroticism, but in this especial case Mr. Weil meant to make an investigation on his own account before he accepted as a universal rule the one his friend had laid down.

He did not go to sleep that night until he had finished his story. Had it been arranged by a competent hand he could have read it in four hours, but as it was he consumed eight in the work. With all its faults, he liked it. There was something breezy about it, and it had a theme that he did not remember had been treated exactly in the same way before. Though, as he himself had said, without much talent for composition, Archie had read a great many books. It is no proof because a person cannot write that he would make a poor critic. Mr. Weil might almost have filled Lawrence Gouger's place at

Cutt & Slashem's. He had written fugitive pieces in his time for the papers, in reference to his travels, which had been extensive, and had even contributed occasional book reviews to the magazines. His connection with Gouger enabled him to keep in touch with what was going on in the literary world, and the dozens of new volumes which passed through that office were always at his disposal.

"She's not a fool, by any means," he remarked to himself, when he put down the last sheet of Miss Fern's work. "A fellow who understood his business might put that into such shape that it would be worth using. I mean to find some one who can do it, and suggest the idea to her, when I get to that stage in this affair. Let me see, who do I know that could undertake it?"

He had begun to undress, and was in the act of taking off his collar as he spoke. His mind ran over a list of struggling literary men. Something seemed the matter with most of them. There was Hamlin, but he would be too exacting, and would want to suggest alterations in the story itself, which would never do. There was Insley, whose last three books had been flat failures, and for whom Cutt & Slashem had positively refused to print anything more; but Insley had gone into the country for the summer and nobody knew his address. Then there was--

"Roseleaf!"

Archie received this thought like an inspiration. He threw his cravat on the bureau and began tugging at his shoestrings to the imminent danger of getting them into hard knots that no one could unravel. Roseleaf! Why not? The boy would do almost anything he suggested, so great was his confidence that a road to literary preferment could be staked out over that path. Roseleaf would not undertake the work for the sake of pecuniary compensation, but the thing could be presented to him in quite another light. In Miss Fern's story there were living, breathing men and women. In his own there were beautifully drawn marionettes. He could be made to see that the study of the young lady's method was worth his while. And then!

Mr. Weil's shoes lay on the floor, in the disorder of a bachelor who had never in his life taken pains to put anything in the place where it really belonged. He took out the studs of his shirt, pulled that garment over his head, and then sat for some minutes wrapped in active thought.

"They must be introduced to each other!" he exclaimed, at last. "Between them they have every qualification for success; apart they are like the separated wheels of a watch. There is Shirley, with a style so sweetly subtle, a grace so perfect, every line a gem; and with it all not a sign of human emotion. There is Millicent, full of plot and daring and breathing characters, and bold conceptions, and no more able to write good English than an Esquimaux squaw. I have both these interesting persons on my hands, and I must combine them, for their mutual good.

"I wonder what Gouger will say when I unfold my plan. Perhaps I had best not tell him. He actually came near threatening, to-day, to send a line to Miss Fern, warning her against me. He wouldn't have done it, though. Lawrence has a bark that is worse than his bite by a great deal. Yes, I'll bring these young folks together. I'll take them as Hermann does the rabbits, and press them gently but firmly into one. And then sha'n't we get a combination! And won't Mr. Lawrence Gouger hug himself when the product of their joint endeavor comes to him for a reading!"

The musier finished disrobing and donned his night robes, but it was a long time before he felt like slumber. He could think of nothing but his scheme. As he revolved it over in his mind, it took many new forms. At first Roseleaf was to be asked to rewrite the story that Miss Fern had offered Cutt & Slashem. And afterwards there must be an entirely new novel, conceived together and worked out slowly, using the best of what was brightest in both of them.

The last idea Mr. Weil had before he relapsed into unconsciousness contained two novels, worked out at the same time. Roseleaf was all right, if he could only get a glimpse of realism into his work. Miss Fern would have no trouble if her ideas could find a garb that suited them.

There would be a way to make them of service to each other, and the time to cross a bridge is always when you come to it. So thought Archie Weil, as he fell asleep.

In the morning he laughed to think of the description he had given to Shirley, in his offhand way, of "the perfect woman." It was a faithful list of Miss Millicent's charms, so far as they were apparent to him. Shirley had noted them down with great carefulness, and would be sure to notice how fully the authoress met the ideal he now had in mind. It only remained for the schemer to say something to Miss Fern that would suggest Roseleaf to her, whenever they were made acquainted.

It must be plain to the reader that Mr. Weil's principal intention in this whole matter was to dispose of the *ennui* which idleness brings even to its most adoring devotees. He had a fair fortune, accumulated by a father who had denied himself every luxury to amass it. Drifting to New York, he had found the vicinity of the Hoffman House very agreeable, and his companions, with the exception of Mr. Gouger, were of about as light views of life as himself. The critic was one of those strange exceptions with which most of us come in contact, where persons of entirely opposite tastes and inclinations become attached friends.

Breakfast was served so late to Mr. Weil that he had not finished that repast when the young novelist made his appearance. Seating himself on the side of the table that faced his friend, Mr. Roseleaf responded to the latter's inquiries in regard to his health by saying that he was quite well. Indeed, he looked it. His eye was bright, his cheek rosy. His attire showed just enough of a negligent quality to be attractive. There was an air about him such as is often associated with an artist of the pencil and brush.

"Never better in health," he said, "but very anxious to begin something definite in the way of work."

Mr. Weil smiled his most affable smile.

"What did I tell you to do, first?" he asked, playfully.

"To fall in love."

"Which you have not yet done!"

The young man shook his head.

"Good Heavens! And you have lost more than a week!"

Roseleaf colored more than ever.

"Isn't there something else--that I could--begin on?" he asked, humbly.

"I don't know of anything. Love is the alphabet of the novelist. You'd best go straight. Aren't there any eligible young women at your lodging house?"

The younger man thought a moment.

"No; only the chambermaid."

Mr. Weil sipped his coffee with a wise expression.

"It may come to that," he said, putting down the cup, "but we'll hope not. We will hope not. What's the matter with Central Park? There are five hundred nice girls there every afternoon."

"But I don't know them," said Roseleaf, desperately. "And--I have been there. Yesterday one of them looked at me and smiled. I walked toward her, and she slackened her speed. When I came within a few feet she almost stopped. Then--I could think of nothing to say to her, and I walked on, looking in the other direction."

Several breakfasters in the vicinity turned their heads to note the couple at the table, from which a laugh that could be heard all over the room came musically.

"Why didn't you say 'Good-morning?'"

"Yes! And she might have said 'Good-morning.' And then it would be my turn, and what could I have done?"

Mr. Weil folded up his napkin and laid it by his plate.

"You coward," he replied, affably, "you could have done a thousand things. You could have remarked that the day was fair, or that you wondered if it would rain. And you could have asked her to stroll over to a restaurant and take a little refreshment. Once opposite to her, the rest would have come fast enough."

The novelist took out a handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. It all seemed very easy the way Archie described it, but he was sure it would be very different in practice. How could he know, he demanded, that the young lady would go to the restaurant with him? She might have declined, and then he would have been in a worse position than ever.

"Declined!" echoed Archie. "Declined a lunch? Declined ice cream? Declined champagne frappé! Well, you *are* ignorant of the sex. My dear boy, it is evident that I shall have to introduce you to the leading lady of your company, and if you will be patient for a very few days, I hope to be able to do so."

Rousing himself with a show of genuine interest, Roseleaf inquired for further particulars.

"Listen," replied the other. "I expect, to-morrow evening, to spend a few hours in the company of one of the most charming members of her sex. She, like you, has an ambition to become a successful writer. Like you, also, she lacks some of the prime qualities that are needed for that end. It happens, however, that the things wanting are entirely different in each of your cases--that you will, if you choose, be able to supplement and perfect each other. I shall tell her that I know a young man of literary taste who will give her advice on the points in which she is deficient. With such an opening you will be at once on Easy street, and if you cannot fall in love

within forty-eight hours, I shall regard you as a case too hopeless to merit further attention at my hands."

The young man's cheek glowed with pleasure.

"That is more like it," he said. "When do you think I shall be able to meet this young lady?"

"Within a week or two, at the latest. I must sound her before I trust you with her, for she is nearly as much a stranger to me, so far, as to you. Of course there is no objection--quite the contrary--to your falling in love elsewhere in the meantime, if opportunity serves."

At this moment Mr. Weil called his companion's attention to a rather corpulent gentleman who had just entered the breakfast room and was stopping near the door to hold a brief conversation with some one he had met there.

"You see that fellow?" he remarked. "Wait a minute, and I will get him over here. If you ever want to put a real character into one of your stories you will only need to take his photograph. In actual life he is as dull as a rusty meat axe, but for literary purposes he would be a godsend."

Catching the eye of the person of whom he was speaking, Mr. Weil motioned to him to come to his part of the room, and as he approached arranged a chair for him invitingly.

"Mr. Boggs, I want to present a young friend of mine to you," said Archie, rising. "Mr. Walker Boggs--Mr. Shirley Roseleaf."

Mr. Boggs went through the usual ceremony, announcing that he was most happy, etc., in the perfunctory style that a million other men follow every day. Then he took the chair that was offered him, and gave an order for his breakfast to a waiter.

"Are you a New Yorker, Mr. Roseleaf?" he asked, when this important matter was disposed of.

"Mr. Roseleaf is staying here for the present," explained Mr. Weil. "He is a novelist by profession, and I tell him there is no better place to study the sensational than this vicinity."

The young man's color deepened. He doubted if it was right to introduce the subject in exactly these terms. Mr. Boggs' next question did not detract from his uneasiness.

"Excuse me--I am not altogether up in current literature, and I must ask what Mr. Roseleaf has written."

Mr. Weil helped his young friend out of this dilemma as well as he could.

"He has written nothing, as yet; at least nothing that has been printed," he said. "He is wise, I think, in laying a deep foundation for his romances, instead of rushing into print with the first thoughts that enter his head, as so many do, to their own subsequent regret and the distress of their readers. I want him to meet men and women who have known what life is by their own experiences. You ought to be worth something to a bright writer, Walker. You have had many an adventure in your day."

Mr. Walker Boggs shrugged his shoulders.

"In my 'day,' yes," he assented. "Enough to fill the Astor and Lenox libraries and leave enough for Charlie Dillingham and The American News Company. But that is nothing but history now. My 'day' is over and it will never return."

He paused and ran his right hand dejectedly across his vest in the vicinity of the waist band. Though he knew perfectly what Mr. Boggs referred to, Archie Weil wanted him to express it in his own words to Shirley.

"You wouldn't think," continued Mr. Boggs, after a pause which seemed filled with strange emotions, "that my figure was once the admiration of every lady who saw it, that they used to stop and gaze at me with eyes of positive envy. And now--look at this!"

He indicated his embonpoint again, and shook his head wrathfully.

"It is simply damnable," he continued, as neither of the others thought best to interrupt him. "When I was twenty-four I had a reputation that was as wide as the continent. When I walked down Broadway you would have supposed a procession was passing, the crowds gathered in such numbers. If it was mentioned that I would spend a week at Saratoga or Newport, the hotels had not a room to spare while I remained. The next year I married, and as one of the fashion journals put it, two thousand women went into mourning. For a decade I devoted myself entirely to my wife and to business. I made some money, and kept out of the public eye. Then my wife died, and I retired from the firm with which I had been connected. The next twelve months dragged terribly. I did not know what to do. Finally I decided that there was but one course open to me. I must resume again the position I had vacated as a leader of fashion."

Mr. Weil bowed, as if to say that this was a very natural and praiseworthy conclusion; precisely as if he had not heard the story told in substantially the same way a dozen times before. He was watching Roseleaf's interested expression and had difficulty in repressing an inclination to laugh aloud.

"I sought out the best tailor in the city," continued Mr. Boggs. "I went to the most fashionable hair dresser. I spent considerable time in selecting hats, cravats and gloves. When all was ready I took a stroll, as I had done in the old days, from Fiftieth street, down Fifth Avenue and Broadway to Union Square. I met a few acquaintances who stared at me slightly, but did not act in the least impressed. The women merely glanced up and glanced away again. What was the matter? I went home and took a long survey of myself in the mirror, a cheval glass that showed me from crown to toe. My costume was perfect. There was not a wrinkle in my face--this was several years ago, remember. There was not a gray hair in my head then--there are

a few now, I admit. 'What is it?' I asked myself a hundred times as I stood there, studying out the cursed problem. My tie was all right, my shirt front of the latest cut, my watch chain straight from Tiffany's, my--ah! I saw it all in a moment!"

Roseleaf, who did not see it even yet, wore such an astonished expression that Mr. Weil had to stuff his napkin into his mouth to prevent an explosion.

"It was this devilish abdomen!" said Mr. Boggs, slapping that portion of his frame as if he had a special grudge against it and would be glad if he could hit it hard enough to bring it to a realizing sense of its turpitude. "My figure had gone to the devil! It was not as large as it is now, but it was large enough to cook my gruel. My waist had increased so gradually that I had never noticed it. I got a tape and took its measure. Forty-two inches, sir! The jig was up. With a heart as young as ever, with a face as good and a purse able to supply all reasonable demands, I was knocked out of the race on the first round by this adipose tissue that no ingenuity could hope to conceal!"

Mr. Weil could wait no longer. His musical laugh rang out over the room.

"Let this be a warning to you, Shirley," he said, "to wear corsets."

"It is no joke," was the indignant comment of Mr. Walker Boggs, as he proceeded to add to his rotundity by devouring the hearty breakfast that the waiter had just brought him. "I am left like a marooned sailor on the sea of life. The only occupation that could have entertained me is gone. It is no time to enter business again, I couldn't have selected a wiser one to leave it. I don't want to marry, once was enough of that. The only women I can attract are those commercially inclined females that any other man could have as well as I. What is the result? My life is ruined. I take no pleasure in anything. I eat, walk about, go to a play, sleep. A *pig* could do as much; and a pig would not have these memories to haunt him, these recollections of a time so different that I am almost driven wild."

Roseleaf felt a sincere pity for the unfortunate gentleman, and did not see the slightest element of humor in his melancholy recital. But Archie Weil could not be restrained.

"You're right about that pig business," he remarked. "You recall the incident in Mother Goose, where--

'A little pig found a fifty dollar note, And purchased a hat and a very fine coat.'

"There are strange parallels in history."

Mr. Boggs would have replied to this remark in the terms it deserved had he not been too much engaged at the moment in masticating a particularly fine chop. As it was he growled over the meat like a mastiff in bad humor.

"Are there no remedies for excessive accumulation of fat in the abdominal region?" asked Weil, taking his advantage. "It seems to me I have read advertisements of them in the newspapers."

"Remedies!" retorted the other, having swallowed the food and supplemented it with a glass of ale. "There are a thousand, and I have tried them all. I have taken things by the gross. I have paid money to every quack I could find. For awhile I starved myself so nearly to death that I went to making my will. And every day I grew stouter. I don't know what I measure now, and I don't care. A few fathoms more or less, doesn't count, when one falls from a steamer in midocean."

Mr. Weil took occasion to say that there was no need for this extreme discouragement. A little coin in the hand, or a new diamond ring, would still bring youth and beauty to his disconsolate friend.

"That's just it," retorted Boggs. "It's the contrast that's killing me. The only women who would look at me to-day are mercenary ones that wouldn't care if I was black as Othello or big as George IV. Why, I could show you a trunkful of letters, written me by the finest women in this country, when I

was at my best. They breathe but one thing--love, love, love! I lived on it! It was the air that kept my lungs in motion. And I thought to go back to it so easily! *Ah!*"

Mr. Boggs commenced upon his fourth chop and emptied the last of the quart bottle into his glass.

"Well, I'm sorry for you," said Weil. "I think the times must have changed, as well as yourself, though. Now, here's a young fellow, with all the qualifications of face, figure and address that you once had, and he claims to be unable to make the acquaintance of a single interesting woman between Brooklyn Bridge and Spuyten Duyvil."

The heavy eyes of Mr. Walker Boggs rested upon the youthful face opposite to him. Under the scrutiny to which he was subjected Roseleaf reddened, in the way he had. He had never looked more handsome.

"This is evidently a jest of yours," said Boggs, turning to Mr. Weil.

"Not in the least, I assure you."

"Then I say he can do what he likes, and I know it," replied the stout man. "If I had his form I'd have to ask the police to clear the way for me. I have seen circulation impeded in front of this very hotel because I was coming out to take my carriage. If he won't look at them, why, of course, the women can't do it all, but it lies with him."

Roseleaf's eyes glistened with a strange mixture of hope and fear. He did not think he would care to be in such great demand as that, but he dearly wished to break through the iron bars that enclosed him. He glanced in a glass that paneled the wall near by. He was good-looking enough, it was no vanity to say so. What he lacked was confidence.

"He is afraid of them, that's his trouble," smiled Weil. "We will cure him of that, and when he gets to know women as they are he will give us a novel that will set all creation by the ears. Gouger--you know Gouger--says he

writes the purest English. All he needs is a taste of life."

To this Mr. Boggs gave his unqualified assent. And he added that if he could be of any service in the matter he would only be too glad.

"We thank you for the offer, and may be able later to make use of it," said Mr. Weil. "And now good-morning, for we have important business to attend to."

Roseleaf looked long and earnestly at the person they were leaving. He seemed to him a very ordinary individual. If such a man had won the love of scores of beautiful women, surely he himself could gain the affections of one. When he stood with Weil in front of the hotel, by which an unrivaled procession of ladies and gentleman was already beginning to pass, though it was only eleven o'clock, he felt much encouraged.

"They are looking at you," whispered Archie, "plenty of them. Did you see those two girls in pink in that landau? Why, they nearly broke their necks to get the last glimpse of you. There is another lady who would stop if you asked her, pretty as any of them, though she must be nearly thirty. Your eyes are not open. Ah, here is something better! In that carriage, with the Titian tresses!"

It was Miss Millicent Fern, and she bowed to Mr. Weil. Then her bright eyes lit up with a new lustre as they fell upon his companion.

CHAPTER V.

STUDYING MISS MILLICENT.

When Mr. Weil made his appearance at the residence of Mr. Wilton Fern, the door was opened for him by a young negro of such superb proportions that the caller could not help observing him with admiration. He thought he had never seen a man more perfectly formed. The face, though too dark to suggest the least admixture of Caucasian blood, was well featured. The lips were not thick nor was the nose flat, as is the case with so many of the African race. The voice, as the visitor heard it, was by no means unpleasant. Mr. Weil could not imagine a better model for an ebony statue than this butler, or footman, or whatever position, perhaps both, he might be engaged to fill.

"Yes, sir, Miss Millicent is in, and she is expecting you," said the negro, in his pleasant and strong tones. "Let me take your hat and stick. Now, sir, this way."

Miss Fern came in a few moments to the parlor, where Archie was left, and greeted him most cordially.

"There is a sitting-room on the next floor," she said, "where we shall not be disturbed. I have given Hannibal orders to admit no one, saying that we shall want the evening entirely to ourselves."

"Hannibal?" repeated the visitor. "Is that the name of the remarkable individual who received me just now?"

"Yes," said Miss Fern, rather coldly. "Though I do not know why you call him 'remarkable.'"

"He is so tall, so grand, so entirely overpowering," explained Mr. Weil. "One would think he might be the son of an African king. I never saw a black man that gave me such an impression of force and power."

Millicent elevated her eyebrows a little, as if annoyed at these expressions. She answered, still frigidly, that she had noticed nothing unusual about Hannibal. She did not believe she had looked closely enough at his face to be able to identify him in a court.

"He would make a fine character for a novel," said Mr. Weil, as they walked together up the broad staircase. "I could almost write one myself, around such a personality."

The young lady looked disgusted.

"A negro servant!" she exclaimed. "What kind of a novel could you write with such a central figure?"

"Perhaps I should not put him in the centre," laughed Archie, determined to win her good nature. "Every story needs lights and shades. You can't deny that he would cast a magnificent shadow."

The humor of this observation struck Miss Fern and she joined mildly in her companion's mirth. Then she remarked that the central figure of a novel--the main thing in it--to her mind, should be a being who could be given the attributes of beauty and grace. The minor characters were of less account, and would come into existence almost of their own accord.

"And now, before we do anything more," she said, "I want you to tell me about that excessively handsome young man that I saw with you yesterday in Madison Square."

Weil was delighted at this introduction of his young friend. He began a most flattering account of Shirley Roseleaf, describing him as a genuine paragon among men, both in talent and goodness. He drew heavily on his imagination as he proceeded, feeling that he was "in for it," and might as well do his best at once. And he could see the cheek of the young listener taking on a new and more enticing color as he went farther and farther into his subject.

"If I have to rearrange my novel--the one Mr. Gouger rejected--I shall draw my hero after that model," she cried, when he paused for breath. "I never saw a man who came so near my ideal."

"But--you would have to alter your hero's character, in that case?" he said. "I have read your MSS., and your description does not tally with my young friend at all."

Miss Fern reddened.

"You don't mean to claim, do you," she replied, "that physical beauty and moral goodness always go hand in hand?"

"They should," he answered, in a tone that was meant to be impressive.

"Ah, that is another question! *Do* they? that is all the novelist needs to know. Did you ever read Ouida's 'Sigma?' There are the two sisters, one as pure as can be, the other quite the opposite, and the beauty belongs to the depraved one. I know Oscar Wilde takes a different view in 'Dorian Grey,' but he is wrong. I am sure that the worst man or woman in the world--reckoning by what are called the 'amiable vices'--might be the most lovely to look upon, the most delightful to associate with. Eve found the serpent attractive, remember."

Where did she learn all these things? Weil looked at her with increasing astonishment. "Amiable vices." He liked the appellation.

"Perhaps you are right," he assented, as if slowly convinced. "If you wish to be acquainted with Mr. Roseleaf, I will bring him here with pleasure. My only fear is that he will not interest you. He seems almost too perfect for earth. Think of a young man who knows nothing of women, who says he has no idea what it is to be in love, who does not understand why the ladies who pass down Fifth Avenue turn their heads to look at him! He, like yourself, is a novelist, but his characters are beautiful images that lack life. He carves marble figures and attempts to palm them off as flesh and blood. He really thinks they *are*, because he has never known the difference. If

you could take him, Miss Fern, and teach him what love really is--"

The young lady blushed more than before.

"I--" she stammered.

"In a strictly literary way," he explained. "But," he added, thinking he was getting upon the edge of a quicksand, "we must not forget the object of my visit."

He took the parcel containing her MSS. that he had obtained from Mr. Gouger, and began to untie the string. Manlike he soon had it in a hard knot, and Miss Millicent, coming to his rescue, her young hands touched his and made his heart beat faster.

"There," she said, when the knot had given way to their joint endeavors. "It is all right, now. But, before we begin on this, tell me a little more about Mr. Roseleaf. What has he written? Where was it published? I will send to-morrow morning and buy a copy."

Her enthusiasm was agreeable under the circumstances, but the truth had to be explained to her.

"What he has written I will let you see, one of these days," he replied. "As for publishing, he ran upon the same rock that you did--that of Mr. Lawrence Gouger."

The beautiful eyes opened wider.

"So he rejected his work, too! And yet you say that it was well done?"

"Exquisitely. Shirley's lines are as symmetrical as his face and figure. His people are dead, that is all the trouble. Gouger scented the difficulty under which he labors, in a moment. 'Go and fall in love!' he said to him, 'and you will write a story at which the world will marvel!'"

Miss Fern arranged one of her locks of Titian red that had fallen down.

"And hasn't he taken the advice?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Not yet," smiled the other. "He says, like a very child, that 'he cannot find any one to love.' I walked up the avenue with him to-day, and afterwards rode in the Park. There were hundreds of the prettiest creatures, all looking their eyes out at him. And he hadn't the courage to return one glance, not one. Ah, Miss Fern, it will be genuine love with Shirley Roseleaf, if any. The imitations one finds in the fashionable world will never answer for him."

The young lady breathed a gentle sigh, as her thoughts dwelt on the handsome figure she had seen in front of the Hoffman House.

"You may bring him here--yes, I should be glad to have you," she said, slowly. "But I must ask one favor; do not tell him what I said so thoughtlessly about his being my ideal. Let me talk with him on fair terms. It may be, as you suggest, that we shall be of advantage to each other. When can you arrange it?"

"Almost any day," smiled Weil. "I will let you know, by mail or otherwise. And now, this story of yours," he added, thinking it a shrewd plan to divert her attention from the other matter while it was still warm in her mind. "Though I have read it through, and think I understand it fairly well, I am all the more anxious to hear it from your lips. You will put into the text new meanings, I have no doubt, that have escaped my observation."

Miss Fern flushed pleasantly and inquired with a show of anxiety whether Mr. Weil had found its construction as bad as his friend, Mr. Gouger, had intimated.

"To be perfectly honest, it might be improved," he replied. "But the germ is there, Miss Fern--that necessary thing for a good novel--an interest that will hold the reader in spite of himself. I disagree with Lawrence in his essential point. I am sure that a good writer of English with a taste for fiction could

make all the necessary alterations without in the least detracting from the value of the story. For instance, I believe if Mr. Roseleaf would take hold of it I could guarantee to get you a publisher this winter."

"And do you think he would?" she cried.

"I think so."

The authoress was so delighted with this announcement that she conquered the slight wound to her pride. It would be herself still who had drawn the picture, who had put the coloring into it; all that the other would have to do might be described as varnishing. She took up the first sheet of her writing, and turned up an oil lamp that stood upon the table at her elbow, the better to see the lines.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

"Quite ready," smiled Mr. Weil.

In a voice that trembled a little, and yet not unpleasantly to the listener, Miss Fern began to read her manuscript. The opening chapter introduced the heroine and two gentlemen, either one of whom might be the hero. As the book is now so well known it is needless to transfer its features to these pages.

Presently the authoress paused and seemed to wait for her guest's criticism.

"That is one chapter," she said.

"Yes. I remember. And the second one is where Algernon begins to disclose a very little of his true nature. Shall we not have that now?"

"As you like. I thought perhaps you would give me advice as we proceeded, some fault-finding here and there, a suggestion of alterations."

He shook his head affably.

"Not yet," he answered. "Up to this point I see nothing that requires condemnation."

"Nor praise, perhaps?" she said, in a low tone.

"That might be true, also," he replied. "The first chapter of a novel is only the laying of the cloth and the placing of a few dishes. The viands that form the meal are still in the kitchen."

She smiled at the simile.

"But even the laying of the cloth is important," she said.

"Your cloth is laid most admirably," he answered. "And now we will have the castor, which in this case, I believe, contains a certain quantity of mustard and red pepper."

At this she laughed the more, and glanced through a few of the sheets in her hands before she spoke again.

"Did you form any opinion about--about *me*--from this story?" she asked, constrainedly. "Did you, in brief, think it had taken a bold girl to write it?"

He hesitated a moment.

"Yes," he said, at last. "A bold girl, a daring girl, a brave girl. Not one, however, whose own conduct would necessarily be like that of the woman she has delineated."

She was so pleased that she put down the MSS. and leaned toward him with both hands clasped together.

"You are very, very kind," she said, impressively.

"No, merely truthful," he replied. "With your permission I want to retain that last quality in all my conversations with you. When you ask me a

question I wish to be perfectly free to answer according to my honest convictions."

"It is what I especially desire," she said, brightening. "No one able to judge has heard anything of this story except your friend, Mr. Gouger. I know it is bold, sometimes I think it is brazen. I can conceive that there are excellent people who would say it never should have been written. To my mind, the moral I have drawn more than justifies the plainness of my speech. You can tell better than I where I have overstepped the proper bounds, if there be such places. You are, of course, a man of the world--"

The protesting expression on the face of her companion arrested her at this point.

"That depends on what you mean by 'a man of the world?'"

"It is a common expression."

"And has many definitions. Before I plead guilty to it, I want to know just how much you intend by it."

Miss Fern put down the page she had taken up and a puzzled look crossed her pretty face.

"You make it hard for me to explain myself," she said. "I suppose I meant--"

"Now, be as honest as you asked me to be," he interrupted.

"Well, then, I suppose you are a man like--like other men."

"But there are many kinds of other men."

The young lady tried several times to make herself clearer, and then asked, with a very pathetic pout, that she might be permitted to proceed with her reading, as the hour was growing later. It was not a very important point,

any way, she said.

"I cannot entirely agree with you," replied Archie. "If you are to be a writer of fiction, you should not consider any time wasted which informs you in reference to your fellow creatures. It is from them that you must draw your inspiration; it is their figures you must put, correctly or incorrectly, on your canvas. Don't understand me as dictating to you, my dear Miss Fern. I only wish, as long as you have referred to me, to know of what I am accused."

To this Miss Fern answered, with many pauses, that she had not intended to accuse her visitor of anything. And once more--with evident distress--she begged to be permitted to drop the matter and return to her reading.

"Very well," he assented, thinking he had annoyed her as much as was advisable for the present. "As they say in parliamentary bodies, we will lay the question on the table, from which it can be taken at some more fitting time. I am as anxious as you can be to get into Chapter II."

She read this chapter to the end, and paused a few seconds to see if he had any comments to make, but he shook his head without breaking silence, and she went on with the story. He pursued the same plan till the end of the fifth chapter.

"It is interesting, exciting and true," he remarked, referring to the closing scene. "And I cannot help feeling arise in my brain the question that Mr. Gouger put when he read it: How could a young, innocent girl like you depict that situation with such absolute fidelity."

He had come to the point with a vengeance. But to Miss Fern his manner was far more agreeable than if he had approached it by stealth, or in an insinuating way. She had anticipated something of the sort and had tried to prepare herself to meet it.

"Does not nature teach us some things?" she asked, speaking straightforwardly, though her color heightened in spite of her efforts. "Given a certain condition, an intelligent mind can prophesy results."

He shook his head in mild disagreement with her.

"Gouger is an expert, and he denies this, as a regular rule, at least. You should have heard him argue it with Roseleaf. 'Either throw yourself into a love affair,' he said, 'or never try to depict one.' Excuse me, Miss Fern, you bade me be frank--"

She assented, with a grave nod of her shapely head.

"You may have been in love--I do not ask you whether you have or not--but you cannot have known personally of the sort of love that you have depicted in these pages. I call it little less than miraculous that you should draw the scene so accurately."

She colored again, this time partly with pleasure, for she was very susceptible to compliments.

"Perhaps your statement may explain to you," she said, pointedly, "what I meant a few minutes ago by calling you 'a man of the world.' You recognize at a glance what I had to construct from my imagination."

Archie Weil's face changed as he realized how deftly he had been caught. He had meant to pretend to this girl that he was more than usually ignorant of the nether side of life.

"Don't think too badly of me because I happen to know what is clear to every man," he said, impressively.

"To every one?" she answered. "To your friend, Mr. Roseleaf?"

"Ah! He is an exception to all rules. And yet, Gouger says he can never write a successful book till he is more conversant with life than he is at present."

She looked troubled.

"With life?" she echoed. "With sin, do you mean?"

"With the ordinary things that men know, and that most of them at some time experience."

Her bright eyes were temporarily clouded.

"What a pity!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he said, for it was his humor to agree with her. "It is a pity."

There was a pause of a minute, and then she asked if she had read enough for one evening. He answered that as it was now past ten o'clock it would not be easy to get much farther and that he would come again whenever she chose to set the time.

"You do not say much about my work," she said, anxiously, as he prepared to go.

"Silence is approval," he responded. "I can talk it over with you better when you have reached the end. I have things to say, and I shall not hesitate to say them then."

"When is it most convenient to you to come?" she inquired.

"Any time," he answered. "I don't do much that is really useful. But wait till you see Shirley. He will atone for the shortcomings you find in me."

She repeated the word "Shirley," as if to test its sound.

"You are your father's only child, are you not?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"No. I have a sister, Daisy, a little younger than I."

"And has she a literary turn, also?"

"Not in the least."

Archie arose, and Miss Millicent accompanied him to the front door. The tall negro came to open the portal, but Miss Fern told him, with the same quality of dislike in her tone which Weil had noticed before, that he need not wait.

"He is really a magnificent piece of humanity," said Archie, when the man had disappeared. "I never saw anything quite like him."

"You admire negroes, then?" said the young lady, almost impolitely.

"I like representatives of every race," he answered, as if not noticing her. "There are interesting specimens in all. I number among my acquaintances several Chinamen, a Moor, a Mexican, Jews, Portuguese and Russians innumerable. If that fellow was not in your employ I would engage him to-morrow, merely as a study."

Miss Fern took the hand he held out to her and set the next meeting for Saturday evening. Then she said:

"If you want Hannibal, perhaps papa would oblige you. I certainly would do all I could to persuade him."

CHAPTER VI.

"HOW THE WOMEN STARE!"

The next day Archie Weil lunched with Lawrence Gouger. He wanted to talk with his friend about the young author and authoress. Gouger listened with interest to the story he had to relate, and nodded approval when it appeared that Archie had behaved admirably thus far in relation to Miss Millicent.

"Do you know anything about Mr. Fern?" he asked, when the other had reached a period.

"Nothing."

"Well, neither did I, a week ago, but I have taken pains to inform myself. He is a highly respectable elderly party, who deals in wool. He married a very beautiful lady, who has now been dead eight or ten years and he lives altogether in the society of his two daughters. If you succeed in getting Millicent's book on the counters you will earn his everlasting gratitude. They say he is not literary enough himself to be a judge of its merits, and if she has fifty copies to present to the family friends it will probably be all he will ask."

Mr. Weil uttered a low whistle.

"I don't know what the family friends will say of it," he replied, "but I call it pretty warm stuff. If the list includes many prudes they will hardly thank the girl for sending such a firebrand into their houses."

"Pshaw!" said Gouger. "The world is getting used to that sort of thing, and they won't mind it a bit. Besides, they will be so lost in admiration of their cousin's name on the cover that they will think of nothing else. What did you make out of her? Is she as innocent as I predicted?"

Archie poured out a glass of Bass' ale and sipped it slowly.

"Quite," he said, as he put it down on the table. "And she's no dunce, either." He went on to tell of the trap he had fallen into. "I'm dying with impatience to get her and Roseleaf together. They'd make an idealic couple."

Mr. Gouger inquired what he was waiting for.

"Oh, I want to do the thing right," said Weil. "I want to learn her as thoroughly as I can, before I bring him upon the stage. It will take three or four evenings more to hear the rest of her novel, and another to discuss it. I shall get around to him in about a fortnight, at the rate things are going. He will keep. What do you suppose he is doing now? Writing poetry! He sent a piece a few days ago to the *Century*, and they accepted it."

"He will be gray when it appears," said the critic. "It takes a long time for anything to see the light in that publication."

"But in this case an exception will be made," said Weil. "They have assured him that it will come out in their very next issue. He will be so proud to see his name in print that I expect to find difficulty in holding him back. A poet who appears in the *Century* has certainly stepped a little higher on the ladder."

The critic agreed to this, and remarked that such a man as Roseleaf should give his whole attention to poetry.

"Wait!" cried Archie. "Give him time. See him after he has fallen head over ears in love with charming Millicent Fern. There is something in him, I feel sure, and between that dear girl and myself we will bring it out.

By-the-way, there is a character I want you to meet," he added, as Mr. Walker Boggs came into the room. "You have never had the pleasure, I think, though you have heard me speak of him."

Mr. Boggs had his attention attracted by a waiter who was sent for the purpose and came with great willingness to occupy a seat with Mr. Weil and his friend.

"We were talking of a New York merchant just now," said Archie, when the introductions were over, "and it occurs to me that you, who know almost everybody, may have some knowledge of him. He is in the wool business, I hear, and I think you once told me you had done something in that way. His name is Wilton Fern, and he lives at Midlands."

"Do I know anything about him?" echoed Mr. Boggs. "I should say so. He was my partner for seven years, and I still have a little stake left in the concern, on which I am drawing interest."

Mr. Weil showed his astonishment at this statement. What a very small world it was, after all! Then, after pledging his friend not to mention that he had ever discussed the matter with him, he went guardedly into the particulars of Miss Millicent's book, and of his having called at the house for the purpose of passing judgment upon it.

"I didn't know that was in your line," replied Boggs.

"Well, it was this way," answered Archie. "Mr. Gouger's decision didn't exactly suit the young lady, as it was not very favorable. Mine will be quite to her taste, as I view her abilities in a more favorable light. Now tell us all about the family, as the only one of them I have met is Miss Millicent. Why, this is a regular find, old man! You should have told me a week ago that you possessed all this information that I have been aching to get hold of."

Thus adjured, Mr. Boggs entered upon his story. From which it appeared that he knew the Ferns, root and branch, and had dined with them dozens of times.

"What sort of a chap is the pater?" asked Weil.

"A very well-kept man of nearly seventy, with a great deal of what is called 'breeding' in his manner, and a face like the portrait of a French marquis cut out of a seventeenth century frame. He doesn't look like a business man at all, and between ourselves he's not much of a one. All the money he ever

made--saving my apparent egotism--was when I was in the concern. I've heard he's got a big mortgage on his residence and is going down hill generally. Too bad; nice fellow; sorry for him; such is life."

Archie asked if Boggs would do him a personal and particular favor, if it would not cause him much trouble; and on being answered in the affirmative, said he would esteem it a great honor if he could be introduced to Mr. Fern by that gentleman's former business associate.

"I suppose I shall run across him at Midlands, some evening," he said, "and get one of those presentations that are the most aggravating things in the world. I don't want that to happen, and the best way, to use an elegant phrase, is to take the bull by the horns, or in this case, the sheep by the tail. Will you make an accidental call on him to-morrow afternoon and let me be of the party?"

Mr. Boggs responded that he would be delighted. And this matter being settled, all parties could give more direct attention to their lunch than they had been doing for the preceding ten minutes.

"You must have heard of my friend Boggs, in the days when he was a figure on the streets of this town," said Weil, presently, returning to what he knew was the favorite subject of that personage. "You've lived here for twenty years, and of course the name of Walker Boggs is familiar to you."

Mr. Gouger looked a good counterfeit of complete mystification for some seconds, and then a gleam as of sudden recollection shot across his face.

"Certainly, certainly!" he said. "Mr. Boggs was what is popularly known as a lady killer, if I am not mistaken. You got married, did you not, Mr. Boggs, some ten or eleven years ago?"

The party addressed acknowledged the practical correctness of the date.

"Why, it comes back as plain as day," said the critic. "The *Herald* had a page about you, including your portrait and some verses by a well known

poet. It said your marriage had cast a gloom over Manhattan Island and some of the up-river counties."

Mr. Boggs gloomily nodded, to show that the statement was true. Then he touched his most rotund portion with a significant look.

"I'm a widower now," he said, "and nothing but this--*this*--stands in my way. As Shakespeare says, 'Tis not as deep as a well, nor as wide as a church door, but--' The ladies never look at me now, and all on account of this d--d flesh, which hangs like a millstone around my neck."

Cutt & Slashem's critic, ignoring the peculiar character of the metaphor used, remarked politely that he thought no lady of sense would put great stress on such an insignificant matter.

"Insignificant!" echoed Boggs. "I'll bet it's fifty inches around, come! And it's not the 'ladies of sense' I'm after. Quite the contrary."

One of Archie Weil's explosive laughs followed this statement, which caused an expression of mild injury to settle over the countenance of Mr. Boggs.

"You're getting on toward forty, and you ought to quit," said Weil. "Confound the women! Let them go."

"That's well enough to talk about," replied Boggs, gruffly. "How would you like to follow your own advice?"

Weil uttered an exclamation.

"I? I have precious little to do with them, I assure you. For a man of my correct habits I have the worst name of any one I know. Everybody insinuates things about me, and they can prove nothing."

"We'll ask Isaac Leveson about that," sneered Boggs. "By-the-way, that wouldn't be a bad place to take young Roseleaf to, when you get to

instructing him in earnest. I met the young fellow on the avenue last night and walked around with him for a couple of hours. He's a darling!"

"Roseleaf?" cried both the other gentlemen, in one breath.

"To be sure. How the women stared at him! I couldn't blame them; his waist isn't over thirty, and he's as handsome as--as I was at his age. I told him he could have all the loveliness in New York at his feet, if he liked."

Weil smiled significantly at Gouger.

"What did he reply to that?" he asked.

"Oh, he had an ideal in his head, and none of those we saw quite came up to it; for I did get him to raise his eyes and look at the prettiest ones. I drew out of him slowly that he would have nothing to do with a girl unless she had red hair; that--"

Mr. Weil uttered a laugh so hearty that it attracted the attention of everybody in the room. Mr. Boggs paused to inquire the cause of this outbreak, but Archie assured him that something entirely out of the present discussion had just occurred to him, which was to blame for his impoliteness.

"A girl must have *Titian* hair," repeated Mr. Boggs, accepting the explanation, "or he would not consider her. He ruled out all the striking blondes and brunettes, saying that he liked only those of a medium shade. We came across one that answered these descriptions, an exquisite little creature who looked as if she would swallow him could she get the chance. And then there came out another idea. He would not think of this fairy because she was so short. 'I want a woman five feet, four inches tall,' he said, as if the article could be made to order, in case the size did not happen to be in stock. Then, would you believe it, he found a girl embracing every attribute he had mentioned. Her hair was just the right shade, her height must have hit the mark exactly, her complexion was medium. But no. She was too heavy. She would weigh a hundred and forty-five, he said, quite

twenty pounds too much. If we had found a girl that filled all his description he would have invented something new to bar her out of the race."

Mr. Weil remarked that he was not so sure of Roseleaf's insincerity. He believed the right woman would yet be discovered, and that a case of the most intense affection would then spontaneously develop.

"In fact," he added, "I have the identical creature in mind. It is clear to us--to myself and Mr. Gouger here--that Shirley will never write a thrilling romance till he has fallen wildly, passionately in love."

Mr. Boggs smiled slightly, and then sobered again.

"Shall you have him marry, also?" he inquired, pointedly.

"Why not?"

"Because it will finish him; that's why. The romance in a modern marriage lasts six weeks. At the end of that time he will be useless for literary purposes, or anything else."

Mr. Weil shook his head in opposition to this rash statement.

"My theory is," said he, "that a novelist should know everything. To write of love he should have been in love; to tell of marriage he should have had a wife--a real one, no mere imitation; to talk of fatherhood intelligently he should become a father. How can he know his subjects otherwise?"

The stout man smiled significantly.

"And if he wishes to write of murder, he must kill some one. And if he wants to depict the sensations of a robber he must take a pistol and ask people to stand, on the highway."

"Now you are becoming absurd," said Archie.

"No more than you," said Boggs. "You go too far, and you will find it out. Let your novelist fall in love. That will do him good. But don't let him marry, or you will lose him, mark my word. Let him contemplate matrimony at a distance. Let him reflect on the glory of seeing his children about his knees. So far, so good. But when you have shelved him with a wife of the present era, when you have kept him up nights for a month with a baby that screams--his literary capacity will be gone. Make no mistake!"

Mr. Weil, half convinced, and much surprised to hear such wisdom from this unexpected source, made an effort to maintain his ground.

"Nearly all the modern novelists *are* married," he remarked.

"Yes, and nice stuff they write, don't they? Namby-pamby, silly-billy stories, misleading in every line! They are the most unsafe pilots on the shores of human life. They start, without exception, from false premises. Their chart is wrong, their compass unreliable, their reckoning ridiculous from beginning to end. Where did you ever see a bit of real life that resembled these abortions? Do lovers usually fall on their knees when they propose? Is the modern girl an idiot, knowing less of the facts of nature than an oyster? Is the conversation between men and women filled exclusively with twaddle? You would think so, from reading these books; and why? They are written by married people, most of them, people who don't dare step over the line of the commonplace any more than a woman would dare order her dressmaker to put pockets in her gown!"

Archie looked at Mr. Gouger, who nodded a partial approval of these statements. Mr. Boggs betook himself with more interest to his chops. And the other two gentlemen, remarking that time pressed, bade him good-by for the day.

"I see you agree with him that I shouldn't marry Roseleaf?" said Archie, with a rising inflection.

"There is certainly point in what he says," replied Mr. Gouger.

"But--confound it! With the boy's disposition, it will be a delicate business," retorted Weil. "I don't know as I can carry him to the point of passionate love for pretty Miss Fern, and then shut off the steam when it suits me."

This matter was discussed for the next ten minutes, as the friends walked along toward the office of Cutt & Slashem.

"I think you are foolish to delay so long introducing him to her," said Gouger, finally. "I don't see that you are making any progress whatever."

"Ah, but I am," replied Weil. "I am making both of them more and more anxious for the meeting. Shirley walks the street feverishly impatient, and I have no doubt mutters her name in his dreams. Millicent talks about her ideal of manly beauty. When they get together failure will be impossible."

Mr. Gouger laughed at the idea that Roseleaf was "feverishly impatient" to meet any girl, and ventured to predict that the young man would have to be put in irons to get him to the residence of the Ferns when the time came; or at least to keep him there.

"Just the point I am working on," replied Weil. "Under ordinary circumstances I would have to handcuff his wrists to mine, but I am making such a strong impression on his imagination that he is crazy to go. And once she gets him under her influence--I tell you, Lawrence, she is no ordinary girl."

"She certainly does not write like one," smiled the critic, "either in her subject or her English. You may make something of him--I rather think you will--but not of her. Her ideas are wild, and her realism a little too pronounced even for the present age."

"She has truth on her side, you admit," said Archie.

"Yes, to a remarkable degree."

"Well, that ought to be something, if Boggs' estimate of the modern liar is correct. Shirley will help her to style, give her his own, if necessary. I am going to land both of these fish, if only to spite you, Lawrence. You tossed them away with that fine contempt of yours, and you will weep hot tears for it before you die."

At the door of Cutt & Slashem's they met the two members of that firm, who paused to say a word to Mr. Gouger. They were anxious for a new book to bring out as soon as possible, and were regretting with him that nothing worth publishing seemed to present itself.

"You may strain matters, it necessary," said Mr. Cutt. "We can't keep up on reprints forever. I hope you made no mistake in rejecting that book of Mrs. Hotbox. I hear it is selling well."

Mr. Gouger's face was, as ever, immovable before his employers.

"What 'Fire and Brimstone?'" he inquired. "The authorities seized the entire edition this morning."

Mr. Cutt looked at Mr. Slashem, with a startled expression.

"In that case, I am glad we escaped it," he said. "We shouldn't like that sort of an affair, of course."

Mr. Weil, who knew both the gentlemen well, inquired what they thought of Mrs. Hotbox's production.

"I have never seen it," said Mr. Slashem.

"Nor I," said Mr. Cutt.

The partners disappeared into the counting-room, where they had an interview with a binder who had offered to do their work at one-tenth of a cent a hundred copies less than the concern with which they were then dealing. Archie said good-by to Gouger, and went off to find Roseleaf, with

whom he had engaged to take, later in the day, a ride through the Park.

"How soon am I to see your paragon?" sighed the young man, as they were making the grand round of that famous drive.

"Within a week, I hope. Are you getting uneasy?"

"I am getting lonesome," was the gloomy reply. "And I want to begin work."

"Well, it will soon pass now. To-morrow evening I am to hear another installment of her novel. Two more sittings after that will finish it, I should say. And the next thing will be--you. But have you seen no one else in all this time that you care for?"

The young man looked aimlessly at the fleecy clouds that hung low on the horizon.

"No," he answered.

"And you think you are ready for a passionate affection, if the right person is found?"

"I will try," he said, simply.

Mr. Weil roused himself and touched his horse with the whip.

"Try!" he echoed. "You will not have to try. She will carry you off your feet, at the first go. Shirley, I have found you a superb woman, that you *must* love. All I want to feel sure of is, that you can control yourself enough to behave in a reasonable manner."

Roseleaf looked up inquiringly.

"She belongs to an eminently respectable family," explained Archie. "Her father is a gentleman of the most honorable type. She has a young sister,

who--"

Roseleaf, slow at all times, had at last begun to comprehend.

"You surely don't think--" he began.

"Ah, that is the question! A novelist must learn so very much--a novelist who is to depict the truth, as you are to do. Where should he stop? What experience should he refuse, provided it may be utilized in his work? A responsibility that is no light one will rest on me, my dear boy, when I have introduced you to this family, and left you to your own devices."

Roseleaf's eyes opened wider at these mysterious suggestions, but he did not like to make any more inquiries. Weil changed the conversation, calling attention to the women they met, who turned their handsome heads to look at the young man, as their equipages almost touched his.

"What an awfully wide swath you are cutting!" was Archie's exclamation, as the throng increased.

CHAPTER VII.

A DINNER AT MIDLANDS.

True to his appointment Walker Boggs met Mr. Weil on the following afternoon, and set out with him for Wilton Fern's office. Though engaged, as has been already stated, in the wool trade, Mr. Fern did not have on the premises to which these worthies repaired a very large assortment of that product. His warehouses were in another part of the city, and all the wool that was visible to his customers was arranged in sample lots that would easily have gone into a barrel. Mr. Weil, notwithstanding the description that Boggs had given of his ex-partner, was not prepared to see such an exceedingly fine specimen of humanity as the one introduced to him. The word "gentleman" was written in large characters on his broad forehead and in every word he spoke. It certainly was not often, said Archie to himself, that one encountered that sort of man in business.

"I have already heard something of you, sir," said Mr. Fern, affably, but with the dignity that was a part of his nature, no more to be discarded than his eyes. "That is, if you are the same gentleman that has kindly offered to assist my daughter in arranging a story she has written."

Mr. Weil admitted the correctness of the supposition, but disclaimed any special credit for what he had done. He explained briefly how he was drawn into the case. The visit lasted upwards of an hour, during which the conversation wandered from literature to business and politics, and all sorts of things.

Mr. Weil could not tell from Mr. Fern's manner of alluding to his daughter's work whether he had a very high idea of its value or not. Indeed, there was very little to be learned from this grave gentleman that was not expressed in the language he used. He was inclined, Archie thought, to reticence, for when there was a lull in the conversation it was always one of the others who had to start it going. The thing that might be counted a substantial gain, out of the whole affair, was an invitation to dinner for the following Wednesday, in which Mr. Roseleaf was included, and Mr. Boggs also.

Before the Wednesday set for the formal dinner at the Ferns', Mr. Weil had heard the whole of Miss Millicent's novel read by the lips of that charming young woman. There was certainly something very strong in it, in spite of its grammatical faults. It would be a very good story when "Dr." Roseleaf had put it into a little better English.

The meeting between Roseleaf and Millicent was most interesting to the one who had been the means of bringing them together. The girl put out her hand with a straightforward motion of welcome, and it was accepted with something resembling timidity by the young man, who did not even raise his eyes to hers. The talk that followed was nearly all her own, Shirley's part in it being largely monosyllabic replies to her statements and suggestions.

When Miss Daisy was presented to both the gentlemen, for the first time--Mr. Boggs she remembered very well--she drew their attention for a few moments from her sister, but soon relapsed into the more insignificant place which she seemed to prefer. She was not as large in any way, as Millicent, and did not seem likely to become so. Her hair was of a soft shade of light brown, and her eyes a decided blue. In the presence of her sister she did not expect to shine, and was evidently relieved when she could go into a corner and talk over times long past with Walker Boggs.

Mr. Fern came in rather late, but still before the hour announced for dinner. He had his habitual look of quiet elegance, but withal an expression of care about his face, that Weil attributed to the business troubles of which Boggs had spoken. The manner of the daughters toward him was marked by the watchful eyes of the chief conspirator. Millicent merely looked up and said, "Papa, this is Mr. Roseleaf, of whom we have spoken," and then when the greetings that followed were exchanged, went on talking with those about her as if there had been no interruption. Daisy, on the other hand, crept softly to her father's side, and putting an arm around his neck, kissed him when she thought no one observed her.

"You are tired, papa," she whispered.

"No, no!" he said, brightening. "I am very well."

It was at the table that Mr. Fern had his first conversation with Roseleaf, and the two men got along nicely together. Shirley acquitted himself creditably. Weil, who saw everything, noticed that the negro, Hannibal, in superintending the service in the dining-room, lingered more about Miss Daisy's chair than any other, and took extra pains to see that her wants were anticipated. In spite of this, however, Mr. Fern frequently asked his younger daughter to have more of certain dishes, as if his mind was constantly turned in that direction.

"How long do you think it will require to do the work you have so generously undertaken?" asked Mr. Fern of Roseleaf, when the dessert was reached.

"It is impossible to say," stammered the young man. "Some weeks, at least."

"So I supposed," said Mr. Fern. "That being the case I wish to tender you the hospitality of my home. It would be a great deal of trouble for you to come every day from the city, and I know we could make you comfortable here."

Roseleaf was about to decline the offer with thanks, when Mr. Weil spoke to him in a low tone.

"Take it, by all means," he said. "It's a chance in a lifetime. You know nothing of family life. Don't dream of refusing."

The delay allowed Miss Millicent to add her request to that of her father, and fearing to let his protégé answer, Mr. Weil boldly spoke for him.

"It is a good idea," he said. "He will have his baggage brought up to-morrow. There's nothing like being on the ground, when there's work to be done. And, with the general permission, I am going to run out pretty often myself, to see how things progress."

The bright, off-hand way of the last speaker seemed to please Mr. Fern, for he heartily seconded this suggestion. When the table was vacated, Mr. Fern asked if he might be excused for a few minutes, while he wrote a couple of important letters, and requested Walker Boggs to show the guests through the grounds, where they could smoke their cigars till he returned.

Accordingly Weil and Roseleaf accompanied their new guide out of doors and across an extensive lawn to an arbor at the further end, where a handsome prospect of the Hudson unfolded itself. As Archie was wishing for some feasible way of getting rid of Boggs, temporarily, that gentleman espied an acquaintance in the adjacent road and went off to speak to him.

"Are you in love yet, you dog?" asked Archie, as soon as he and his young friend were alone. "What! You're not! Don't let an hour pass, then, before you are. The best of all proverbs is, 'Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.'"

"How can I do this to-day?" was the doleful response.

"How can you help it, you mean? There she was at the table--Titian hair, hazel-grey eyes, lovely waist--everything. Love! *I* could fall in love with that girl, marry her, get a divorce and commit suicide, within forty-eight hours."

Even Roseleaf had to smile at this extravagant statement.

"Do you want me to do all of those things?" he asked.

"Only the first one, at present. If you can't do that, give up all ideas of being a novelist and secure a place in some factory or counting-room. Everything is ready for you. You are *persona grata* here. Nothing can come in your way. Oh, don't exasperate me!"

Roseleaf haltingly said he would do his best; and the next day he came to Midlands, prepared to spend a month or longer.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLDING HER HAND.

For the first three days Roseleaf gave most of his time to reading the MSS. that Miss Fern had written. He could not say that he liked it, exactly, but that was not necessary. To fill in the time, he consented to let the girl read his own story that Gouger had rejected, though he did this with trepidation, having a dread that she would think it insipid. When she had finished it, however, her delight was unbounded.

"It is lovely!" she exclaimed, in response to his inquiring eyes. "I cannot see why they refused it. I haven't been so interested in a story in years."

When he had read *her* story through he began to rewrite it, departing as little as possible from the original. As soon as he had a chapter finished he would give it to her, for comparison, and criticism, if she chose to make any. She proved, however, a most charming critic, her shafts falling mainly upon herself, for she declared that her novel seemed unworthy of its elegant new dress. She conceived a shyness toward this quiet youth, and blushed when the striking situations and bold language of her tale came into the conversation. It was so different from his own work!

"It is too bold. I am sure it is," she said, repeatedly. "I ought to begin again. My plot has too much freedom, too little conventionality. People will say a very strange girl must have written it."

And he would tell her that he did not think so; that the strength of her ideas was very great, and that the public would find excuses enough for anything that interested and entertained it. He even added that he wished he possessed her knowledge, her insight into life, her fearlessness to tread on any ground that her subject made desirable.

Between them they were doing very good work, without doubt. Mr. Weil took some of the completed chapters to Lawrence Gouger, who returned them with a smile that spoke volumes. Cutt & Slashem would take the story

when it was ready, if the subsequent pages kept up to the mark of the first ones.

"Don't forget your own book," said Gouger, in a note he enclosed for Roseleaf.

Mr. Weil was not backward in accepting the cordial invitation he had had to join the Ferns at dinner whenever he could make it convenient. Besides this he called frequently at the wool office, and ingratiated himself into Mr. Fern's good graces in many ways. Within a fortnight he knew all there was to be known about wool, in which he seemed to have conceived a great interest. In his talks with Roseleaf he spoke learnedly on this subject, referring to the foreign and domestic staples, like one who had made the matter a life study.

"What a queer thing trade is!" he exclaimed, on one of these occasions. "Here we find a man who ought to adorn an atelier, or a seat in Congress, and yet is obliged to guide his entire existence by the price of such a confoundedly dull thing as the hair on a sheep's back. He votes a certain political ticket on account of the attitude of the party on Wool; he dines off mutton and lambs' tongues; he casts his lot with the Sheep at church. I don't know but he would feel a genuine pleasure in having Wool pulled over his eyes. And still I am convinced that he never ought to have been in the Wool business at all, and that Boggs--what a drop--is right in his impression that it will eventually swamp him."

Roseleaf asked how Mr. Fern got into the trade in the first place.

"Well, as I understand it, Boggs was looking for a partner. Mrs. Fern had some cash and her husband wanted to put it into a good thing, from a financial standpoint. They did well while they were together. When Boggs pulled out they had a clear \$200,000 apiece. Boggs--confound him!--has his yet; Fern hasn't. He's proud as the devil, and didn't tell me this, by any means. It would break him up completely to have to go into bankruptcy. Really, I wish I could do something for him."

Roseleaf looked up inquiringly.

"Why, I've got a fair amount of money," explained Archie, "and perhaps a lift over these hard times might be the making of him. I'm not particularly a philanthropist, but I like this fellow wonderfully well for such a new acquaintance. I shall give him a delicate hint in a day or two, and if I can fix things without too much risk--we have to protect ourselves, you know--I am willing to do so."

This struck Shirley Roseleaf as rather odd. He had never thought about Mr. Weil in that way. Whether he was rich or poor had never entered his head. He began to wonder if he was very wealthy. He certainly lived well, and had no visible occupation of the sort the census takers call "gainful."

"It is an interesting family, though," pursued Archie, in his rambling way. "I wish I could get into it as you did, you rascal, and observe it at shorter range. Even the servants are worth studying. Look at that Hannibal; who can say that the African race is inferior when it produces such marvels! I can hardly take my eyes off the black paragon when he is present. How he passes the soup--as if it were some heavenly decoction, made by the gods themselves and sent to earth by their favorite messenger! With what grace he opens the carriage door! with what majesty he mounts to his seat by the driver! I wonder if he has a sister. She would be worth a journey to see. I have met such women on their native soil, statuesque, slender, full-breasted, square-shouldered, with jars of water on their heads and clinking silver anklets. What a cursed thing is our American prejudice against color! No other people carries it to such an extent. In the Latin Quarter the West India blacks are prime favorites with the pretty grisettes."

The young man could not help a slight shiver at this information. He did not in the least agree with the sentiments his friend was advancing, but neither did he think it wise to contradict him.

"Then there is the little one--Miss Daisy"--continued Weil, branching suddenly into that topic. "So quiet, so self-abased, as if she would not for the world attract one glance that might be claimed by her elder sister, who

is perfectly willing to be a monopolist of attention. A nice girl, sweet as a fresh-plucked lily. There must be treasures hidden under all that reticence. Still waters run deep, the silent swine devour the milk. I think I ought to investigate the child. If you are to have that aggregation of beauty known as Millicent, what prevents me from securing a slight hold in the affections of the junior?"

Roseleaf shook his head in a way that might have meant almost anything. He never could tell how much in earnest his friend was when he took up a vein like this. Neither could he imagine little Daisy in the role of an entertainer for such a very wise man as Archie, not only much her senior but a thousand times her superior in knowledge and acquaintance with things that people talk about.

"Keep your eye on her--she will be worth watching," said Weil, with one of his laughs at the sober face before him. "She is worth almost as much to a rising author as the negro--not quite, but nearly. Then there is the pater-familias; is there anything in him? No, he will be of no service to you. And that brings us back to our superb Millicent, with whom you must now be wildly infatuated."

Roseleaf shook his head again.

"No--not yet," he said.

"But, what do you do all the time? How can you sit by the side of a pretty girl, and kiss her cheeks, and put your arm around her, and yet keep from falling in love?"

The younger man gasped at each of these suggestions, like one who has stepped into icy water and feels it gradually creeping upward.

"I have done none of those things," he faltered.

"None of them! Then I shall not let you stay here!" cried Archie. "What does the girl expect? That we are going to make her reputation in the

literary world and get nothing for ourselves? I never heard such effrontery! She refuses to give you the least opportunity, does she--the jade!"

More and more confused grew the other at these expressions.

"You don't understand--you are quite in error," he articulated. "She--she has refused me nothing, because--because I have asked nothing."

Mr. Weil uttered a disheartened groan.

"But this will not do, my dear fellow!" he said. "How can you accomplish anything unless you make a beginning? Rewriting the story that she has written will not advance you one step on the path you profess such anxiety to tread. That is only an excuse--a make-believe--a pretence under which you have been given quarters in this house and allowed every chance in creation to learn your lesson. Are you afraid of her, or what is the matter? Does she overpower you with her beauty? Tell me where your difficulty lies."

But Shirley could hardly answer these apparently simple questions. He said he feared the trouble might be in the formality of the situation. How could Mr. Weil expect, he asked, that a spontaneous case of love-making would develop from such a condition of things.

"Stuff!" cried Archie, with a grimace. "If you and she were members of a theatrical company, and were cast as a pair of lovers, you wouldn't find so many pitfalls. You would go ahead and repeat the lines of your part, wouldn't you? All you want is to do the same now."

"But what *are* the 'lines of my part?'" inquired the other, dolefully.

"Take her hand once in yours and they will come to you," retorted Weil.

Roseleaf reddened so much that Archie regretted the severity of his tone, and hastened to turn the conversation to something more agreeable. He made up his mind, however, to have a talk with Miss Fern, and at the first

opportunity he did so. It was on an afternoon when he knew Roseleaf was in the city, and he came to the point at once, after his own fashion.

"How are you and my young friend getting along?" he asked her.

"Oh, as well as possible," she responded. "I am learning to like him more and more. I really shall be sorry when his task is done."

Mr. Weil shrugged his shoulders.

"There's a bit of selfishness in your words, Miss Fern," he said. "Have you forgotten that he is not here to be useful to *you* alone; that you agreed to do what you could for *him*, as well?"

The girl cast down her pretty eyes in confusion.

"I am sure I have tried to be agreeable," she replied, gently.

"That is not enough," replied Archie, gravely. "What he needs is something--some one--to stir his blood, to awaken his fancy. I told you in the first place that you ought to make him fall in love with you--for literary reasons. He must feel a sensation stronger than mere friendship for a woman before he can write such a story as will bring him fame."

Miss Millicent did not grow more comfortable under this suggestion. She remarked, after a long wait, that she did not see how the end sought was to be accomplished. Love, she said, was not a mere expression, it was a deep, actual entity. Two people, playing at love with each other, might afterwards find that they were experimenting with fire.

"I have heard," she continued, her fair cheeks growing crimson, "that there are women--"

Then she paused and could go no further. But he understood.

"There are women--thousands of them," he admitted, "who would willingly do what I ask. If it is necessary, he must go to them."

She wanted to say that she hoped it would not come to that--she wanted to convey to her companion the horror she felt for what she supposed his words implied--but she could not. It was so much easier to write of things than to talk of them to a man like him.

"Do you call it quite fair," he asked, "to claim all and give nothing? He does not require much. Could you not let him take your hand, and--"

"And--"

"Possibly, touch your lips with his?"

Miss Fern rose to her feet with a fierce gesture.

"Sir!" she exclaimed.

"Very well," replied Mr. Weil, shortly, turning away.

The girl resumed her seat, with rapidly rising and falling bosom. She was in a quandary. The suggestion she had heard would have sounded from any other lips like a premeditated insult. Coming from this man the venom seemed to have vanished.

Roseleaf felt somewhat discouraged after his latest talk with Weil. He wanted to make a start, to do something, no matter how little, toward the object he fully believed was to be attained. That evening while walking with Miss Fern (for it was their frequent habit to go out of doors unchaperoned) he found himself unconsciously taking her hand--that hand for which he had until now felt a genuine fright. And she, after all her resolutions never to permit anything of the sort, gave it to him, as they strolled together along an unfrequented byway.

"I want so much to make a Name," he was saying fervently. "I have tried and tried to begin such a book as Mr. Gouger wants, but I cannot. Won't you help me, dear Miss Fern? Won't you show me what I lack? I know you can, if you will. They tell me I have had no experiences, and that I must have--not a real affair, you know, but an inkling of what it is like. I have tried to say things to you and have been in fear that you would not like them, and have held my peace. But now, I can wait no longer."

In his exuberance Roseleaf spoke at last with ardor, and even went so far as to attempt to put one of his arms around the waist of the fair creature by his side. On her part Miss Fern was nearly overcome by surprise.

In one instant the timid young gentleman had changed into the similitude of a most ardent swain; but in the next he became again his natural self, with the added confusion resulting from his excited and mortified state.

"Let me take you home," he said, when he saw that she could find no words even to chide him. "Let me take you home; and to-morrow I will go away."

Go away! She did not like that idea! Her book was not yet finished, for one thing; and besides he was a nice young fellow, and had meant no offense.

"There is no reason why you should go," she stammered. "I forgive you, I am sure."

"Do you!" cried Roseleaf, grasping her hand again in his joy. "You are kindness itself to say so. I must appear very stupid" (here he half put his arm around her again, checking himself with difficulty from completing the movement) "and dull, and wanting in manners, but you are the only young lady I have ever known on terms of the least intimacy."

Miss Fern replied that she did not mind what had occurred, and hoped he would forget it. She added that she would do anything she could for him, and had the most earnest wish that they should be friends.

At the gate they paused, and in some way their eyes were looking into each other. The girl laughed, a relief to feelings that had been for the past ten minutes somewhat overcharged.

"Well, you have made a beginning," she said, mischievously, for she wanted to drive the sober expression from his clouded face.

"A beginning?" he echoed.

"Yes," she said. "You have held my hand."

He crimsoned.

"You said you would forgive me," he murmured.

"With all my heart," she responded, putting the hand in his again.

He felt a thrill go through him, but it was a pleasant sensation.

"I came very near putting my arm around you," said he, looking away from her. "Do you forgive that, too?"

She took the hand away and struck him playfully on the cheek with the palm of it.

Then, before he surmised what she intended, she ran brightly up the steps of the house and vanished.

CHAPTER IX.

"DAISY, MY DARLING!"

It was Roseleaf's full intention to say something about this adventure to his instructor in the art of love, Mr. Archie Weil, but somehow he was not able to summon the requisite courage. He had a delicate sense that such a thing ought not to be repeated, where it might by any possibility bring a laugh. And about this time the novelist's attention began to be attracted toward the younger sister, who had till then almost entirely escaped his observation.

He noticed particularly the ceaseless devotion that the black servant of the family exhibited toward her. She might have been a goddess and he a devotee; a queen and he her slave. Hannibal moved about the girl like her very shadow, ready to anticipate her slightest wants, while Daisy seemed to take this excess of attention as a matter of course.

Millicent constantly showed her dislike for the servant.

"I don't see how you can endure to have him touch you," she said to Daisy. "He knows better than to lay his hands on me. I have told papa often that I want him discharged, and he ought to consider my wishes a little."

To this Daisy answered that the boy, as she persisted in calling the giant, meant well and was certainly intelligent. Her father did not like to change servants, for it took him a long time to get used to new ones. So Millicent tossed her head, returned to her collaboration with Mr. Roseleaf, and things went on as usual.

Imperceptibly Shirley began to take an interest in Daisy. She did not run away from him, and he discovered, much to his surprise, that she was worth talking to. She was not exactly the child he had supposed, and she had the full value of her eighteen years in her pretty head. He got into the habit of taking short strolls with her, on evenings when Millicent was occupied with Archie, and when, as often happened, Mr. Fern was away with Hannibal in the city. There was a sequestered nook at the far end of the lawn, in which

the pair found retreat. Before he realized it, Roseleaf had developed a genuine liking for these rambles, and was pleased when the evenings came that brought Mr. Weil to dinner.

Daisy was ingenuous, to a degree, if surface indications counted for anything. The words that flowed from her red lips were as unstudied as the pretty attitudes she assumed, or the exceedingly plain but very becoming dresses that she wore. After she once got "used" to Roseleaf she treated him quite as if she had been five years his senior.

"Are you a rich man?" she asked him, on one of those early autumn evenings that they passed together.

Her manner was as simple as if she had said that it looked like rain, and his answer was hardly less so.

"No, Daisy. I have not much property, but I intend to earn more, by-and-by. Did you think, because I seem so idle, that I was a millionaire?"

"No," she answered, a shade of disappointment in her face. "I only wanted, in case you had plenty of money, to get you to lend me some."

He stared at her through the half-light. Her features were turned in a direction that did not reveal them very well. What did she want of money!

"How much do you need?" he inquired, wondering if it was within his power to oblige her.

"Oh, too much, I am afraid. And I cannot answer any questions, because the object I have is a secret. I don't think my plan very feasible, for it might be years and years before I could pay it back. You won't mind my speaking of it, will you?"

Curiosity grew stronger, and as politely as possible he renewed his question as to how much the girl needed to carry out her plan.

"I don't know, exactly," she said, thoughtfully. "Perhaps a thousand dollars a year for five or six years; it might take less."

"It is a great deal," he admitted. "Does your father know what you contemplate?"

The girl changed color at once.

"Oh, no. I should not like to have him, either. He would say it was very foolish. And yet I am sure it would not be. The money would do much good--yes, ever so much."

The young man thought hard for a few moments. A desire to see a brighter light flash into those young eyes possessed him. He debated seriously the idea of handing her his patrimony, as he would have given her a pound of candy if she had wanted it.

"I might give you part," he said, after a pause. "Perhaps your thousand for the first year or two."

She looked him full in the face, and put both her hands in his impulsively.

"You are too good," she exclaimed, with fervor. "But you cannot afford so large a gift. No, I would only take it if you had a very large sum, and could not possibly miss it. I asked carelessly. I should not have done so--I was selfish to think of such a thing."

"I want to speak to you about something, also," said Roseleaf, after a strained pause. "I have noticed of late that your father has some trouble on his mind."

She started suddenly.

"Ah!" was all she said.

"And I have wondered if there was anything I could do to--to aid *him*--to relieve him. Because, I would like it very much if I could, on account of--of--"

She looked up inquiringly.

"I have been so much a member of your family, in a certain way, that a grief like this appeals strongly to me," he said, haltingly.

She paled slightly as she repeated his words.

"A grief?"

"Well, distress, annoyance, whatever it may be called. If there is anything I can do, I shall be more than happy."

The girl sat for some moments with her eyes on the ground.

"He *is* troubled," she said, finally. "I am glad to talk with you, for I cannot get him to tell me anything. He is greatly troubled, and I am worried beyond expression. I can't understand it. He has always confided in me so thoroughly, but now he shakes his head and says it is nothing, trying to look brighter even when the tears are almost ready to fall. What can it be, Mr. Roseleaf? He has no companions outside of his office and this house? He sits by himself, and isn't a bit like he used to be and every day I think he grows worse."

Roseleaf asked if Daisy had talked much with her sister about it.

"No," she said, with a headshake. "I don't believe Millie has noticed anything. She is so occupied with her literary matters"--there was a sarcastic touch upon the word, that did not escape the listener--"she has no time for such things. I hope you won't think I mean to criticise her," added the young girl, with a blush. "I know you care a great deal for my sister, and--"

She stopped in the midst of the sentence, leaving it unfinished. And Roseleaf thought how interesting this girl had become.

"Let me confide in you, Daisy," he said, in his softest tone. "I do not care 'a great deal,' nor even a very little for your sister. You see," he went on, in response to the startled look that greeted him, "I am to be a novelist. To be successful in writing fiction, I have been told that I ought to be in love--just once--myself. And I came here and tried very hard to fall in love with Miss Millicent; and I simply cannot."

Daisy's fresh young laugh rang out on the air of the evening.

"Poor man!" she cried, with mock pity. "And hasn't she tried to help you?"

"No. She hasn't. And as soon as I get the work done I have commenced for her, I am going away."

The child--she was scarcely more than that--grew whiter, but the shadows of the evening hid the fact from her companion.

"You ought not to go," she said, slowly, and rather faintly, "until you have made another trial."

"Oh! It is useless!" he replied.

"Is it that you cannot love--Millie--or that you cannot love--any one?"

He hesitated, puzzled, himself, at the question.

"I never did love any one--any woman," he confessed, "and perhaps I never shall. But your sister seems peculiarly hard to love. Yet she is a very handsome girl and equipped with a mind of unusual calibre."

Daisy acknowledged this description of her sister's charms. She remarked that it was strange that such a combination did not suffice to accomplish the desired result.

"There are people who do find her entertaining," she added. "Mr. Weil is one of them."

"Oh, Archie!" said Roseleaf. "He finds everything entertaining. It is nothing worth remarking. She is the exact description of his ideal in feminine face and form. He once gave me the list of the excellencies of a 'perfect woman,' and your sister has them all."

The younger Miss Fern had her own opinions about this matter. She thought the innocent man at her side had not quite gauged the interest that Mr. Weil took in her family.

"I will make a proposition," she said, with a light laugh, when they had talked longer upon the subject. "I am afraid it won't seem worth much to you, and perhaps you can do better; but why can't you stay here, and--if Millie won't do--make love to *me*?"

Darkness is responsible for many things. In the light, Daisy could not have uttered those words, even in jest. There, when the sun had set and the stars were not yet on duty, she found the courage to make that suggestion.

"You are very kind," he stammered, when he grasped her meaning. "But I do not think it will answer. I am afraid love cannot be pushed to any point without its own initiative."

"That is probably the case with *real* love," replied the girl, "but an imitation that would serve your purpose might be evolved in the way I have indicated. For instance, you could take my hand in yours--like this--and I could lean toward you in--this way. And then, if you had sufficient courage--"

Before he dreamed of doing it, it was done! He had kissed her on her tempting lips, placed within an inch of his own.

"You are too good a scholar," she pouted, rising to her feet in some confusion. "I did not give you leave to do that."

"I beg your pardon most humbly," he answered, with intense contrition. "May I assure you that the act was wholly involuntary and that I am very sorry for it?"

She turned and surveyed him in the shadow.

"Are--you--*very*--sorry?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I have made you angry."

"Do I seem angry?"

"At least, I have injured your feelings."

Her face was close to his again.

"Well, I forgive you. There, let us make up."

She raised herself on the tips of her toes and kissed him twice.

All the blood in this young man's body seemed to rush to his head and then back with violence to his heart.

"*Daisy!*" he stammered. "*Daisy!*"

But she sprang away as he tried to embrace her, and standing two yards off, tauntingly cried that he did not know what love was, and that no one could ever teach him. Taking up the challenge he started toward her. She ran away, he in pursuit. She had gone but a few steps when she tripped over an object in the path and went down. In trying to stop himself Roseleaf fell by her side.

"Daisy!" he cried. "Are you injured?"

She did not answer. In the darkness he saw her lying there so still that he was frightened. He caught her passionately in his arms, and knew no better way to bring her to consciousness than to rain kisses on her cheeks. As might be expected this only served to prolong her swoon, which was not a very genuine one, if the truth must be told, and it was some seconds before she opened her eyes and caught him, as one might say, in the act.

"How dare you!" she demanded, shrinking away from him.

"Daisy, my darling!" he answered, his voice tremulous. "I thought you were dead, and I knew for the first time how dearly, how truly I loved you!"

She laughed, not very heartily. She had hurt herself truly in her fall, and her feminine nerves were jarred.

"You are doing nicely," she said. "For a beginner, one could ask nothing better. And now, if you will help to rise, I think it would be more proper."

"No." He spoke with force and passion. "You must not think I am trifling. *I love you! Yes, I love you! I worship you!*"

"I do not see," she remarked, insisting in spite of him that she must assume a standing position, "how you differ in your expressions from the lovers I have read of in novels. It is quite time that we returned to the house. To-morrow, if you like, I will give you another lesson."

Shirley was a picture of utter despair. His new sensations almost overwhelmed him. In one second the dead arteries in his body had leaped into the fullest life. The touch of that young maiden's lips had galvanized him. He could not bear to leave her with those mocking words. But at that moment a voice was heard in the direction of the residence.

"Miss--Dai-sy! Miss--Dai-sy!"

It was Hannibal, who had returned from a drive with Mr. Fern. They could see him dimly coming across the lawn with the girl's cloak in his hand. Daisy, with one quick grasp of the fingers that hung close to hers, said good-night to her companion, and started in the direction of the servant. If she intended--as seemed probable--to pretend she was out alone, Roseleaf did not mean to share in that deception, and he followed close behind her.

"Here I am, Hannibal," called Daisy. "Ah, you have my coat. It was very kind of you. Has papa come home? I am coming in. I did not think how late it was."

The negro stopped as he saw the strollers, and knew that they had undoubtedly been together. What more he suspected no one can say with certainty. But he threw the cloak upon the grass that bordered the pathway and turned on his heel without a word.

"Confound his impudence!" exclaimed Roseleaf, when he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to speak. "I have a good notion to follow him and box his ears."

The soft hand of the girl was on his sleeve in a moment.

"Say nothing to him--*please!*" she answered. "He--he is very thoughtful for me--of my health--and I was careless. Papa must have sent him."

The touch on his arm mollified the young man at once. He tried to make out the lines of the pretty face that was so near him and yet so far away.

"We are to study again to-morrow, then," he said, taking up her statement with an assumed air of gayety. "At what hour?"

But she broke away from him abruptly, and ran into the house without a word. Hannibal stood in the doorway and Roseleaf thought he distinguished harsh sounds from the negro's lips; but this seemed so incredible that he conceived his senses at fault.

Looking at his watch the novelist saw that it was still early enough to take a stroll by himself and ponder over his new happiness--or misery, which was it?--under the open sky. It was two hours later that his latchkey turned in the door, and in that time he had resolved either to make Daisy Fern his wife or commit suicide in the most expeditious fashion.

CHAPTER X

"OH, SO MANY, MANY MAIDS!"

The only disagreeable thing about falling in love with Daisy was that Roseleaf felt compelled to reveal the truth to Archie Weil. He believed he was bound to do this by a solemn contract which he had no moral right to ignore. Perhaps Weil might claim that he had no business to fall in love with one sister when his "manager" had picked out the other for this operation. Be that as it may, there was no use in evading the question. It must be talked over, be the result what it might.

"Well, I know what love is now," was the abrupt way in which the young man opened the subject on the following afternoon.

He had ridden to the city, as Weil was not expected at the residence of Mr. Fern that day. The hope he had formed the previous evening of getting another interview with Daisy had not materialized, she having gone on some short journey before he could intercept her.

"You do!" was the equally abrupt reply, uttered in a tone that betrayed undoubted astonishment. "What do you mean?"

Roseleaf reddened.

"It came to me all at once, last evening," he said, avoiding the gaze of his companion. "We were down at the end of the lawn, you know--"

Archie interrupted him with a sudden shout.

"Not *Daisy*!"

"Yes."

"You are in love with *Daisy*!"

Roseleaf bowed.

"Upon my word!"

There was nothing in any of these expressions that conveyed the information which the younger man craved, namely, whether his friend approved what he had announced, but he stole a look at him and saw that he appeared more astounded than angry.

"You dear boy," he said, "I don't know what to say to you. You blush like a maiden over the acknowledgment. I am half inclined to believe you are the girl in the case, and your partner in love some great, strapping fellow on whose bosom you intend to pillow your coy head. So it is Daisy, eh? And last night it came to you? Tell me how it happened."

Comforted in a measure by the good nature of his friend, Roseleaf proceeded to give the outlines of what had occurred, suppressing the more intimate facts with which the luckier reader is acquainted. He admitted the touch of hands, but did not mention the pressure of lips to lips. He told of the girl's swoon, but said nothing of the extraordinary measures adopted to bring her to her senses. But, while he made no insinuations, nor pretended to see through the meshes in this net, the experience of Mr. Weil served him in good stead. He could fill in the vacant places in the story with substantial correctness.

"I don't know what Miss Millicent will say to all this," he remarked, when the recital came to a pause.

"I think she was just beginning to like you a little herself. Most of our talk last evening was about you, and when I mentioned, as I took my leave, that you were probably out walking with Daisy, I could see distinct traces of jealousy. I want to be fair with my client. I told her that you came there to learn love from her, not from her little sister. If all this should result in breaking her heart, I don't see how I could excuse myself. And the other one, she seems such a child, I never thought of her in that connection. Why, how old is she--not over eighteen, I think."

Roseleaf answered that Daisy would be nineteen on her next birthday, an ingenious way of stating age that was not original with him.

"All right," said Archie, digesting this statement slowly. "And now, what is your programme?"

Roseleaf looked surprised at the business-like nature of the question.

"I mean to secure her consent to marry me, as soon as possible," he said.

"And then?"

"Why, see her father, I suppose. Isn't that the most important thing to do?"

Mr. Weil shook his head decidedly.

"Not by any means. You must not act with undue haste. Mr. Fern would say she was too young to think of matrimony, a proposition you could not successfully dispute. Besides, should he happen to give his consent and appoint a week from Wednesday for the happy occasion, see what a mess it would put you in."

The suggestion caused the brightest of smiles to illumine the countenance of the listener.

"It would make me the happiest of mortals!" he cried. "There is nothing that could prevent my summoning the clergyman and securing the prize I desire."

Mr. Weil grunted.

"H--m! And in the meanwhile what would become of your great novel?"

This question brought a sober pause to the young novelist.

"I could write it after my wedding," he answered, finally.

"Could you? You could write nothing at all then--nothing that any one would pay a cent to read. I have told you from the start that what you want is a *grande passion*, something to stir your soul to its depths. You are on the verge of that experience. Already you have had a glimpse of what it will be like. For the first time the touch of a woman's fingers has driven sleep from your eyelids. No, you didn't tell me you laid awake all night, but I saw it by looking at you. You can shut yourself up in your room now, and rhapsodize over the dear face, the lovely mouth, the soft voice of your beloved. In another week, if this keeps on, you can write like a combination of George Eliot (after she met Lewes) and Amelie Rives (before her marriage). A month later, Gouger might rave over your productions, for you will be on the Matterhorn of bliss unsatisfied."

A slight laugh, at his own excess of description, issued from the lips of Mr. Weil, but the countenance of his companion was as firm as a rock.

"You are right," said Roseleaf, gravely. "Already I see the vast difference between this sensation of love and the thing I imagined it to be when I wrote those silly pages that Cutt & Slashem did so well to reject. But I am torn between two desires. I want to write my novel--until yesterday I thought no wish could be so great. And I also want my wife." He breathed the word with a simple reverence that affected even the flinty heart of his hearer. "I shall never rest easy until I find her wholly mine, to love, honor and cherish while God gives me breath!"

The hand of the elder man dropped heavily on the table by his side.

"*Good!*" he exclaimed. "*Very good!* You could not have said it better. There is an opportunity before you to accomplish both of these things. I only wish to impress upon you the fact that they must come in the order I have indicated, or one of them will never come at all. Write your story while the fever of passion is on you. The dead calm of married life would only bring the sort of novel that the shelves are already piled with, nauseating to the public and a drug in the hands of the publishers."

Roseleaf doubted the full correctness of these conclusions. He thought, with that dear girl by his side, he could write with all the fervor of a sweetheart, for his affection was to have no boundary, no limit, no end. But he had a high opinion of the abilities of Mr. Weil, and he had no idea of disputing the conclusions of that wise guide.

"Do you think she will accept me?" he asked, wistfully, returning to the main question. "It came so sudden, and there was very little said, and it was late; and then Hannibal came after her, and she went into the house. Everything was left in a state of uncertainty."

"Did nothing show whether you were indifferent to her?" was the wily interrogation that followed. "Usually I believe something conveys the sweet word 'hope' to the waiting one. And what do you say about Hannibal? That he came to call your charmer and took her away from you?"

Without reserve the young man repeated what had happened. Archie seemed deeply interested, but whatever his thoughts he did not express them at the time.

"And that reminds me of another thing," said Roseleaf. "Have you noticed anything strange about Mr. Fern?"

"Yes," said Mr. Weil, "I have noticed. I wondered if you had done the same. Have you discovered what the trouble is?"

"No, and Daisy doesn't know, either. Indeed, she is much distressed about it. Remember, this is a secret between us, for perhaps I had no right to talk of their affairs. He is in a state of great depression, and as he is so regular in his habits I can't imagine what to lay it to. You are so shrewd, couldn't you find out?"

Mr. Weil rose and took a few paces up and down the room.

"You are the fellow to do that, not I," he said, presently. "Yes, hear me out. You are in a sense a member of his family, and would have a natural right

to allude to the state of his health. Then, if you were to put in a word about Miss Daisy--why, you might kill several birds with one stone."

Roseleaf looked much puzzled.

"I thought," he said, "that you wanted me to postpone the matter of my marriage as long as possible."

"Your marriage, yes. But not the preliminaries. They may require a dozen bouts with the old gentleman. The first time he will probably laugh you out of the room as a silly young noodle; the second he will say that he has nothing against you personally, but that his 'baby' is too infantile to think of such things for ten years yet; the third he will begin to see the situation in its right light, and after that it will be only a matter of detail. All these things will be of the greatest value to you in the novel you are going to write, and you must not on your life miss a single one of them.

"Drop into the wool shop, catch his royal highness there, and for the first thing express solicitude for his health. Unless he is on his guard more than is likely you ought to catch some slight straw to show what ails him. Then follow it up with a word or two about Miss Daisy, and you will have spent a good afternoon, even if he doesn't smile on your suit at first hand, and take you to his manly breast as his long-lost son-in-law."

The reasonings set forth in these propositions were so evidently correct that Roseleaf resolved to adopt them just as soon as he could bring himself into the proper mood. In the meantime, however, he wanted to have a little further talk with Daisy, for he could hardly ask her father for her hand without the semblance of permission on her part. He tried to remember all she had said to him at the foot of the lawn, and was compelled to admit that it was very little indeed. The only things he was certain of were the kisses, but his experiences were so slight that he could not tell how much weight to give even these.

That evening he tried his best to get a word with her alone, but she eluded him, and he was obliged to go to the boudoir of her sister and read over that

young lady's MSS. as it stood revised by his careful hands.

"Well, another chapter will finish it," said Miss Fern, when he put down the pages. "And then Mr. Gouger will decide whether Cult & Slashem consider it worth printing."

"Yes," he answered, gravely. "They will print *your* story now, without doubt. But *I* am as far as ever from satisfying their requirements."

Millicent thought how supremely selfish she must seem, talking always of her own hopes and doing nothing to help the one who had made her success possible. She saw that he wore a dejected look, and she began to sincerely pity him. When our own ships are safely in sight of the harbor we have more time to dwell on the derelicts in which the property of our friends is embarked.

"Perhaps, when we get this disposed of, I can help you," she suggested.

It was nearly a week before Roseleaf could get another talk with Daisy, a week that tried him to the utmost, for he could think of nothing but her, and could not understand her reasons for treating him so strangely. At last he wrote her a letter, giving it to Hannibal to deliver, in which he said that he was about to return to his city lodging and wanted to know if she meant him to leave without a kind word at parting. He thought the negro looked peculiar as he took the note, half as if he did not intend to accept the commission to deliver it; but he concluded that this must be imagination. He wondered why Archie Weil took such a fancy to Hannibal. If Roseleaf was lucky enough to claim Daisy as his wife, he would never have that figure darken his door.

The letter must have been taken to its destination without delay, for an answer was brought in the course of an hour, stating in the briefest language that Miss Daisy would await him in the parlor, after lunch.

At the table Miss Fern was present, as usual, but not her father, his business in the city keeping him away at that hour. At meals it was Daisy's habit to

say little, leaving the conversation to her sister and whoever else happened to be there. At the end of this particular lunch Millicent went up stairs to her chamber and Daisy betook herself to the parlor, followed a few minutes later by the young man.

"Why have you treated me so coldly?" were his first words, when he found himself alone with her.

"Oh, dear, that is a very bad beginning!" she said, smiling. "I shall have to instruct you in some of the simplest things, I see already. When you wish to make friends with a woman, don't begin by scolding her. I am here because you wrote that you wished a kind word. Don't give me too many cross ones, please."

He sighed impatiently.

"Daisy," he exclaimed. "I hope you are not going to make fun of me! I have passed a most miserable week. After the glimpse of heaven you gave me, that evening--"

She put on an air of mock surprise.

"Did I do that! It was much more than I intended, then. I fear you are inclined to use extravagant metaphors, Mr. Roseleaf. But, never mind. You are going away, and I am very, very sorry. However, as you came here on Millie's account, and not on mine, I suppose I have no right to say so."

The fair brow of the young man was a mass of wrinkles.

"I can't understand why you speak so lightly," he answered. "You know--I told you--that I love you--that there is nothing in all the world so dear to me--that I want your promise to be my wife. I can't go from here without that consolation. Daisy, I ask you, in all sincerity, to say that as soon as your father's consent is obtained, you will name a day when you will marry me."

The smile faded from the girl's lips. Something brought to her mind a very sad reflection.

"You ask a great deal," she said. "Much more, I think, than you realize. Until a week ago I was nothing to you. We lived under the same roof, we took our evening strolls together, we talked like the commonest acquaintances, and that was all. Then, in a moment, you discovered that your heart was on fire. I have not ascertained what made the marvellous change. I am sure you cannot tell yet if it be a genuine and lasting one. Were I inclined to believe I ever should be willing to go to the lengths of which you speak, I should assuredly want time for the maturest reflection. In the first place, I know almost nothing about you. One would not engage a--a coachman--without more inquiry. How can a girl promise to trust her entire future to a man with whom she has but a casual acquaintance? Such things need consideration. I know my father would say so. And if he heard only the nicest things about you, I doubt if he would like to have you take me from him--especially now, when his heart is heavy and he leans so much on my love and care. No, you are in too great haste."

His impatience grew to boiling heat as he listened. How could she find so many reasons, and (he was obliged to confess) such sensible ones, to bring against him?

"There is one thing you *can* do," he said, with an attitude of deep dejection. "You can tell me if you love me."

She tossed her head with a feminine movement that was wholly charming.

"Yes, I could tell you that, but it would be a very improper thing, under the circumstances, provided I was able to give you the answer you seem to wish. If I did care for you, would I like to say so in definite words when anything further might turn out to be impossible? A girl would not wish to have a man that she was never to marry going about with the recollection that she said, 'I love you.'"

"Then you can say nothing at all?" he asked sadly. "Shall I be uncertain whether at the end of my term in purgatory I am to be raised to a state of bliss or dashed into the Inferno?"

She laughed; a delicious little laugh.

"You are getting hyperbolic," she answered. "There are ten thousand better women than I."

"But I don't want them," pleaded the young man. "Did you ever read the lines of Jean Ingelow:

"Oh so many, many, many Maids and yet my heart undone. What to me are all or any? I have lost--my--one."

Daisy replied that the sentiment was very sweet, and added that when a lover could quote such admirable poetry with accuracy, there was hope for him. Do what he would, Roseleaf could not make her see that everything in his future life depended on "one little word" from her. She persisted that he was misled by the violence of his first affection, and that if he would only let a month or two pass he would discover that his pulse would fall off a number of beats to the minute.

"And is that what you want?" he asked, reproachfully. "Would you like to have me come back two months later, and tell you my love had ceased?"

"Yes, if it was the truth. How much better than to learn it after my vows had been pledged and I was bound to you for the rest of my days!"

He rose and went with quick steps to her side, catching up her hand and covering it with kisses. She did her best to stop him, whispering, with a glance toward the door, that they might be interrupted at any minute.

"By whom!" he retorted, stung at her coldness. "Your sister has gone up stairs, and there is no one else in the house."

"Hannibal might come in," she said, in a low tone. "He has no way of knowing that I do not wish to be interrupted."

He grew angry at the mention of that name. But the warning had its effect and he sat down, nearer to her than before, his heart beating rapidly.

"I hate the fellow!" he exclaimed bitterly. "It is a good thing I am going away, or I should strike him some day for his insolence!"

Daisy paled at the vehemence of her companion.

"Has he been insolent to you?" she murmured.

"To me? He would not dare! What angers me is the way he speaks to the rest of you. He came with your cloak that night, acting as if he was your master, instead of your servant. I have heard him speak to Mr. Fern in a way that made me want to kick him! Why does your father bear it? Why do you? Has Hannibal some mysterious hold on his situation?"

The girl heard him patiently, though the roses did not come at once to her white cheek.

"I am afraid," she said, when he had finished his tirade, "that you despise him for his color. It is a prejudice that seems to me--and to my father--unchristian and uncharitable. Perhaps, in the anxiety to make Hannibal forget that God gave him a darker skin than ours, we may have gone to the other extreme, and treated him with too great consideration. But I think you overstate the case."

Her gentle words smote upon the ears that heard them, and in a moment Roseleaf was affected by the most lively contrition. Without attempting to excuse himself he begged her pardon, which she readily granted.

"When do you leave us?" she asked.

"To-morrow morning."

"But you will call--occasionally?"

"If I may."

His tone was so sad that Daisy assured him he ought to have no doubt of that.

"I understand," she added, "that you have probably helped Millie to a reputation that she craves above everything, and she ought not to prove entirely ungrateful. We have enjoyed your stay here, and shall be most sorry to have you go. I should be glad to think you would honor us with your company to dinner not less often than once each week."

For the first time a ray of light came into his face.

"Oh, may I?" he cried. "Then I shall not be shut off entirely from seeing you?"

"No, indeed," she answered. "Father likes you and Mr. Weil too well--you will bring him, of course. Once a week, at least--if it were twice it wouldn't do any harm; and if it were three times--"

His face was now one bright beam of light.

"Daisy," he cried. "I believe you do not hate me after all!"

"I hope you never thought I did," she responded. "Why is it that a man can see no middle ground between positive dislike and marriage? I expect to like a good many men in the course of my life, but I can only marry a very few of them."

He was obliged to laugh at this, and to say that she would only marry *one*, if he had *his* way. Before they had finished with this subject Roseleaf was in a state of high good nature, though he had little apparently upon which to base the rise in his spirits.

"Can't I say something--just a hint, if no more, to your father?" he asked, getting down again to business.

"Pretty risky!" she answered, sententiously. "He wouldn't give you much encouragement I fear."

The young man caught eagerly at the word.

"You *fear!*" he echoed. "God bless you, Daisy!"

Bearing in mind what she had previously said about the unlocked doors, he did not attempt to suit the action to the phrase. But his happy face spoke volumes.

"You had best say very little to father at present," said Daisy, soberly. "He is most unhappy."

"I wish I knew what troubled him!" he exclaimed.

"I wish so, too, if you could aid him," she answered, earnestly.

"Who knows but I may?" he asked, with a smile that she hoped would prove prophetic.

CHAPTER XI.

ARCHIE PAYS ATTENTION.

Roseleaf took rooms at his old lodgings in the city, and set in earnest about the work of beginning his great novel. He had interviews with Mr. Gouger, at which he detailed the slight thread of plot which he already had in mind, profiting by the critic's shrewd suggestions. It was decided that he should portray, at the beginning, a youth much like himself, who was to fall in love with an angelically pure maiden. The outline of their respective characters were to be sketched with care, and sundry obstacles to their union were to be developed as the story progressed. Gouger warned his young friend not to write too fast, and to content himself for the present with delineating the phase of love with which he had become familiar.

"Later on," he said, "when your hero finds that this girl is not all his bright fancy painted her--when it is proved beyond a doubt that she has played him false, that she has another lover--"

Roseleaf turned pale.

"But that will never be!" he interrupted.

"It will, of course--in the story," corrected Gouger. "She will lead him a race that will make him an enemy to the entire sex, if she is used for all the dramatic effect possible. People expect to find immaculate purity in the earlier chapters of a story, as they do in small children. With the progress of the action they look for something more exciting. To sketch a seraph who remains one would only be to repeat the failure you made in your other effort--the one you brought to me the day I met you first. It is not the glory of heaven that attracts audiences to our churches, but the dramatic quality of hell. A sermon without a large spice of the devil in it would be much worse than a rendition of Hamlet minus the Prince. Put your heroine in the clouds, if you will, at the beginning. The higher she goes, the greater will be her fall, and the greater, consequently, your triumph."

The young novelist shivered as he listened to these expressions. How could he build a heroine on the model of Daisy Fern, and conceive the possibility that she would ever allow her white robes to touch the earth? He might have constructed such a plot with Millicent as the central figure, though that would be by no means easy; but Daisy! Impossible! He asked the critic if it would not do to send the hero of the tale to perdition, while leaving his sweetheart immaculate to the close.

"No," said Gouger, decidedly. "A man's fall is not much of a fall, any way you put it. The public is not interested in such matters. It demands a female sacrifice, like some of the ancient gods, and it will not be appeased with less. I expect you to be new and original in your treatment of the theme, but the subject itself is as old as fiction. You have too little imagination, as I have told you before. You must cultivate that talent. Having conceived your paragon, imagine her placed under temptations she cannot resist; surround her with an environment from which she cannot break; place her in situations that leave her no escape."

Roseleaf shook his head.

"I am afraid I never shall be able to do it," he said.

"Pshaw! Don't talk of failure at this stage of the game. All you have to do is to introduce upon the scene a thoroughly unprincipled man of good address, who is fertile in expedients. You will find your model for that among a dozen of your acquaintances. Why, take Archie Weil, and hold him in your mind till you are saturated with him."

What did Mr. Gouger mean? That Mr. Weil would actually do these dreadful things, would in his own person perpetrate the outrage of winning a pure girl to shame. It seemed childish to ask such a question, and yet such a meaning could easily be taken from what the critic had said. No, no! All he could have meant was that Mr. Weil might serve as a figure on which to lay these sins--that he could be carried in the writer's mind, as a costumer uses a stuffed frame to hang garments on while in the process of manufacture.

"Then there is Boggs," added Gouger, with a laugh. "You ought to find some place for a fellow like him, if only for the comic parts of your novel, and there must be a little humor in a book that is to suit the mass. A writer for a magazine said recently with much truth, 'He who would hit the popular taste must aim low.' I think Boggs could furnish the cheap fun for an ordinary novel, without too great a wear on the writer. Go ahead, my boy. Write a half dozen chapters in your own idyllic way, and then get Archie to take you to a few places where your mind will be turned to opposite scenes. It takes all sorts of edibles to suit the modern palate."

So Roseleaf wrote, slowly, patiently, with devotion to his art, until he had completed five chapters of his story. And Gouger read it and went into ecstasies, declaring it the best foundation he had ever seen for a most entrancing romance.

"He has wrought his people up to such a superlative height," said the critic to Mr. Weil, "that the *chute* will be simply tremendous! How simply, how elegantly his sentences flow! If he can handle the necessary wickedness that must follow, the sale of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' or 'Thou Shalt Not,' will be eclipsed without the least doubt. But, the question still is, *can* he?"

"There's no such question," was the response. "He must, that's the way to put it. Confound it, he shall! And the next thing for him to do is to take a few visits with me to the underground regions, where he can get such slight shocks to his literary system as will enable him to take up the vein he must work."

During this time Roseleaf did not forget the invitation he had received to dine with the Ferns. It did him good to see Daisy, although he could not now get her for a moment to himself. He sighed to her over the table, and across the parlor, after the party had retired to that part of the house, and she answered him with little bright smiles that acted like an emollient on his hurt spirit. He had never found the courage to beard her father in his den--of wool--and was not even sure that the affair had reached a stage where anything could be gained by taking such a step. What he wanted was a word of assurance from Daisy that she would wait for him till he had

made a Name in literature, or proved his ability in some definite manner. There was no indication that any one else was in the way; everything pointed to a contrary probability. But there is nothing so desolate as the heart of a lover whose fair one is just beyond his reach.

Mr. Weil accompanied Shirley on most of these visits, and knew very well what was going on. None of the glances exchanged between the young people were so much their exclusive property as they believed. Had Archie possessed eyes in the back and sides of his head, he could have seen little more than he did. While appearing to devote his entire attention to Mr. Fern and Millicent--principally the former, he found time to watch Roseleaf and Daisy, and even the negro Hannibal.

He noticed that the servant was no less devoted than formerly to the youngest member of the household. He saw him hover around her at the table like a protecting spirit, letting her want for nothing that thoughtfulness could procure. And he noticed that Daisy seemed as oblivious of this as she had always been. She accepted these extraordinary attentions quite as if Hannibal were some automaton, acting with a set of concealed springs--a mechanism in which there was nothing of human life or intelligence.

Mr. Fern was the same gentlemanly host as of yore, with the same dark cloud hanging over him, whatever might be its cause. Courteous by nature to an exceptional degree he could not assume a gayety he did not feel. There was some terrible weight bearing him down, some awful incubus of which he was unable to rid himself. The only person who did not notice it was Millicent, and the one it troubled most was Daisy, on whose sweet young face the share she had in her parent's griefs had already begun to leave its impressions.

Millicent's novel was soon placed in Mr. Gouger's hands, completed. The original theme was unaltered, but in its new garb of perfect English no one would have recognized the rejected work. The combination of the girl's strength of mind and the man's elegance of diction was successful. The critic recommended its acceptance without a word of dissent, and Cutt & Slashem even consented, on his suggestion, to forego the guarantee against

loss which they had of late demanded from all authors whose names were unknown to the reading public.

"I have fixed it for you, Archie," he said, when that gentleman next made his appearance at the sanctum. "No deposit or guarantee, and ten per cent. of the retail price for royalty. So take a train to your inamorata's house and tell her the news."

Mr. Weil did not seem to wholly relish the announcement.

"In the first place," he remarked, "you have no business to speak of Miss Fern as my inamorata; and in the second you will pay her more than ten per cent. or you won't get the book to print."

At this, Mr. Gouger, after the manner of all publishers and their agents, proceeded to show to Mr. Weil that it was perfectly impossible to pay another cent more than the figure he had named; and before he had finished he agreed to see the firm and get the amount raised considerably, provided the sales should exceed five thousand copies. In short, Mr. Weil secured a very respectable contract for a new author, and one that was sure to please Miss Fern, if she was in the least degree reasonable.

"I wish you would hurry up Roseleaf," remarked Gouger, when this matter was disposed of. "When will you take him down into the depths and let him see that side of life?"

"I have arranged a journey for to-morrow night," said Weil. "We shall go to Isaac Leveson's and make an evening of it. Unless things are different there from usual, he will lay the foundation for all the wickedness he needs to put into his story."

The critic nodded approval.

"He will probably have a Jew in it, then--a modernized Fagan."

"Yes," said Weil. "And a negro. A tall, well-built negro, who has a white man for his slave!"

CHAPTER XII.

DINING AT ISAAC'S.

On the following day, when Shirley Roseleaf presented himself at the Hoffman House, he found Mr. Weil awaiting him in a state of great good nature.

"Go home and make yourself ready for a dive into the infernal regions," he said, merrily. "I am going to take you to a place where the devil spends his vacation, and show you a set of women as different from those you have lately met as chalk is from indigo. Be here at nine o'clock this evening, prepared for the descent."

A vision of subterranean passages crossed the mind of the listener, and he thought of tall boots and a tarpaulin.

"How shall I dress--roughly, I suppose?" he inquired.

"Certainly not. Put on your swallow tail, and white tie. Vice in these days wears its best garments. You cannot tell a gambler from a clergyman by his attire. Dress exactly as if you were going to the swellest party on Fifth Avenue. The only addition to your toilet will be a revolver, if you happen to have one handy. If you do not, I have several and will lend you one."

If he expected to startle the young man he was in error. Roseleaf merely nodded and said he would take one of the weapons owned by Mr. Weil.

"We shall not use them--there are a thousand chances to one," said Archie. "New York is like Montana. You remember what the resident said to the tenderfoot, 'You may be a long time without wantin' a we'p'n in these parts, but when you do you'll want it d--d sudden.'"

When Roseleaf returned, the hands of his watch indicated the time at which he had been asked to make his appearance, but Mr. Weil did not take him immediately to the point of destination. Instead he walked over to a variety

theatre that was then in operation on Twenty-third street, and after spending a short time in the auditorium guided the young man into the "wineroom." Here the ladies of the ballet were in the habit of going when off the stage, for the sake of entertaining the patrons with their light and frivolous conversation, and inducing them if possible, to invest in champagne at five dollars the bottle.

Archie was, it appeared, not unknown to the throng that filled this place, for his name was spoken by several of both sexes as soon as he entered. He nodded coolly to those who addressed him, and took a seat at a table with his companion. With a shake of his head he declined the offers of two or three fairies of the ballet to share the table, and ordered a bottle of Mumm with the evident intention of drinking it alone with his friend.

Roseleaf slowly sipped the sparkling beverage. He was cautioned in a whisper to drink but one glass, as it was necessary that he should keep a perfectly clear head. Weil remarked in an undertone that he had only ordered the wine as an excuse for remaining a few minutes.

"I call this 'the slaughter house,'" he added, in a voice still lower. "Girls are brought here to be murdered. Not to have their throats cut," he explained, "but to be killed just as surely, if more slowly. I have seen them come here for the first time, with good health shining out of their rosy cheeks, delighted at the unwonted excitement and the amount of attention the frequenters of the place bestowed. I have watched them growing steadily paler, having recourse to rouge, the eyes getting dimmer, the voice growing harsher, the temper becoming more variable. And then--other fresh faces came in their stead. There are killed, on an average, twenty girls a year here, I should say; killed to satisfy the appetites of men, as beeves are killed in Chicago, but not so mercifully."

The novelist looked into the faces that were nearest to him and thought he could discern the various grades of which his friend spoke--the new, the older, the ones whose turn to give way to others would soon come. All of them were drinking. Most had on the stage dresses they had just worn or were about to wear in the performance. Some had finished their parts and

were enveloped in street clothes, ready to take their departure with the first male who asked them. And they were drinking, drinking, either in little sips or in feverish gulps, as they would at a later day, when the five-dollar wine would be replaced by five cent beer or perhaps the drainings of a keg on the sidewalk.

Mr. Walker Boggs soon came into the wine-room and joined the pair at Mr. Weil's table. He called for a whiskey straight, pushing the champagne aside with an impatient movement.

"I won't punish my stomach with such stuff, even if it *has* gone back on me," he exclaimed. "That will knock out any man who drinks it between meals."

Mr. Weil assented to this proposition, and to show his full belief in it filled his own glass again and tossed its contents down his throat.

"What brings you here?" he asked, quizzically.

"Those creatures," replied Boggs, with a motion of his hand toward the members of the ballet. "They're all that's left me now. *They* don't mind the size of my waist. My hold on *them* is as strong as ever. But *you* ought not to be here," he broke in, turning to Roseleaf. "It will be years before you get to this stage, I hope."

Mr. Weil hastened to explain.

"Shirley is merely observing," said he. "He came at my request. We are going next to Isaac Leveson's."

Mr. Boggs grew interested.

"So, so! You intend to show him Isaac's to-night?"

"Yes. Isn't it a good idea?"

The stout man shrugged his shoulders as if he had nothing to say on that point. The movement was essentially a Frenchy one and might have meant anything.

"Perhaps you would like to go with us," said Archie.

"What do you intend to do there?"

"Tell Mr. Roseleaf all the secrets."

Mr. Boggs stared at the speaker.

"Isaac won't let you," he answered, grimly.

"Won't he? He'll have to. Why, what's the odds? The boy won't give him away. And if he should--" His voice sank to a whisper.

Mr. Weil then proceeded to explain to his young friend that "Isaac's" was a peculiar affair, even for Gotham. It had entrances on two streets. Into one door went the most respectable of people, intent on getting an exceptionably good dinner, which was always to be had there, cooked in the French style and elegantly served. At that end of the house there were several dining-rooms that would hold forty or fifty guests, and several others made to accommodate family parties of six to twelve. If a couple happened to stray in and inquire for a room to themselves the head waiter informed them that it was against the rule of the house to serve a private dinner to less than four people.

It was evident that the establishment was conducted on the most moral principles, and in a way to prevent the possibility of scandal. For though a great many couples undoubtedly take dinners in private rooms with the utmost propriety, it must be admitted that such a course is open to suspicion and might be used as a basis for unpleasant rumors. Mr. Leveson, who kept this hotel, took great pride in saying that nothing in all New York bore a better name, and no amount of bribery would have induced one of his employes--on *that* side of the house--to vary the rules laid down.

But on the *other* side of the building--at the entrance on the other street--ah, that was different!

If only the most respectable customers entered the first door it was almost equally true that none but those who lacked that quality used the second. Mr. Leveson sometimes remarked with glee, at twelve o'clock at night, that he would give a hundred dollar bill for an honest man or woman in any of the rooms up-stairs. The waiters had instructions to "size up" all comers with care, and to admit no accidental parties who might apply for entrance under a misapprehension as to the character of the place.

"We are all full, sorry to say," was the established formula. "There is a very good restaurant just around the corner, on ----th street." And in this manner the shrewd restaurateur got all the custom he wanted, while preserving the natural atmosphere in each part of his dominions.

The meals served in these two places were prepared by one chef, and served from one kitchen. Thus the virtuous and vicious patrons were supplied with exactly the same dishes. But on what may be called the Good side nothing stronger than wines were found on the bill of fare. On the Wicked side every decoction known to the modern drinker was to be had for the asking. Then, again, the doors of the Good side were closed at eleven o'clock, while it was often daylight before the last patron of the Sinful side reeled into his carriage.

After a little more talk Mr. Boggs seemed satisfied and consented to join the party.

Mr. Leveson was notified of the presence of the newcomers and met them at the door. Isaac was of a decidedly Jewish cast of countenance, slightly gray, not very tall, and quite round shouldered. He put out a lank hand toward Roseleaf, when that young gentleman was named as a matter of introduction, but put it down again when Mr. Weil curtly said handshaking was out of date. Archie had seen a disinclination in the eye of his friend to touch the fingers of the Hebrew, and with his usual quickness had solved the difficulty. The party entered a private office at the left of the entrance,

where Mr. Leveson inquired what he should order for them to drink.

"You will order nothing, at present," said Weil, in a contemptuous way that excited the astonishment of Mr. Roseleaf. "When I wish for anything I will ring. Who is there in the house?"

The manager of the establishment bowed humbly, and proceeded to run over the list of his customers.

"There is Major Waters and his wife--"

"Together!" exclaimed the questioner.

"Oh, no! The Major has the little blonde that he has brought for the last month; his wife has Mr. Nikles of the Planet. Then--"

But Mr. Weil interrupted him again.

"You'll let them run into each other some day and there'll be a nice time."

"Never fear that. The boys understand thoroughly. He comes earlier and stays later than she. Besides, we never let anybody meet on the stairs. The waiters cry out, 'You must go back; it is bad luck!' if any of them seem in danger of running into each other. They are as safe from discovery here as if they were in places a mile apart."

Some one descended the stairs at this moment and Leveson tiptoed to the door and opened it half an inch to peer at them.

"You know I have no object in saying these things," said Weil, "except to save your precious self from trouble. Who is that going out?"

"Some new people; it is the third time they have been here."

"Well," asked Weil, impatiently, "who are they?"

Leveson held up both his hands as if to beg a moment to answer.

"They come from Brooklyn. I don't know their names. I think neither is married."

"I have a curiosity about things," explained Weil to his friends, "that I cannot account for. You remember how Silas Wegg used to talk about 'Aunt Jane' and 'Uncle Parker.' Well, I have the same way of studying the men that wander in here of an evening, with other people's wives and daughters. There is so little really entertaining in this confounded world that I seize upon anything promising a change with avidity. Isaac tells me all the secrets of his queer ranch, and they prove wonderfully interesting, sometimes. You see," he added, addressing himself particularly to Roseleaf, "not a couple comes into this place that would like to have it known."

Roseleaf bowed constrainedly.

"And how does Mr. Leveson know them?" he inquired. "They surely do not register, or if they do their names must be fictitious."

Mr. Weil laughed.

"He has ways of finding out," said he. "There are little birds that fly in at the window and tell him."

"I should not think he would wish to know," commented Roseleaf.

"Especially when it is evident they would not like to have him."

Archie laughed again.

"Let me explain, then," he said. "I need not mind Boggs here, who is discretion itself. Leveson's reason--of course, I can rely on your silence?"

The young face reddened at the insinuation that he might betray a secret.

"I was sure of it," said Archie, so quickly that Roseleaf felt at ease again. "Well, the reason why Isaac wants to know what is going on is, he is connected with the police."

Roseleaf said "Ah!" and opened his eyes wider.

"People who go to places like this," continued Mr. Weil, "are of great interest to the guardians of the peace. And by the police I do not mean the members of the regular force so much as the special service. It is to the latter that we go when a confidential clerk has robbed us or we become suspicious that our wives are unfaithful. Nine times out of ten the chief of the private detective office knows in advance all we wish him to ferret out. When he has told us that we will set investigations on foot, and that he hopes to learn something of the matter within a few days, he bows us out of his bureau with an air that implies that we have not come to the wrong party. And as soon as we are gone he turns to a ledger, and in a few minutes has found an abstract that tells him everything.

"Let us suppose," said Mr. Weil, "that a jeweler misses twenty valuable pieces of *bijouterie* from his stock. The circumstances prove that they were taken by some one in his employ. He thinks of his clerks, and cannot find the heart to accuse any of them of such a grave crime. He goes to the detective office and states his case. When he is gone the chief turns to the book and finds this:

"L. M. Jenkins, clerk at Abram Cohen's, Sixth Avenue; about twenty-three, medium height, dark, dresses well. Rooms at No. -- Twenty-Ninth street. Has been giving expensive suppers as well as valuable jewelry to Mamie Sanders, No. so-and-so, Such-a-street. They dined together at Isaac Leveson's on such-and-such dates.' Etc., etc., etc.

"Now, he can recover the jewelry and get that clerk into quod in three hours, if he likes. Naturally he won't expedite things in that way, because he wants some excuse for running up a large bill, unless it be a bank case, where he prefers to make a great impression and get himself solid with the directors. But he will collar the fellow and recover the stuff, and all because

he knew about it long before any one in the store had a suspicion."

Mr. Leveson returned. Mr. Weil asked that one of the private rooms on the second floor be put in order at once, for himself and friends. He then inquired what ladies were in the house unoccupied by escorts.

"Miss Pelham has been waiting an hour for the Judge," replied Isaac, "but I don't think he'll come. He disappoints her half the time now. And Mrs. Delavan, who has just come in, found a note from Col. Lamorest, asking her to excuse him to-night."

Archie looked pleased.

"They'll do," he said. "Tell them to come and dine with us. But," he paused, and looked at Roseleaf, "we need still another."

The color mounted to the cheeks of the young novelist, as he understood the thought that prompted this statement.

"Not on my account--I would much rather not," he stammered.

"You will kindly leave that to my judgment," replied Archie, impressively. "Remember, you are not the instructor here, but the pupil. There must be some one else, Isaac."

Mr. Leveson hesitated. He was mentally going over the rooms upstairs and taking stock of what was in them.

"There are two girls," he said, at last, "who used to work in one of the dry goods stores, but you wouldn't want them. They are very strict, and they dress plainly,--and I am afraid the other ladies wouldn't like to associate with them."

Mr. Weil grew vastly irritated by this statement. He brought his hand down on the table with a bang.

"The other ladies!" he echoed, angrily. "When you tell Mrs. Delavan and Jenny Pelham that you want them to dine with us, you know that ends it! As to these shop girls, what do you mean by calling them *strict*? What would a *strict* girl be doing in *this* house?"

Mr. Leveson cringed before his interrogator and made the old, imploring movement with his hands.

"Let me explain," he said. "These girls came here a few weeks ago with some traveling men. They took dinner, but Adolf says neither drank a drop of wine. A few days later they came again, with other escorts, and the same thing occurred."

"Why did you let them in?" demanded Weil.

"Because I knew the gentlemen."

Archie started to say something, but checked himself.

"And after that they came alone and asked to see me," pursued Isaac, humbly. "They said they had been thrown out of work, and thought there might be an opportunity to do something here, like waiting on the guests. And while we were talking, two old customers of the house called to dine, alone, and asked me if they could get some one to share the meal with them. And, it seemed quite providential--"

Archie stopped the voluble speech by striking his hands sharply together.

"Enough!" he said. "When the dinner is ready send one of them in. That will make the three we need."

In half an hour the dinner was ready to be served. Then Isaac came with the information that the girls refused to be separated.

"What a nuisance!" exclaimed Weil. "Well, send both of them, then. We'll take care of them, somehow."

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUESTION OF COLOR.

The next morning, when Roseleaf awoke, he was for some time in a sort of stupor. Through the bright sunlight that filled his room he seemed to scent the fumes of tobacco and of liquor. The place was filled, he imagined, with that indefinable aroma that proceeds from a convivial company made up of both sexes. He half believed that Jennie Pelham and Mrs. Delavan were sitting by his bed, more brazen than the bell which, from a neighboring steeple, told him the hour was ten. And surely, by those curtains there, hiding the flame that filled their cheeks, were the two "shop-girls," their pinched faces denoting slow starvation. Boggs, and Isaac Leveson, and Archie Weil were there, all of them; and the young man tossed uneasily on his pillow, struggling with the remnant of nightmare that remained to cloud his brain.

When he was able to think and see clearly he sat up and rang for a pitcher of ice water. He was consumed by thirst, and his forehead ached blindly. When he had bathed his head and throat he turned, by a sudden impulse, to his table, and took out the MSS. of the story he had begun. Slowly he read over the pages, to the last one. Then, seizing his pen, he devoted himself to the next chapter, without dressing, without breakfasting.

It was four o'clock when he ceased work. He realized all at once that he was feeling ill. The fact dawned upon him that he needed food, and donning his garments, he took his way listlessly to a restaurant and ordered something to eat. As he swallowed the morsels, he fell to wondering how much temptation *he* would be able to bear, with hunger as a background.

He passed a good part of the evening in walking the streets, selecting, instinctively, sections where he was least likely to meet any one he knew. When he returned to his room he read over the MSS. he had written that day, and into his troubled brain there came a sense of pleasure. Gouger was right. To tell of such matters in a novel, one should know them himself. Roseleaf could never have written of vice before he saw Leveson's. Now, it

was as plain to him as print, almost as easy to use in fiction as virtue. What was to follow? He pondered over the plot he had mapped out, and it grew clearer.

Daisy had given him no further encouragement--at least in words--since that day she had said it was "risky" to ask her father, but he felt certain that she regarded him with favor, and that if Mr. Fern put no obstacles in the way she would not refuse to wed him when the right time came. He thought it would be wise to obtain one more brief interview with her, before proceeding to extremities, and determined to do his best to draw her aside, when he made his next visit to her house. This settled, he went to bed again and slept soundly.

When the day to go to Midlands arrived Shirley's courage began to ooze a little. So much depended upon the attitude of his dear one's mind, which, for all he knew, had changed since he talked with her, that he fairly trembled with apprehension. He avoided Mr. Weil, with whom he usually took the train, and went out early. Alighting at a station a mile or two away from the right one, he walked through the woods, trying to think how to act in case matters did not turn out as he hoped. Under the branches he strolled along, until he came within sight of the roofs of Midlands; and then he threw himself at the foot of a tree close to Mr. Fern's grounds, and gave himself up to reverie.

When he laid down here it was only five o'clock, and he was not expected at the house for a full hour. It pleased him to be so near the one he loved, and to lie where he could dream of her sweet face and see the outlines of the house that sheltered her, while she had no knowledge of his presence. Just over there was the arbor, where he had first had the supreme bliss of touching her lips with his own. If he could get her to come there with him again--to-night--when the others were occupied with their talk of earthly things, and if she would only tell him frankly that he might go to her father, and that her prayers would go with him! A soft languor came over his body at the deliciousness of these reflections, but it was dissipated by the sound of voices which presently came to him from the other side of the hedge.

"I can't exactly understand, Miss Daisy," said one of the voices, which he had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Hannibal, "why you wish me to go away?"

There was an assurance in the tone that Roseleaf did not like. He had noticed it before in the intercourse of this negro with his employers. There was something which intimated that he was on the most complete level with them.

"I want you to go," said Daisy, in her quiet way, "because education is the only thing that will make you what you ought to be. There are a hundred chances open to you, in the professions, if you can take a college course. Unless you do, you can hope for nothing better than such employment as you have now."

It made the listener's blood boil to think that these people should be consulting in that way, like friends. Daisy ought to have a better sense of her position.

"I will not refuse your offer, at least not yet," replied Hannibal, after a slight pause. "It may be as you say--if I graduate as a doctor or a lawyer. But I know that I live in a country where my color is despised--and all that could possibly come to me here as a professional man is work among my own race. I should be a black lawyer with black clients; or a black physician, with black patients. To really succeed I should go across the ocean to some land where the shade of my skin would not be counted a crime."

Daisy's face could not be seen by the listener, but he was sure it was a kindly one, and this made him fume. The situation was atrocious.

"It should not be considered so anywhere," said the girl, gently.

"It is an outrage!" responded the black. "Having stolen our ancestors and brought them here from their native country, the Americans hate us for the injury they have done. In France, they tell me, it is not so. Oh, if I *could*

gain an education, and become what God meant to make me--a man!" He paused as if the thought was too great to be conceived in its fullness, and then said, abruptly: "Where can you get this money?"

Roseleaf's suspicions were now keenly aroused and he dreaded lest she should bring his name into the conversation.

"Your father would not give it to you--without an explanation," pursued the negro. "And you have no fortune of your own."

"I will get it--let that suffice," interrupted the girl. "I can give you \$1000 a year for two years, at least, and I hope for two or three more, if you will go to Paris and put yourself under instruction. Can you hesitate to accept a proposal of that kind? I thought you would seize it with avidity."

As Daisy said this she arose, and started slowly toward the house. Hannibal walked by her side talking in a tone so low that nothing more was intelligible to the eavesdropper she little suspected was so near. But suddenly the girl stopped, and Roseleaf heard her cry with startling distinctness:

"How dare you!"

The voice that uttered these words was filled with rage, and the girl's attitude, as Roseleaf could see--for he had risen hastily to his feet--was one of intense excitement. Then she added:

"If you ever speak of that again, they will be the last words I will ever exchange with you. My offer is still open--you can have the money if you wish it--but never another syllable like this! Understand me, Hannibal, never!"

Miss Daisy passed on toward the house, alone. The negro stood where she had left him, his head bowed on his breast, as if completely cowed by the rebuke. Roseleaf's heart beat rapidly. What gave this fellow such power over these people? How could he say things to call out such an exclamation

as that of Daisy's, and yet hold her promise to pay him a large sum of money, instead of getting the prompt discharge he merited?

And this was what the girl wanted to do with the \$1,000, she had asked him to lend her! Should he still give it to her? Yes, if it would rid the country of that insolent knave who, from whatever cause, occupied a position that must be growing unendurable to those who had to bear with him.

What had Hannibal said, that made her turn as if grossly insulted, and speak with a vehemence so foreign to her nature? Roseleaf would have enjoyed following the negro and giving him a severe trouncing. Though Hannibal was twenty pounds heavier and considerably taller than he, the novelist had not the least doubt of his ability to master him. He believed the courage of an African would give way when confronted by one of the superior race; and at any rate, righteous indignation would count for something in so just a contest.

There were no traces of excitement on Daisy's pretty face as she welcomed the guests of the family. Weil arrived at about the same time as Roseleaf, coming directly from the station, and Mr. Fern arrived a little later. Millicent looked her best, which is saying no less than that she was a beauty, and Archie told her politely that she ought to sit for a painting. When the dinner was served, Hannibal took charge as usual. Shirley watched him with an interest he had never felt before, and nodded assent when Weil whispered behind his napkin, "Good material for a novel in that fellow, eh?"

The opportunity for a word alone with Daisy came earlier than Roseleaf expected. In fact she herself proposed it, while passing out of the dining room. She said she had something particular to tell him.

"It is about that money you were so kind as to say I could have," she explained, when they were far down the lawn, and out of hearing of the others. "I want it very much and very soon. It--it will be all right, I hope, and--and not cause you any inconvenience."

"I will bring it, or send it to-morrow," he replied, instantly. "But I still wonder what you intend to do with it."

She smiled archly.

"A good act, I assure you," she replied. "Something of which you would certainly approve, if you knew all the circumstances. You are very kind, and if it was darker here I should be--almost--tempted to kiss you."

He replied that it was growing darker rapidly, and that the requisite shadow could be obtained if they stayed out long enough; but she said she could remain but a few moments, and turned in the direction of the house.

"But, Daisy!" he cried, and then paused. "You--you know there is something of very great importance that I want to talk about. I get so little chance, and I want so much to tell you things. I have been trying to go to your father's office, and I can't find courage."

"I didn't know you were thinking of buying wool," she said, mischievously.

"I want one little lamb, to be my own," he answered, "to love and cherish all my life long. Am I never to have it?"

She sobered before the earnestness of his sad face.

"You are a dear boy," she said, "and I love you. There! Don't say anything more to me to-night. I have made a foolish confession, for which I may yet repent. We must go in. They will be looking for us."

She looked at his countenance and saw that it was radiant.

"I can endure anything now," he said. "You love me, Daisy--can it be true? I will go in with you--and I will wait. But not too long, my sweetheart; do not make me wait too long. Repent your confession, indeed! If you do, it will be from no fault of mine. *Daisy!*"

As he said these things they were gradually nearing the piazza, where the negro was taking in the chairs.

"I have something pleasant to tell you," whispered Daisy. "You don't like Hannibal. Well, he is going away soon."

Roseleaf assumed surprise.

"Has your father discharged him?" he asked.

"No, he intends to leave of his own accord. He believes himself fitted for better work. Hush! He may hear you."

As they passed the servant, Daisy said, "Good-evening, Hannibal." It was her invariable custom, and she spoke with the greatest courtesy. But in this case the negro did not raise his eyes, nor turn his head toward her, nor make the slightest sign to show that he heard.

It was too much for Roseleaf, and he stopped.

"Did you hear Miss Daisy address you?" he demanded, sharply.

Hannibal looked up, with a curious mixture of amusement, contempt and hate in his dark face.

"I did," he answered.

"Why did you not answer?"

"Because I did not choose."

Daisy threw herself in front of Roseleaf, just in time to prevent Hannibal's receiving a blow.

"Oh, stop!" she exclaimed, "I beg you!"

The noise and the sound of raised voices brought Mr. Fern and his other daughter, with Archie Weil, to the door. Mr. Fern took in the situation at a glance, and his troubled face grew more distressed.

"Mr. Roseleaf," he said, speaking as if the words choked him, "I am surprised--that you should--hold an altercation like this--in my daughter's presence."

Roseleaf did not know what to do or say. Daisy's pleading eyes decided him, much against his judgment, to drop the matter where it was, galling to his pride though it might be. He escorted his sweetheart into the parlor, where the entire party followed, in a most uncomfortable state of mind.

"How can you permit that negro to insult your guests?" demanded Millicent, as soon as the door was closed. "It is beyond belief. If he is master of this house it is time the rest of us left it. I am certain Mr. Roseleaf did not act without great provocation."

Before Mr. Fern could answer, Daisy had spoken.

"It is over now, and there is nothing to be said. Hannibal is going away in a few days, and that will end your trouble."

The father turned such an incredulous look toward his daughter that it was evident he had heard nothing of this.

"Going?" he echoed, faintly. "Going?"

"Yes," said Daisy. "He told me to-day. He is going to some country where his color will not be counted a misdemeanor."

Roseleaf had difficulty in maintaining the silence with which he had determined to encase himself. But Daisy did not wish him to speak, and her will was law.

"Well, I am glad of that!" exclaimed Millicent. "In a country where they consider such people their equals, he will not meet the pity and consideration he has so abused here. Still, I do think, father, that you ought to apologize to Mr. Roseleaf for the way in which you have addressed him."

This freed the young man's tongue.

"By no means," he said. "Very likely I was wrong to say anything."

"You were not wrong!" retorted Millicent. "You were entirely right. You would have been justified in punishing the fellow as he deserved. It is others who are wrong. If he were not going, I would never stay to see repeated what I have witnessed in the last six months."

Mr. Fern seemed to have lost all ambition for controversy. His elder daughter's cutting words evidently hurt, but he would not reply.

Mr. Weil came to the rescue by introducing a new topic of conversation, that of a European tenor that was soon expected to startle New York. Daisy went to the piano, and played softly, talking in whispers to Roseleaf, who leaned feverishly over her shoulder. But she made no allusion to Hannibal, and he did his best to forget him.

"What do you make of that?" asked Mr. Weil, when he was in a railway car, on the way back to the city with his young friend. "A glorious chance for a novelist to find the reason that black Adonis is allowed such latitude."

But Roseleaf was not listening. He was thinking of a sweet voice that had said: "You are a dear boy and I love you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"LET US HAVE A BETRAYAL."

Mr. Archie Weil had become quite intimate with Mr. Wilton Fern; so much so that he called at his office every few days, took walks with him on business errands, went with him to lunch (to the annoyance of Lawrence Gouger, who did not like to eat alone) and sometimes took the train home with him at night, on evenings when Shirley Roseleaf was not of the party. Everybody in the Fern family liked Archie. Even Hannibal, who had conceived a veritable hatred for Roseleaf, brightened at the entrance of Mr. Weil either at the house or office, the negro seeming to alternate between the two places very much as he pleased. Millicent liked him because he was so "facile," as she expressed it; a man with whom one could talk without feeling it necessary to pick each step. Daisy liked him because her father did, and because Roseleaf did, and because he treated her with marked politeness that had apparently no double meaning.

And they all got confidential with him, which was exactly what he wanted them to do; only the one he most wanted to give him confidence gave him the least. This was Mr. Fern, himself.

Try as he might, Archie could not discover what clouded the brow of the wool merchant, what made him act like a person who fears each knock at the door, each sound of a human voice in the hallway of his office. He could find no reason for Mr. Fern's attitude toward Hannibal, whose manners were as far removed as possible from those supposed to belong to a personal servant. There must be a cause of no ordinary character when this polished gentleman permitted a negro to insult him and his daughter, in a way to excite comment. What it was Mr. Weil was bent on discovering, but as yet he had made little progress.

It was on account of this plan that Mr. Weil affected to like Hannibal so well. He used to spend hours in devising ways for securing the truth from that source. Hannibal, however, gave no signs of intending to reveal his secret, and if he was going abroad to study, it seemed unlikely that the

investigator would get at many facts in that quarter.

One day, Mr. Weil happened to call at the office of the merchant at an hour when the latter was out, and found Hannibal in possession. As this was an opportunity seldom available, Archie entered into a lively conversation with the fellow.

"They tell me you are soon going to leave us," he said, as a beginning. "I hear that you are going to Europe."

"Yes," said Hannibal, with a certain wariness.

"If I can tell you anything about the country I shall be glad," said Weil, affably. "I have spent considerable time there. You don't understand the language, I believe?"

The negro simply shook his head.

"It's easy enough to acquire. Get right into a hotel with a lot of students, and pitch in. Though they *do* say," added the speaker, archly, "that the best method is to engage a pretty grisette. The poet was right:

"'Tis pleasing to be schooled in a strange tongue
By female eyes and lips;
that is, I mean, When both the teacher and the taught are young--

"You know the rest."

The answering smile that he expected, did not come into the negro's face. If possible, it grew still more reserved and earnest.

"There's one good thing, if you'll excuse my mentioning it," pursued Archie, "and that is, the French have no prejudice whatever against color. Indeed, a colored student gets a little better attention in Paris than a white one."

Then the silent lips were unlocked.

"Could a black man--*marry*--a white woman, of the upper or middle classes?" asked Hannibal, slowly.

"To be sure. There was the elder Dumas, and a dozen others. I tell you there's absolutely no color line there. They judge a man by what he is, not by the accident of race or skin. You'll see such a difference you'll be sorry you didn't go years before."

Hannibal sat as if lost in thought.

"Mr. Fern will miss you, though," continued Archie. "Yes, and the family. You seem almost indispensable."

A suspicious glance was shot at the speaker, but his face bore such an ingenuous look that the suggestion was dismissed. What could he know?

"They will get some one else," said the negro, quietly.

"Yes, but in these days it is not easy to get people one can trust. Mr. Fern will not find any one to take your place in a moment. And just now, when he evidently has a great deal of trouble on his mind, it will be unpleasant to make a change."

Hannibal was completely deceived by the apparently honest character of these observations. He could not resist the temptation to boast a little, that peculiar trait of a menial.

"I know all about Mr. Fern's affairs," he agreed. "Both here and at the house. He would not trust the next man as he has me."

Mr. Weil nodded wisely.

"I see, I see," he answered. "You know then what has annoyed him of late--that which has puzzled all the rest of us so much. You know, but having the knowledge in a sort of confidential capacity, you would, of course, have no right to reveal it."

Hannibal straightened himself up in an exasperating way.

"You will not find what troubles Mr. Fern," he said, loftily. "And now, may I ask *you* something. Do you expect to marry his eldest daughter?"

An inclination to kick the fellow for his impudence came so strong upon Mr. Weil that it required all of his powers to suppress the sentiment. But through his indignation there struggled his old admiration for this elegant physical specimen. He wished he could get a statue modeled from him, before the original left the country.

"That is a delicate question," he managed to say.

"I know it," replied Hannibal. "But I have observed some things which may have escaped you. Shall I tell you what I mean?"

Not at all easy under this strain, the curiosity of Mr. Weil was so great that he could only reply in the affirmative.

"Miss Millicent," explained Hannibal, slowly, "is in love--very much in love--with another person."

A stare that could not be concealed answered him.

"You have not seen anything to indicate it?" asked the negro. "I thought as much. She has done her best to cover it, and yet I can swear it is true. She *likes* you, as a friend. But she *loves* him, passionately."

He was in for it now and might as well follow this strange matter to the end.

"Do I know this individual?" asked Archie.

"Yes. You brought him to the house and introduced him to her."

The man gave a slight cry, in spite of himself.

"Not Roseleaf!"

Hannibal bowed impressively; and at the moment Mr. Fern's footsteps were heard in the entry.

Mr. Weil did not know, when he tried to think about it afterwards, whether the wool merchant noticed particularly that he and Hannibal had been talking together, or suspected that they might have confidences. His head was too full of the startling statement he had heard, and when he was again upon the street he wandered aimlessly for an hour trying to reconcile this view with the facts as they had presented themselves to his mind previously.

Millicent in love with Roseleaf! She had said very little to the young man, so far as he had observed. Her younger sister--sweet little Daisy--had monopolized his attention. If it were true, what an instance it was of the odd qualities in the feminine mind, that leave men to wonder more and more of what material it is constructed. But *was* it true? Was Hannibal a better judge, a closer student, than the rest of them? He did not like Millicent, any better than she liked him. Was he trying a game of mischief, with some ulterior purpose that was not apparent on the surface?

Out of it all, Archie Weil emerged, sure of but one thing. He must use his eyes. If Millicent loved Roseleaf, she could not hide it successfully from him, now that he had this clue.

The girl's novel was selling fairly well. Weil had made a bargain with Cutt & Slashem that was very favorable. It gave him an excuse to talk with the authoress as much as he pleased, and he used his advantage. He brought her the comments of the press--not that they amounted to anything, for it was evident that most of the critics had merely skimmed through the pages. He came to tell her the latest things that Gouger had said, what proportion of cloth and paper covers were being ordered, and the other gossip of the printing house. And now he talked about the work that Shirley was engaged on, and grew enthusiastic, declaring that the young man would yet make a place for himself beside the Stevensons and Weymans.

Millicent struck him as caring much more for news of her own production than that of the young man who had been represented as the object of her adoration. If she was half as fond of Roseleaf as Hannibal intimated, she was certainly successful in concealing her sentiments from the shrewd observer. The result of a fortnight's investigation convinced Weil that the negro had made a complete mistake, and all the hypotheses that had arisen were allowed to dissipate into thin air and fly away.

Another two weeks passed and Hannibal still remained with the Ferns. An inquiry of Daisy produced the answer that he thought of remaining in America till spring. The girl tried to act as if it made not the slightest consequence to her whether he went or stayed, but she did not succeed. Mr. Weil knew that she wished most heartily for the time when the negro would take his departure. She was bound up in her father, and Hannibal was worrying him to death--from whatever cause. She wanted the tie between him and this black man broken, and hated every day that stood between them and his hour of sailing.

Roseleaf was almost as uneasy as Daisy over the delay. He had given her the money she asked for, though no allusion to its purpose had been made.

She still had it, somewhere, unless she had given it to the one for whom it was intended. When she took the package from his hand she rose on her tiptoes and kissed him with the most affectionate of gestures. It was the second occasion on which he had been permitted to touch her lips, and he appreciated it fully. He realized from her action how deeply she felt his kindness in providing her with the funds that were to relieve her father of an incubus that was sapping his very life.

"You don't find much use for our black Adonis yet, I see," said Weil, as he laid down the latest page of the slowly building novel. "I had hoped you would penetrate the secret of his power over your heroine's father, by this time."

"No, I cannot understand it at all," replied Roseleaf. "And if you, with your superior quickness of perception, have found nothing, I don't see how you

could expect me to."

"You have greater opportunities," said Weil, with a smile that was not quite natural. "You have the ear of the fair Miss Daisy, remember," he explained, in reply to the inquiring look that was raised to him.

"Ah, but she knows nothing, either," exclaimed Roseleaf. "I am sure of that."

Mr. Weil was silent for some moments.

"Well, if you cannot find the true cause," he said, "you will have to invent a hypothetical one. Your novel cannot stand still forever. Imagine something--a crime, for instance, of which this black fellow is cognizant. A murder--that he peeped in at a keyhole and saw. How would that do?"

Roseleaf turned pale.

"You know," he said, "that you are talking of impossibilities."

"On the contrary, nothing is impossible," responded the other, impatiently. "College professors, delicate ladies, children not yet in their teens, have committed homicide, why not this handsome gentleman in the wool business? Or if you *won't* have murder--and I agree that blood is rather tiresome, it has been overdone so much--bring a woman into the case. Let us have a betrayal, a wronged virgin, and that sort of thing."

The color did not return to the young man's cheek.

"Which is still more incredible in the present case," he said. "Do you think Wilton Fern could do evil to a woman? Look in his face once and dismiss that libel within the second."

A desperate expression crossed the countenance of the elder man.

"You must agree that he has done something!" he cried. "He wouldn't allow a darkey to annoy him like this for fun, would he? He wouldn't wear that deathly look, and let his child grow thin with worriment, just as a matter of amusement!"

To this Roseleaf could not formulate a suitable answer. He felt the force of the suggestions, but he would not associate crime with the sedate gentleman who was the object of these suspicions. He simply could not think of anything disreputable in connection with Daisy's father, and it seemed almost as bad to invent an offense for the character in his novel whose photograph he had thus far taken from Mr. Fern.

Daisy was surprised, a month after this, to have Mr. Weil stop her in the hallway, and speak with a new abruptness.

"Why don't that cursed nigger start for Europe?" he asked.

She glanced around her with a frightened look. She feared ears that should not might hear them. But she rallied as she reflected that Hannibal was miles away, in fact in the city with her father.

"He is going soon," she replied. "But why do you allude to him by that harsh term? I thought you rather liked him."

"I do," he answered. "I like him so well that if he continues to talk to--to your father--as I heard him the other day, I will throw him into the Hudson: I can't stand by and see him insult an--an old man--much longer."

The girl looked at him with sad eyes.

"I thought I had succeeded in silencing that kind of talk," she said. "Mr. Roseleaf used to speak very violently of Hannibal, but he has listened to reason of late. Let me beg you to see nothing and hear nothing, if you are the friend of this family you have given us reason to believe."

She extended her hand, as if to ask a promise of him, but he affected not to see it.

"When does he intend to go?" he demanded.

"Before the 1st of April."

"I will give him till that date," he answered, "but not an hour beyond. He will sail out of this country for some port or other, or there will be a collision. You must not, you shall not defend him!" he added, as she was about to speak. "I know the harm he is doing, and it must have an end!"

Turning from her suddenly he went out of doors. Far down the road he stopped to look around, pressing his hand to his forehead, like one who would make sure he is awake, and not the victim of some fearful dream.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

Before the first of April came, Hannibal sailed. During the winter he had taken lessons in French of a city teacher, until he believed he could get along after a fashion with that language. He announced to Daisy that he would go on the third of March, then he changed it to the tenth, and again to the seventeenth. Each time, when the date approached, he seemed to have a weakening of purpose, a dread of actually plunging into the tide that set toward foreign shores. The girl had interviews with him on each of these occasions, at which what passed was known only to themselves. And each time, when she had reached her own room, she threw herself on her bed and wept bitterly.

But, at last, on the twenty-fourth, he went. With his overcoat on his arm, his satchel and umbrella in his hands, he said "Good-by" to the little party that gathered at the door. He had been treated with great consideration in that home. Perhaps he realized this to some extent as he was about to turn his back upon it. Certain it is that he could not hide the choking in his throat, as he said the words of farewell. Archie Weil, who stood there with the rest, thought he saw a strange look in those black orbs as they dwelt a moment on the younger daughter; but it passed so quickly he could not be sure.

Mr. Fern was there, and Roseleaf. Millicent had responded, when a servant went to inform her that Hannibal was going, that she was very glad. Did she wish to go down? By no means. She hoped she was not such a fool.

Weil, who watched everybody, saw an unmistakable relief in the careworn countenance of Mr. Fern, when the tall form of his late servant disappeared at the gate.

"I hope you will do well," had been the last words of the merchant, and Daisy had added, "So do we all, I am sure." Roseleaf had not spoken. He had stood a little apart from the others, his mind filled with varying emotions. It was he who had furnished the money to carry out this plan, and

if it made one hour of Daisy's life happier he would be content.

Within an hour it was evident that a cloud had been lifted from the entire household. Everybody felt brighter and better. Roseleaf eyed Mr. Fern with surprise, and had half a mind to go to his office the next day and tell him how dearly he loved his daughter. It was the first time anything like a smile had been upon that face since he had known its lineaments.

Archie Weil devoted his attention, as usual, to Millicent. He did not talk to her about Hannibal, knowing how distasteful was the subject. He discussed her novel, of which she never seemed to tire, and asked her about another, which she had begun to map out. She told him she was sure she could do better the next time, and spoke of the assistance Mr. Roseleaf would furnish if needed, quite as if that was a matter already arranged between her and the young novelist.

Archie wondered if Millicent knew the extent of the attachment that had grown up between Shirley and her sister. She seemed to feel sure that he would be at hand when wanted. Could it be that she believed he would ultimately become her brother-in-law? The negro's guess had almost been blotted out of his mind. There had been absolutely nothing in his observation to confirm it.

A day or two after the departure of Hannibal, Mr. Fern had a conversation with Daisy, in which he dwelt with more stress than she could account for on a special theme. He was talking of Walter Boggs and Archie Weil, and he cautioned her earnestly to treat both gentlemen with the greatest consideration. The girl detected something strange in his voice, and she stole apprehensive glances at him, hoping to read the cause in his eyes.

"Why, papa, I never see Mr. Boggs," she said. "It is weeks and weeks since he came here. As for Mr. Weil, we all treat him nicely, I am sure, and are glad to have him come."

"Yes," he admitted. "You use him quite right, my child. I am not complaining; only, if you could show him *particular* attention, something

more than the ordinary--" He paused, trying to finish what he wished to say. "There may be a time when he will be of great value to me--and--I want him to feel--you observe things so cleverly--do you think Millicent cares for him?"

Daisy looked up astonished.

"Cares--for--Mr. Weil?"

Her father nodded.

"He has been here several times a week for months, and most of his time here has been spent with her. I thought--I hoped that she cared for him."

He thought! He hoped! Daisy had never had such an idea in her head until that moment. She had a dim idea that her father would give up either of his daughters with great regret, although she could not help knowing that the relations between him and Millicent were not as cordial as those between him and herself. And he "hoped" that Millie would marry, and that she would marry Mr. Weil! Her mind dwelt upon this strange thought. She tried to find a reason for it. Was there any stronger incentive in her father's mind than a desire to see Millie well settled in life, with a good husband?

Had he a fear that the time might soon come when he could not provide for her?

Or was there a worse fear--the kind of fear that had haunted him in relation to Hannibal?

Every time Mr. Weil came to the house after that the young girl watched him as closely as he had ever watched her. He did not exchange a word with her father that did not engage her attention. And the conclusion she came to was that, whatever the object of Mr. Fern in this matter, Mr. Weil was honor itself.

Daisy had never made much of a confidant of Millicent, and the latter had the habit of keeping her affairs pretty closely to herself. It was no easy task, then, that the young sister had in view when she came to a decision to talk with Millie about Mr. Weil.

Her father had expressed a hope that Millie and Weil would marry. Mr. Fern had some strong reason for his wish. Whatever it was, Daisy, with her strong filial love, wanted it gratified.

"Millie, what do you think of marriage?" she asked, one day, when the opportunity presented itself.

"I suppose it's the manifest destiny of a woman," replied her sister, quietly.

Much encouraged, Daisy proceeded to allude to Mr. Weil, praising him in the highest terms, and saying that any girl might be proud to be honored with his addresses. Millie answered with confirmatory nods of the head, as if she fully agreed with all she uttered. But when her sister spoke, the words struck Daisy like a blow.

"I am glad to hear this," she said, in a voice more tender than usual. "I think Mr. Weil would have proposed to you long ago, but that he feared the result."

Daisy gasped for breath.

"Millie!" she cried. "Do you mean that Mr. Weil--that--why, I do not understand! He has hardly spoken to me, while he has spent nearly every minute he has been here, with you!"

"Of course he has," responded the other. "What could be more like a case of true love? If ever a man lost his head over a woman he has lost his over you, Daisy. And, at any rate, you must know that *I* care nothing for him. You certainly could see where *my* affections were engaged."

Daisy pressed her hand dreamily to her forehead. She had never known her sister to show the least partiality to any other man.

"I understand you less than ever," she faltered.

"Are you so blind?" exclaimed Millicent, with superior wisdom. "Did you think Mr. Roseleaf had been so closely engaged all this time in my literary work without learning to care for me? I presume you will think I ought to blush, but that is not my way. The strangest thing is that I should have to explain what I thought every one knew."

Poor little Daisy! She was so crushed by these statements that she did not know what reply to make, which way to turn for consolation.

"He has told you that he loves you?" she managed to articulate.

"He has shown it, at least," was the answer. "He had not been here a week before he tried to put his arms around me. I had to let him hold my hand to avoid an absolute quarrel. He is not an ordinary man, Daisy, and does not act like others, but we understand each other. He is waiting for something better in his business prospects, and as I am so busy on my new book I am glad to be left to myself for the present."

It was the old story. Daisy could not doubt her sister's version of her relations with Mr. Roseleaf. When he called the next time there was a red spot in both her cheeks. He told her with happy eyes that he had at last secured something which made it possible to speak to her father. He had been offered a position on the Pacific Quarterly, at a good salary, and another periodical had engaged him to write a series of articles.

"They tell me I have no imagination," he explained, "but that I do very good work on anything that contains matters of fact. I have some money of my own, but I did not want to tell your father I was an idle fellow, without brains enough to make myself useful in the world. The novel on which I base such great hopes might not seem to him worth considering seriously, you know. So I can go with a better account of myself, and I am going this

very week."

The bright light that shone from the face at which she looked made her waver for a moment, but she found strength to answer that he must not speak to Mr. Fern about her--now, or at any other time. She did not want to marry, or to be engaged. She wanted to live with her father, and take care of him, and she wanted nothing else.

"Millie will marry," she added, as a parting thrust, meant to be very direct and bitter. "One of us ought to stay with papa."

For a while he was too overwhelmed by her changed attitude to make a sensible reply. When it dawned on him that she meant what she said, he appealed to her to take it back. He could not bear the thought of giving her up, or even of waiting much longer for the fulfillment of his hopes. He spoke in the most passionate tone, and his whole being seemed wrought up by his earnestness. The girl was constantly thinking, however, that this was the same way he had addressed Millicent, and that there was no trust to be placed in him.

"Calm yourself," she said, when he grew violent. "I have tried to be honest with you. I have thought of this matter a great deal. You will admit that it is of some importance to me."

"To you!" he echoed. "Yes, and to me! I do not care whether I live or die, if I am to lose you!"

She wanted to ask him if he had told Millie the same thing, but she could not without making an explanation she did not like to give.

"There are others," was all she said. "Others, who will make you happier, and be better fitted for you--in your career as a writer."

He never thought her allusion had reference to any particular person, and he answered that there was no one, there never could be any one, for him, but her. He had never loved before, he never should love again. And she

listened, thinking what a capacity for falsehood and tragic acting he had developed.

After two hours of this most disagreeable scene, Roseleaf left the house, moody and despondent. It would have taken little at that moment to make him throw himself into the bosom of the Hudson, or send a bullet through his brain.

On the way to the station he met Mr. Weil, who could not help asking what was the matter.

"Oh, it's all up!" he answered. "She has refused me, and I am going to the devil as quick as I can."

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed the other, staring at him. "You don't mean--Daisy!"

"That's just what I mean. I went there to tell her of my good luck, and to say I was going to ask her father's consent; and she met me as cold as an iceberg, and said she had decided not to marry. So I'm going back to town without a single reason left for living."

Mr. Weil stood silent and nonplussed for a few seconds. Then a bright idea came into his head.

"Look here, Mr. Impetuousness," said he. "I know this can be arranged, and I'm going to see that it's done. My God, the same thing happens in half the love affairs the universe over! Give me a few days to straighten it out. Go home and go to work, and I'll fix this, I promise you."

It took some time to persuade Roseleaf to follow this advice, but he yielded at last. Weil pleaded his warm friendship, begged the young man to do what he asked if only to please him, and finally succeeded. A few minutes later Archie had secured an audience with Daisy.

Too shrewd to risk the danger of plunging directly into the subject he had in mind, Mr. Weil talked on almost everything else. It happened that Millicent was away, which enabled him to devote his attention to the younger sister without appearing unduly to seek her. But Daisy, only half listening to what he said, was pondering the strange revelation her sister had made, and thinking at each moment that a declaration of love might be forthcoming.

She remembered her father's injunction to treat this man with particular courtesy, and was in a quandary what to do in case he came to the crucial point. But to her surprise, instead of pressing his own suit, Mr. Weil began to support in a mild manner the cause of Mr. Roseleaf.

"I met Shirley leaving here," he said, in a sober tone, "and he was in a dreadful state. You didn't say anything cross to him, I hope."

With these words there seemed to come to Daisy a new revelation of the true character of this man. Loving her himself, he was yet loyal to his friend, who he believed had a prior claim. As this thought took root it raised and glorified its object, until admiration became paramount to all other feelings.

"Why should I be cross to him?" she asked, evading the point. "There are no relations between us that would justify me in acting as his monitor or mentor."

Mr. Weil shook his head.

"He loves you," he said. "You cannot afford, my child, to trifle with a heart as noble as his."

The expression, "my child," touched the girl deeply. It had a protective sound, mingled with a tinge of personal affection.

"I hope you do not think I would trifle with the feelings of any person," she said. "Still, I cannot marry every man who may happen to ask me. You

know so much about this matter that I feel justified in saying this; and I earnestly beg that you will ask no more."

But this Mr. Weil said gently he could not promise. He said further that Roseleaf was one of his dearest friends, and that he could not without emotion see him in such distress as he had recently witnessed.

"You don't know how fond I am of that boy," he added. "I would do anything in my power to make him happy. He loves you. He will make you a good husband. You must give me some message that will console him."

He could not get it, try as he might; and he said, with a forced smile, that he should renew the attack at an early date, for the cause was a righteous one, that he could not give over unsatisfied. He took her arm and strolled up and down the veranda, in such a way that any visitor might have taken them to be lovers, if not already married. She liked him better and better. The touch of his sleeve was pleasant. His low tones soothed the ache in her bosom, severe enough, God knows! When her father came from the city he smiled brightly to see them together, and after hearing that Millicent was away, came to the dinner table with the gayest air he had worn for months.

Another week passed, during which Mr. Weil went nearly every day to Midlands, and communicated to Roseleaf on each return the result of his labors, coloring them with the roseate hues of hope, though there was little that could legitimately be drawn from the words or actions of Miss Daisy. The critic for *Cutt & Slashem* had also been given more than an inkling of the state of affairs, and had perused with delight the chapters last written on the famous romance. He saw that the next experience needed by the author was a severe attack of jealousy, and as there was no one else to play the part of Iago he himself undertook the rôle.

"Archie Weil is pretty popular with the Fern family, isn't he?" was the way he began, when he called on Roseleaf. "I met the old gentleman the other day and he seemed absolutely 'gone on' him, as the saying is. They tell me he's out at Midlands every day. Got his eye on the younger daughter, too, they intimate."

It takes but little to unnerve a mind already driven to the verge of distraction. The next time that Weil saw Roseleaf, the latter received him with a coolness that could not be ignored. When he pressed for a reason, the young man broke out into invective.

"Don't pretend!" he cried. "You've heard of the case of John Alden. What's been worked once may go again. I'm not entirely blind."

Mr. Weil, with pained eyes, begged his friend to explain.

"Tell me this," shouted Roseleaf. "Do you love that girl, yourself?"

Unprepared for the question, Archie shrank as from a flash of lightning, and could not reply.

"I know you *do!*" came the next sentence, sharply. "And I know that it is owing to the inroads you have made--not only with her but with her father--that I have been pushed out. Well, go ahead. I've no objection. Only don't come here every day, with your cock and bull stories of pleading *my* cause, for I've had enough of them!"

The novelist turned aside, and Mr. Weil, too hurt to say a word, arose and silently left the room. His brain whirled so that he was actually giddy. Not knowing where else to turn he went to see Mr. Gouger, to whom he unbosomed the result of his call.

"Don't be too serious about it," said Gouger, soothingly. "It's a good thing for the lad to get his sluggish blood stirred a little. In a day or two he'll be all right. That novel of his is coming on grandly!"

Weil was in no mood to talk about novels, and finding that he could get no consolation of the kind he craved, he soon left the office. The critic laughed silently to himself at the idea of the biter having at last been bitten, and then took his way to Roseleaf's rooms.

No answer being returned to his knock, he opened the door and entered. At first he thought the place was vacant, but presently he espied a still form on the bed. The novelist was stretched out in an attitude which at first suggested death rather than sleep, and alarmed the visitor not a little. Investigation, however, showed that he was simply in a tired sleep, worn out with worry and restless nights.

"What a beauty!" whispered Gouger. "A very dramatic scene could be worked up if that sweetheart of his were brought here and made to stand beside the couch when he awakes. Yes, it would be grand, but it would need his own pen to trace the words!"

The hardly dry pages of the great manuscript that lay on an adjacent desk caught the eyes of the critic, and he sat down to scan them closer. As he turned the leaves he grew so delighted as to become almost uncontrollable.

"He's a genius, nothing less!" he said, rapturously, and then tiptoed softly from the chamber.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I'VE HAD SUCH LUCK!"

One day Mr. Fern came home in a state of great excitement. He had not acted naturally for a long time and Daisy, who met him at the door, wondered what could be the cause of his strange manner. He caught his daughter in his arms and kissed her like a lover. Tears came to his eyes, but they were tears of joy. He laughed hysterically as he wiped them away and told her not to mind him, for he was the happiest man in New York.

"I've had such luck!" he exclaimed, when she stared at him. "Oh, Daisy, I've had such grand luck!"

She led him to a seat on a sofa and waited for him to tell her more.

"You can't imagine the relief I feel," he continued, when he had caught sufficient breath. "I've had an awful time in business for years, but to-day everything is all cleared up. The house over our heads was mortgaged; the notes I owed Boggs were almost due; I had given out paper that I could see no way of meeting. And now it is all provided for, I am out of financial danger, and I have enough to quit business and live in ease and comfort with my family the rest of my days!"

Daisy could only look her surprise. She could not understand such a transformation. But she loved her father dearly, and seeing that he was happy made her happy, too; though she had had her own sorrows of late.

"Tell me about it, father," she said, putting an arm around his neck.

"You couldn't understand, no matter how much I tried to make it clear," he answered, excitedly. "There was a combination that meant ruin or success, depending on the cast of a die, as one might say. Wool has been in a bad way. Congress had the tariff bill before it. If higher protection was put on, the stocks in the American market would rise. If the tariff rate was lowered they would fall. I took the right side. I bought an immense quantity of

options. The bill passed to-day and the President signed it. Wool went up, and I am richer by two hundred and fifty thousand dollars than I was yesterday!"

For answer the girl kissed him affectionately, and for a few moments neither of them spoke.

"I don't wonder you say I can't understand business," said Daisy, presently. "It would puzzle most feminine brains, I think, to know how a man could purchase quantities of wool when he had nothing to buy with."

The father drew himself suddenly away from her, and gazed in a sort of alarm into her wide-opened eyes.

"That is a secret," he said, hoarsely. "It is one of the things business men do not talk about. When stocks are rising it is easy to buy a great deal, if one only has something to give him a start."

"And you *had* something?" asked Daisy, trying to utter the words that she thought would please him best.

"Yes, yes!" he answered, hurriedly. "I--had--something! And to-morrow I shall free myself of Boggs, and of--of all my troubles. I shall pay the mortgage on the house, and we can have anything we want. Ah! What a relief it is! What a relief!"

He panted like a man who had run a race with wolves and had just time to close the door before they caught him.

"May I tell Millie?" asked the girl. "She has worried about the house, fearing it would be sold."

He shook his head as if the subject was disagreeable.

"She will find it out," he said. "There is no need of haste. And at any rate I don't want you to give her any particulars. I don't want her to know how

successful I have been. You can say that I have made money--enough to free the home. Don't tell any more than that to any one. It--it is not a public matter. I was so full of happiness that I had to tell you, but no one else is to know."

Daisy promised, though she asked almost immediately if the prohibition extended to Mr. Weil. He was such a friend of the family, she said, he would be very much gratified.

She had reached thus far in her innocent suggestion, when she happened to glance at her father's face. He was deathly pale. His body was limp and his chin sunken to his breast.

"Father!" she exclaimed. And then, seized with a nameless fear, was about to summon other help, when he opened his eyes slowly and touched her hand with his.

"You are ill! Shall I call the servants?" she asked, anxiously.

He intimated that she should not, and presently rallied enough to say he was better, and required nothing.

"What were we speaking of?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"We were talking of your grand fortune, and I asked if I might not tell Mr.--"

He stopped her with a movement, and another spasm crossed his face.

"You will make no exception," he whispered. "None whatever. My affairs will interest no one else. If you are interrogated, you must know nothing. Nothing," he added, impressively, "nothing whatever!"

Mr. Fern's recovery was almost as quick as his attack, although he did not resume the gaiety of manner with which he had opened the subject. After dinner he talked with Daisy, declaring over and over that she had been on

short allowance long enough, and asserting that she must be positively in a state of want. She answered laughingly that she needed very little, and then suddenly bethought herself of something and grew sober.

"Do you feel rich enough to let me exercise a little generosity for others?" she inquired.

He replied with alacrity that she could do exactly as she pleased with whatever sum he gave her, and that the amount should be for her to name.

"You don't know how big it will be," she replied, timidly.

"I'll risk that. Out with it," he said, smiling.

"Supposing," she said, slowly, "that I should ask for a thousand dollars?"

"You would get it," he laughed. "In fact I was going to propose that you accept several thousand, and have it put in the bank in your name, so you would be quite an independent young woman. You must have your own checkbook and get used to keeping accounts. I will bring you a certificate of deposit for three thousand dollars, and each six months afterwards I will put a thousand more to your credit, out of which you can take your pin money."

It seemed too good to be true, and the girl's face brightened until it shone with a light that the father thought the most beautiful on earth. Now she could return the thousand dollars she had borrowed of Mr. Roseleaf, a sum that had given her much uneasiness since she broke off her intimate relations with the young novelist. More than this, she would have sufficient on hand to send the future amounts that Hannibal would need to keep him abroad. It was such a strange and delightful thing to see smiles on her father's face that she did not want anything to disturb them. She was quite as happy as Mr. Fern, now that this cloud had been lifted from her mind.

The next day was a bright one for the wool merchant. By noon he had sent for Walker Boggs and astonished that gentleman by handing him a check in

full for the entire amount of his indebtedness. In answer to a question he merely said he had been on the right side of the market. Mr. Fern also settled with his mortgage creditor, and went home at night happy that his head would again lie under a roof actually as well as in name his own. Notes which he had given came back to him soon after, and he burned them with a glee that was almost saturnine. Burned them, after looking at their faces and backs, after scanning the endorsements; burned them with his office door locked, using the flame of a gas-jet for the purpose.

The ashes lay on the floor, when a knock was heard and Archie Weil's voice answered to the resultant question. Mr. Fern lost color at the familiar sound, but he mustered courage.

"I've come to congratulate you," said Archie, warmly. "They say you have made a mint of money out of the rise in wool."

"Who says so?" asked Mr. Fern, warily.

"Everybody. Don't tell me it's not true."

"I've done pretty well," was the evasive reply. "And I'm going out of business, too. It seems a good time to quit."

Mr. Weil made a suitable answer to this statement and the two men talked together for some time. After awhile the conversation took a wider turn.

"Where's your young friend, Roseleaf?" asked Mr. Fern, to whom the matter did not seem to have occurred before. "I don't believe I have seen him at Midlands for a month."

"No, he doesn't come," replied Archie, growing darker. "If you wish a particular reason, you will have to ask it of your daughter."

Mr. Fern looked as if he did not understand.

"He became very fond of her," explained Archie, "and for some reason, he does not know what, she has evinced a sudden dislike to him."

Mr. Fern looked still more astonished.

"Millie is a strange girl," he ventured to remark. "But I supposed--I was almost sure, her affections were engaged elsewhere; and, really, I thought he knew it."

Mr. Weil stared now, for it was evident his companion was far from the right road. He was also interested to hear that Miss Fern had anything like a love affair in mind, for he had supposed such a thing quite impossible.

"I was not speaking of Miss Millicent, but of Miss Daisy," he said.

The wool merchant rose from his chair in the extremity of his astonishment.

"You meant that--that Mr. Roseleaf--was in love with Daisy!" he said. "And that she seemed to reciprocate his attachment?"

"I did. And also that a few weeks ago she asked him to cease his visits, giving no explanation of the cause of her altered demeanor. He is a most excellent young gentleman," continued Weil, "and one for whom I entertain a sincere affection. Her conduct is a great blow to him, especially as he does not know what he has done to deserve it. I trust the estrangement will not be permanent, as they are eminently suited to each other."

The face of Mr. Fern was a study as he heard this explanation.

"If he was an honorable man, why did he not come to *me*?" he asked, pointedly.

"He was constantly seeking Miss Daisy's permission to do so," replied Archie. "Which she never seemed quite willing to give him."

"She is too young to think of marriage," mused Mr. Fern, after a long pause.

"He is willing to wait; but her present attitude, giving him no hope whatever, has thrown him into the deepest dejection."

From this Mr. Weil proceeded to tell Mr. Fern all he knew about Roseleaf. He said the young man was at present engaged on literary work that promised to yield him good returns. He had a small fortune of his own beside. Everything that could be thought of in his favor was dilated upon to the fullest extent.

"I don't believe I can spare my 'baby,'" said Mr. Fern, kindly, "for any man. You plead with much force, Mr. Weil, for your friend. How is it that *you* have never married. Are you blind to the charms of the sex?"

For an instant Archie was at loss how to reply.

"On the contrary," he said, at last, "I appreciate them fully. I have had my heart's affair, too; but," he paused a long time, "she loved another, and there was but one woman for me. Perhaps this leads me to sympathize all the more with my unfortunate young friend."

Mr. Fern said he would have a talk with Daisy, and learn what he could without bringing in the name of his informant.

"We fathers are always the last to see these things," he added. "It would be terrible to give her up, but I want her to be happy."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BURGLAR IN THE HOUSE.

Millicent Fern lay wide awake a few nights later, at Midlands, when the clock struck two. She was thinking of her second novel, now nearly ready for Mr. Roseleaf's hand. There was a hitch in the plot that she could best unravel in the silence. As she lay there she heard a slight noise, as of some one moving about. At first she paid little attention to it, but later she grew curious, for she had never known the least motion in that house after its occupants were once abed. She thought of each of them in succession, and decided that the matter ought to be investigated.

Millicent had no fear. If there was a burglar present, she wanted to know. She arose, therefore, and slipped on a dress and slippers. Guided only by the uncertain light that came in at the windows, she tiptoed across the hall, and in the direction in which she had heard the noise. She soon located it as being on the lower floor where there were no bedrooms, and a thrill of excitement passed over her. She crept as silently as possible down the back stairs, and toward the sound, which she was now sure was in the library.

What was the sound? It was the rustling of papers. It might be made by a mouse, but Millicent was not even afraid of mice. She was afraid of nothing, so far as she knew. If there was a robber there, he would certainly run when discovered. At the worst she could give a loud outcry, and the servants would come.

She tiptoed along the lower hall. A man sat at her father's desk, examining his private papers so carefully, that he seemed wholly lost in the occupation.

The room was quite light. In fact, the gas was lit, and the intruder was taking his utmost ease. His face was half turned toward the girl, and she recognized him without difficulty.

It was Hannibal!

Hannibal, whom she supposed at that moment in France!

Without pausing to form any plan, Millicent stepped into the presence of the negro.

"Thief," she said, sharply, "what do you want?"

They had hated each other cordially for a long time, and neither had changed their opinion in the slightest degree. Hannibal looked up quietly at the figure in the doorway.

"I have a good mind to tell you," he said, smiling.

"You will *have* to tell me, and give a pretty good reason, too, if you mean to keep out of the hands of the police," she retorted. "Come!"

He laughed silently, resting his head on his hands, his elbows on the desk. Millicent's hair hung in a loose coil, her shoulders were but imperfectly covered by her half buttoned gown, the feet that filled her slippers had no hosiery on them. She was as fair a sight as one might find in a year.

"Do you remember the time I saw you in this guise before?" he asked, in a low voice.

A convulsion seized the girl's countenance. She looked as if she would willingly have killed him, had she a weapon in her hand. But she could not speak at first.

"It was you who sought me then," said the negro. "And because I bade you go back to your chamber, you never forgave me. Have you forgotten?"

Gasping for breath, like one severely wounded, Millicent roused herself.

"Will you go," she demanded, hotly, "or shall I summon help?"

"Neither," replied Hannibal. "If you inform any person that I am here, I will tell the story I hinted at just now. Besides, I would only have to wait until your father came down, when he would order them to release me, and say I came here by his request."

Millicent chafed horribly at his coolness.

"Came here by my father's request!" she echoed. "In the middle of the night! A likely story. Do you think any one would believe it?"

"I do not think they would. It would not even be true. But he would say it was, if I told him to, and that would answer. Don't you know by this time that I have Wilton Fern in a vise?"

Yes, she did know it. Everything had pointed in that direction. Millicent could not dispute the insinuation.

"What has he done, in God's name, that makes him the slave of such a thing as you?" she cried.

"I will answer that question by asking another," said the negro, after a pause. "Do you know that Shirley Roseleaf hopes to wed your sister?"

The shot struck home. With pale lips Millicent found herself trembling before this fellow.

"You love him," pursued the man, relentlessly. "You do not need to affirm or deny this, for I know. He loves Daisy, and unless prevented, will marry her. I hold a secret over your father's head which can send him to the State prison for twenty years. If I confide it to you, will you swear to let no one but him know until I give you leave?"

The girl bowed quickly. She could hardly bear the strain of delay.

"Then listen," said the negro. "To save himself in business he has committed numerous forgeries upon the names of two men. One of them is

Walker Boggs and the other Archie Weil. Very recently he has been successful in his speculations, and has called in many notes with these forged endorsements. But the proofs of his crimes are ample, and I possess them. If he ever proposes to let Roseleaf marry Daisy, hint to him of what you know, and he will obey your will. I shall be in the city. Here is my address. If you need me I am at your service. Understand, I shall not harm your father unless he makes it necessary. I only mean to use the fear of what might await him, and you can do the same. It is time I was going. I have found all I want here, though I had enough before."

He handed Millicent a card on which was the address he had mentioned, and she allowed herself to take it from his hand. Then he started to pick up a package of papers that lay where he had put them on the table, when a third figure, to the consternation of both, brushed Millicent aside, and stepped into the room. It was the younger sister.

"Give that to me!" she demanded, imperiously, reaching out her hand for the package.

The apparition was so unexpected that the previous occupants of the library stood for a few seconds staring at it without moving a step. Daisy was dressed in much the same manner as Millicent, but she thought only of the danger that threatened one she loved better than life--her father.

"Give that to me!" she repeated, approaching Hannibal closer.

Without a word the negro, his head bowed, handed it to her.

"And now," she said, in the same quick, sharp tone, "the others!"

"They are not here," he answered, huskily.

"Where are they?"

"At my lodgings in the city."

Instantly Daisy snatched the card from her sister's hand.

"At this place?" she asked, hastily scanning the writing.

"Yes," said Hannibal, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"I will be there this morning at ten o'clock. See that they are ready."

The negro bowed, while his chest heaved rapidly.

"And now," said the girl, pointing to the door, "go!"

He hesitated, as if he wanted to say more to her, but recollecting that she would meet him so soon, he turned and obeyed her. At the threshold he only paused to say, "You must come alone; otherwise it will be of no use." And she answered that she understood.

She followed some paces behind and closed the door after him, pushing a bolt that she did not remember had ever been used before.

Then she turned to encounter her sister; but Millicent had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLACK AND WHITE.

When Daisy reached her own room again, she felt assured that no one but herself and Millicent knew what had occurred. This was something. Had her father awakened, she did not know what might have followed. She had seen him too often, pale and distraught, in the presence of his relentless enemy, not to entertain the greatest thankfulness that he had slept through this terrible experience. At any cost it must be kept from him. She would beg, pray, entreat Millicent to seal her lips. And in the morning she would go to the address Hannibal had given her and obtain his proofs of her father's guilt, removing the frightful nightmare that had so long hung over that dear head.

Would Hannibal surrender his documents? He had made a tacit promise to do so, and she had faith that she could make him keep his word. She knew the negro had a liking for her that was very strong.

She had made it possible for him to become a man--by giving him the money that took him to France. Why had he returned so suddenly? What new fancy had caused him to give up his studies and recross the sea to enter her doors at night, to plunder still further secrets from her father's private desk? There were a thousand reasons for fear, but the devoted daughter only thought of saving the one she loved at all risks. She would dare anything in his behalf.

And this father of hers--that she had revered from babyhood--was a forger! He had made himself liable to a term of imprisonment in the common jail! He was a criminal, for whom the law would stretch out its hand as soon as his guilt was revealed! His previous high standing in the community could not save him; nor the love of his children; nor his new fortune--won by such means as this. Nothing could make his liberty secure but the silencing of the witness to his fault, the negro who had carefully possessed himself of certain facts with which to ruin his benefactor.

What did Hannibal want? Surely he had no revenge to gratify, as against her or her father! They had treated him with the greatest consideration. Only once--that day on the lawn--had Daisy spoken to him in a sharp tone, and then the provocation was very great. Since then she had raised the money that was to make a man of him. What did he require now? An increased bribe to keep him away? Well, she would get it for him. She would spend one, two, three thousand dollars if necessary to purchase his silence; if it needed more she could borrow of--of Mr. Weil.

Yes, Mr. Weil was the friend to whom she would turn in this emergency. He had lost nothing, apparently, by the unwarranted use of his name. The notes on which his endorsement had been forged were all paid. When she met Hannibal she would ascertain his price and then the rest would be easy. Her father need not even know the danger to which he had been exposed.

In the morning she went to Millicent's room early, in order to have a conversation with her undisturbed. Millicent was sleeping soundly and was awakened with some difficulty.

"I've only been unconscious a little while," she said, in explanation. "I thought I never should sleep again. Oh, what a disgrace! My father a forger! Liable to go to prison with common criminals, to wear the stripes of a convict! It seems as if my degradation could go no lower."

Reddening with surprise at the attitude of her sister, Daisy answered that the thing to be thought of now was how to save Mr. Fern from the consequences of his errors.

"You're a strange girl," was Millicent's reply. "You don't think of me at all! Won't it be nice to have people point after me in the street and say, 'There goes one of the Fern girls, whose father is in Sing Sing!' I never thought I should come to this. There's no knowing how far it will follow me. I doubt if any reputable man will marry me, when the facts are known."

Thoroughly disgusted with her sister's selfishness, Daisy cried out that the facts must *not* be known--that they must be covered up and kept from the

world, and that she was going to bring this about. She reminded Millicent of the evident suffering their father had undergone for the past two years, changed from a light-hearted man into the easily alarmed mood they had known so well.

"If he deserved punishment, God knows he has had enough!" she added. "And there is another thing you and I ought not to forget, Millie. Whatever he did was in the hope of saving this home and enough to live on, for us! During the last week he has had an improvement in business. He has paid all of those people whose claims distressed him. You have seen how much brighter it has made him. Now, when he had a fair prospect of a few happy days, comes this terrible danger. Surely you and I will use our utmost endeavors to shield him from harm. Even if he were the worst of sinners he is still our father!"

But Millicent did not seem at all convinced. She could only see that her reputation had been put in jeopardy, and that a dreadful fear would constantly hang over her on account of it.

"It is your fault, as much as his, too!" she exclaimed, angrily. "You both made as much of that negro as if he were a prince in disguise. I've told you a hundred times that he ought to be discharged. I hope you'll admit I was right, at last."

There was little use in reminding her sister that Hannibal had shown himself the possessor of some information that endangered Mr. Fern before either he or Daisy began to cultivate his good will; for she knew it well enough. What Daisy did say was more to the point.

"Have you *always* hated him?" she asked, meaningly. "What did he mean last night by his reference to a time when you *sought* him, *en dishabille*?"

Millicent sprang up in bed, with flashing eyes.

"He is a lying scoundrel!" she cried, vehemently. "I never did anything of the kind, and I do not see how you can stand there and repeat such a

calumny!"

"The strange thing about it," replied Daisy, quietly, "is that you did not dispute him. But then, you did not know a third person was present. When I meet him this morning I shall ask for further particulars."

Millicent sprang from the bed and threw herself at her sister's feet.

"Would you drive me mad!" she exclaimed. "I am distracted already with the troubles of this house, and now you wish to hear the lying inventions of one you know to be a blackmailer and a robber! Don't mention my name to him, I entreat you. He is capable of any slander. You can't intend to listen to tales about your sister from such a low, base thing!"

Having Millicent at her feet, Daisy was pleased to relent a little.

"Very well," she said. "I will not let him tell me anything about you. But I want you to promise in return that you will do all you can to protect father from the slightest knowledge of what happened last night. I am afraid it would kill him. So far he believes us ignorant of his troubles. If I can make an arrangement to send Hannibal back to France he will remain so. Be sure you do not arouse his suspicions in any way, and we may come out all right yet."

The promise was made, and, as nothing could be gained by prolonging the conversation, Daisy withdrew. In the lower hall she met her father, and his bright smile proved to her that he was still in blissful ignorance that any new cloud had crossed his sky. Millicent did not appear at breakfast, for which neither of the others were sorry. It enabled Mr. Fern to talk over some of his plans with his younger daughter. Among them was a possible trip abroad, for he said he felt the need of a long rest after his troubled business career.

The last suggestion opened a new hope for Daisy. If worse came to worst, and there was no other way to escape the jail, flight in a European steamer could be resorted to. It would mean expatriation for life, as far as he was

concerned, but that would be a thousand times better than a lingering death inside of stone walls. He could raise a large sum of ready money, and they would want for nothing. Millie would not wish to go with them, probably. She would stay and marry--how the thought choked Daisy--marry Mr. Roseleaf; unless indeed, the young novelist did what she had foreshadowed, repudiated the thought of allying himself with a tainted name.

Roseleaf! The bright, happy love she had given him came back to the child like a wave of agony.

Making an excuse that she had shopping to do, Daisy took the train to the city with her father, and parted from him at a point where the downtown and uptown street cars separated. Then she took a cab and drove to the address given her.

It was not the finest quarter in the city, and she would have hesitated at any other time before taking such a risk as going there alone. At present she thought of nothing but the object of her visit. Inquiry at the door brought the information that the lady was expected and that she was to go upstairs and wait. The woman who let her in was a pleasant faced mulattress, and several young children of varying shades were playing on the stairs she had to ascend. Daisy mounted to the room designated, which proved to be a small parlor, with an alcove, behind the curtains of which was presumably a bed.

As the weather was quite warm, the girl went to the front windows and opened them, in order to admit the fresh air. Then she sat down and waited impatiently. There was a scent in the room which she associated with the Ethiopian race, a subtle aroma that she found decidedly unpleasant. It gave her an indefinable uneasiness, and she mentally remarked that she would be glad when the ordeal was over. Her nerves were already beginning to suffer.

After the lapse of fifteen minutes, Hannibal entered. He had the look of one who had passed a sleepless night, and despite the blackness of his

complexion, his cheeks seemed pale.

"Good-morning," said Daisy, rising.

"Good-morning," he replied.

And then there was a brief space of silence, each waiting for the other.

"I am here, you see," said the girl, finally, with an attempt at a smile. "And now will you give me the things I came for, as I cannot stay long?"

The negro tried to look at her, tried many times, but failed. His eyes shifted uneasily to all the other objects in the room, resting on none of them more than a second at a time.

"You wonder," he said, after another pause, "why I returned to America, why I came to your house last night. I thought I could tell you--this morning--and I have been trying to prepare myself to do so--but I cannot. You blame me a great deal, that is evident in every line of your face, but you do not know what I have suffered. Were your father to go to jail for the term the law prescribes, he would not endure the agony that has been mine."

He looked every word he spoke and more.

"I am sorry, truly sorry for you," she replied. "But why could you not leave all your troubles, when you went to France, and begin an entirely new life? You found it true what I told you, I am sure, about the lack of prejudice--on account of your--race."

He nodded and cleared his throat before he spoke again.

"Oh, yes; but it is not the prejudice *there* that worries me. It is the prejudice *here*. It is the barrier my color brings between me and the only being whose regard I crave!"

The girl's cheeks grew rosier than ever, but she affected not to understand, and once more reverted to the errand that had brought her thither.

"You promised me the documents with which my poor father has been tortured," she said, reproachfully; "let us not talk of other things until you have given them to me."

The negro drew from a pocket of his coat a fair-sized package tied with a ribbon.

"They are all there," he said. "Every scrap, every particle of proof, everything that could bring the breath of suspicion upon your father's honesty. All there, in that little envelope."

She reached for it, but instead of giving it to her, Hannibal caught her hand, and before she dreamed what he intended, pressed a kiss upon it. The next moment the girl, with a look of outraged womanhood, was rubbing the spot with her handkerchief, as if he had covered it with poison.

"You brute!" she exclaimed. "You--you--"

She could not find the word she wanted; nothing in the language she spoke seemed detestable enough to fill the measure of her wrong.

"You see!" he answered, bitterly. "Because I am black I cannot touch the hand of a woman that is white. You have claimed to be without the hatred of the African so ingrained among Americans; you have talked about the Almighty making of one blood all the nations of the earth; and yet you are like the rest! A viper's bite could not have aroused deeper disgust in you than my lips. And all because the sun shone more vertically on my ancestors than it did on yours!"

Daisy was divided between her horror of the act he had committed and her anxiety to do something to free her father from his danger. She suppressed the hateful epithets that rose to her tongue and once more entreated the negro to give her the packet he held in his possession.

"You can do nothing with it but injure a man who has been kind to you," she pleaded. "And if you use the information you have, and afterwards repent, it will be too late to remedy your error. Give it to me, and return to France with the proud consciousness that you are worthy the position you wish to occupy."

Hannibal shook his head with decision.

"That would be very well if I ever could be considered a man by the one for whose opinion I care most. But while I am to her a creature something below the ape, a mere crawling viper whose touch is pollution, I will act like the thing she thinks me. To-day I possess the power to make a high-born gentleman dance whenever I pull the string. You ask me to give up this power, and in return you offer--nothing."

"One would suppose," remarked Daisy, struggling with herself in this dilemma, "that the ability to inflict pain was one a true nature would delight to surrender. My father has done no harm to you."

The negro bent toward her and spoke with vehemence.

"But his daughter has! She has made my life wretched. Whatever position I may attain will be worthless to me, without the love I had hoped might be mine."

"*Love!*" cried the girl, recoiling. "*Love!*"

"Love and marriage," he replied. "In France we could live without the hateful prejudices that prevail in America. I have natural ability enough, you have told me so a thousand times, and I could make myself worthy of you. As my wife--"

Daisy rose and interrupted him fiercely.

"Cease!" she exclaimed. "There is a limit to what I can endure. If you mean to make any promise of that kind a prelude to my father's freedom from

persecution, we may as well end this conversation now as later. He would rather rot in prison than have his child sacrifice herself in such a manner!"

She started toward the door, and he did not interrupt her passage, as she half expected he would do; but he spoke again.

"All this because I am black," he said.

"Because you are a cruel, heartless wretch!" she answered, her eyes flashing. "Because you have abused the goodwill of a generous family; because you have tortured a kind old man and a loving daughter. If you were as white as any person on earth, I would not marry you. Worse than all outward semblance is a dark and vile mind. Do what you like! I defy you!"

The door opened and closed behind her. Hannibal heard her retreating footsteps grow fainter on the stairs, and then there was silence.

"I might have known it," he said, aloud. "I did know it, but I kept hoping against hope. She would wed a Newfoundland dog sooner than me. Nothing is left but to make her repent her action. I will bring that father of hers to the dust, if only to revenge the long list of injuries his race has inflicted on mine!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"PLAY OUT YOUR FARCE."

When Daisy left the house where she had the interview with Hannibal, she walked for some minutes aimlessly along the street. Her mind was in a state of great excitement. She realized that she had defied a man who could inflict the deepest injury on the father she dearly loved. How she could have done otherwise was not at all clear, but the terror which hung over her was none the less keen. The proposal of the negro--to marry her--filled her with a nameless dread that made her teeth chatter, though it was a warm day. Rather would she have cast her body into the tides that wash the shores of Manhattan Island. Even to save her father from prison--if it came to that--she could not make this sacrifice. She now felt for Hannibal a horrible detestation, a feeling akin to that she might entertain for a rattlesnake. Whatever good she had seen in him in other days had vanished under the revelations of his true character.

What to do next was the absorbing question. A great danger hung over her father. A dim idea of seeking the mayor--or the chief of police--and imploring their mercy, entered her brain. Then she thought of Roseleaf, whose aid she might have secured, if he had not proved himself a double-dealer, capable of making love to herself and Millicent at the same time. And then came the resolve to seek out Mr. Weil, the one person in all this trouble that seemed clear of wrong. Her sister had told her that he loved her. Well, if necessary she would marry him. At least he was a man of honor, and white. Yes, she would go to him and throw herself upon his mercy.

Daisy knew that Archie made his headquarters at the Hoffman House, and summoning a cab she asked to be taken to that hotel. Ensconced in the ladies' parlor she awaited the coming of the man she wanted and yet dreaded so much to see. Luckily he was in the house, and in a few moments responded in person to her card.

"Why, Miss Daisy," he stammered. "What is the matter? Nothing wrong, I trust. You look quite pale. Is it anything--about--your father?"

The girl was pale indeed. Now that Mr. Weil was so close, the danger that he might not be willing to help her rose like a mountain in her path. She did not know exactly how grave a matter forgery was--whether it was something that the injured party would be able or likely to forgive. If she should tell him everything, and he should refuse to be placated--what could she do then?

There was no one else in the parlor, but seeing that she wanted as much seclusion as possible, Mr. Weil motioned the girl to follow him to a remote corner, where the curtains of a recessed window partially concealed them. He felt that she had come on a momentous errand. His suspicions concerning Mr. Fern were apparently about to be verified, and if so, he did not mean that other ears should hear the tale.

"Mr. Weil," began Daisy, tremblingly, "I don't know what to say to you. I am in great distress. Would you--will you--help me?"

He responded gently that he would do anything in his power. He bade her calm herself, and promised to be the most attentive of listeners.

Reassured by his kind words and manner, the girl began again; but she could not tell her story connectedly, and after making several attempts to do so, she broke out in a new direction.

"I want so very much of you, dear Mr. Weil. And I am nervous and afraid to ask what I would like. I will give you anything you please in return. Yes, yes, anything."

He smiled down upon her face, on which the tears were making stains in spite of her.

"You are promising a great deal, little girl," he said.

"I know it; I realize it fully," she responded quickly. "But I mean all I say. I did not think I could, once, but I am quite resolved now. Millie told me you were in love with me, and feared I would refuse you. But I won't. No, no, I will marry you--indeed I will--if you will only save my darling father!"

The concluding words were spoken in the midst of a torrent of sobs that shook the girlish frame and affected powerfully the strong man that witnessed them.

"Daisy, dear child, don't speak like this," he answered. "If I can do anything for your father I will most gladly, and the price of your sweet little heart shall not be demanded in payment, either. Leave that matter entirely out of the question, and tell me at once what you desire."

She heard him with infinite delight, and wiping her eyes she began, in broken tones, to relate the history of Hannibal's revelations. As she proceeded his brow darkened, and when she had finished he muttered something that sounded very much like a curse.

"And what do you wish of me?" he asked, when she had ended.

"To keep him from having my father put in prison; to give us time to escape, if there is no other way; and to forgive the harm to yourself. I know," she added earnestly, "it is a great deal to ask, but I have no one else to go to. He has paid every cent, and you will lose nothing. Tell me, dear Mr. Weil, is there anything you can do?"

He had the greatest struggle of his life to keep from bending over that trembling mouth and pressing upon it the kiss he knew she would not refuse; that mouth he had coveted so long and which must never be touched by his lips!

"Can I do anything?" he repeated. "Certainly. I can stop that fellow so quickly he won't know what ails him. Have no fear Miss Daisy. Go home and rest in peace. Before the sun sets I will remove the last particle of danger from your father's path."

The girl sprang to her feet and would have thrown her arms around his neck had he not prevented her.

"You are certain you can do this?" she cried, beaming with happy eyes upon him.

"There is not the least question of it. But--I must demand payment for my trouble. I shall not do this work for nothing."

With a hot blush Daisy lowered her eyes to the carpet.

"I have already told you what I will do," she said, trembling. "If you accomplish what you say, have no fear but I shall keep my word."

There was an element of pride and truth in the way she spoke that struck the hearer strongly. The reverent smile on his face grew yet deeper.

"I am placed in a peculiar situation," he said, after a slight pause. "Your sister has, unintentionally, no doubt, misrepresented matters in a way that may be embarrassing for us both. When I have removed the troubles that stand in your way, I will talk this over with you."

Daisy looked up quickly. What could he mean?

"I beg you to explain," she stammered. "If there has been any mistake no time can be better to set it right than now."

The man toyed with the lace of the window curtain. He had no intention of evading his duty, and yet he did not find it agreeable as he proceeded.

"Your sister told me," he said, finally, "that--you loved me. She was wrong. I knew all the time she was wrong. You have just offered to give yourself to me in marriage in exchange for the efforts that I am to make on your father's behalf. But I would not marry a woman who did not love me--who only became mine from gratitude. No, I could not accept you under such circumstances."

The young girl glanced at him timidly.

"I wish you knew how much I liked you," she said. "I never knew a man I respected more."

"That is most gratifying," he answered, "for I hold your good opinion very highly. You must think I speak in riddles, for I have said that I demand payment for my services, and yet that I would not accept the greatest gift it is in your power to bestow upon me. Let me wait no longer in my explanation. When I have put your father out of all danger from this blackmailer--and I can easily do it, never fear--you must do justice to Shirley Roseleaf."

She shivered at the name, as if the east wind blew upon her.

"He is not a true man," she replied, in a whisper. "He has forfeited all claim to my consideration."

"Why do you say that? I am afraid there is another misunderstanding here, my child."

Then he drew out of her, slowly at first, the revelations that Millicent had made. And he disposed of the charges, one by one, until there was nothing left of them.

"Could you--would you--only go with me to his rooms," he added, "and see him lying there, wan and pale, disheartened at the present, hopeless for the future, you would change your mind. He has never in his life loved but one woman, and that one is yourself. I will not undertake to say why you have been told differently, though I could guess. Shirley Roseleaf loves you, Miss Daisy, and you love him. When I have made good my promise, I shall ask you to come to my friend's side and bring him back to health with the sunshine of your presence."

Daisy was more than half convinced, for the strong affection she had had for the young man plead for him in every drop of her blood.

"Is he so very ill?" she asked, dreamily.

"He has not left his room for a week," was the answer. "Nothing his friends can say will move him. He is in such a state of mind that he even refuses to have me with him; me, until very lately, his closest friend. But if I tell him you have relented, there is no medicine on earth will have such an instant effect."

The girl thought for some moments without speaking.

"It is my father first, of course," she said at last. "But while you are arranging matters concerning him, I do not see any reason to keep me from helping a sick boy. I--yes, I will go with you now."

He looked the gratitude he could not speak, and fearful that in her mercurial mood she might change her mind, he accompanied her without delay to the street, and procured a cab, in which they were driven rapidly to Roseleaf's lodgings. On the way, with that loved form so near him, Archie Weil had a constant struggle. She might be his, if he would forget duty.

And he loved her! God, how he loved her! He could marry her, and perhaps after a fashion make her happy. The perspiration stood on his forehead as he dwelt on the bliss that he had resolutely cast aside.

Roseleaf's landlady came to the door in person and informed the callers that her guest was in about the same condition as he had been for some days. He was not ill in bed, but he did not leave his room. When she sent up his meals he received them mechanically, and they were often untouched when the domestic went for the dishes. He wrote several hours a day, though he was undoubtedly feeble. Did he have any visitors? Only one, Mr. Gouger, who was with him at the present moment. Should she go up and announce them? Very well, if it was not necessary. Mr. Weil could show the lady into the adjoining room, which was empty, until he had announced her presence in the house to his friend.

Archie whispered to Daisy when he left her at Roseleaf's door, that he would come for her as soon as possible. He did not enter the sick boy's chamber at once, for something in the conversation that came to his ears arrested his steps at the threshold. Mr. Gouger's voice was heard, and Archie's ears caught the sound of his own name.

"You should let me send to Mr. Weil," said Gouger. "I am sure he can explain everything. You have written all you ought for the present. He would take you to ride and bring the color to those white cheeks of yours."

"But he cannot bring me the girl I love," responded Roseleaf, with a profound sigh. "Even if I have done him injustice, she is lost to me now. You know appearances were against him. Why, you agreed with me about it. I don't want to see any one. I want to go away from here, and forget my sorrows as best I can in some far distant place."

There was a sadness in the tone that went to the listener's heart. The door was slightly ajar and Archie took the liberty of looking into the room. Roseleaf lay stretched out in a great chair, and Gouger leaned over him, appearing for all the world like some sinister bird of prey. Mr. Weil felt for the first time in his life that there was something uncanny in the aspect of the book reviewer. He did not think he could ever be close friends with him again. And what did Shirley mean by saying that Lawrence had "agreed" with him when he heard such base opinions?

The critic was fingering with apparent satisfaction a pile of MSS. that lay on the table. It had grown vastly since Archie saw it the last time, and must be fifteen or twenty chapters in extent now.

"You must not go away until you have finished this wonderful work," replied Gouger, with concern. "A few more months--a little further experience in life--and your reputation will be made! Ah, it is wonderful! It is magnificent! The world will ring with your praises before the year is ended. Such fidelity to nature! Such perfection of detail! In all my career I have never seen anything to approach it!"

Shirley moved uneasily in his chair.

"Do you ever think at what cost I have done this?" he asked. "I know the pain of a burn because I have held my hands in the fire. I know the agony of asphyxiation, because I have dangled at the end of a rope. I can write of the miner buried beneath a hundred feet of clay, because I have had the load fall on my own head. To love and find myself beloved; then to see happiness snatched without explanation from my grasp; to feel that my best friend has been the one to betray me! That is what I have passed through, and from the drops of misery thus distilled, I have penned those lines you so much admire. I have written all I can of these horrors. I will not begin again till I have caught somewhere in the great sky a glimpse of sunlight!"

Mr. Weil could wait no longer. He pushed open the door and went to the speaker's side.

"The sunlight is awaiting you," he said, gazing down upon the figure in the armchair. "You have only to raise your curtain."

Mr. Gouger sprang up in astonishment at the sudden arrival, and perhaps a little in alarm also; for he could not tell how long the visitor had been eavesdropping at the portal. But Roseleaf turned his languid eyes toward his old friend, and was silent.

"Shirley, my boy," pursued Weil, with the utmost earnestness, "I can prove to you now that Daisy Fern loves you and you alone."

Roseleaf did not move. His lips opened and the words came stiffly.

"You can promise many things," he said, "but can you fulfill any of them?"

So cold, so unlike himself!

"What will convince you?" demanded Weil. "Shall I bring a letter from her? Or would you rather she came in person, to tell you I speak the truth?"

The shadow of a smile, a smile that was not agreeable, hovered around the corners of the pale mouth.

"I shall write no more," said the lips, when they opened, "until I have seen her and heard the reason for my rejection. I will discover who my enemy is. I will unmask the man or the woman that has done me this injury. Till then, I shall write no more. No, not one line."

Mr. Gouger was nonplussed by the new turn in affairs. He knew that Weil had some basis for what he said, that he was not the man to come with pretence on his tongue. Neither of the other persons in the room paid the least attention to him, any more than if he had not been present. It was like a play, at which Gouger was the only spectator.

"Could you bear it if I brought her to you to-day, if I brought her here now?" asked Archie, beseechingly. "If I go and get her, and she comes with me, will the shock harm you?"

The ironical smile deepened on the face of the younger man.

"Play out your farce," he said.

Casting one look of apprehension at Roseleaf, Mr. Weil turned toward the door that entered the hallway. Before he could reach it, a female form came into the room and caught his arm. Together they faced the recumbent figure in the chair. This lasted but a moment. Then Daisy broke from her escort and threw herself at her lover's feet.

"Come," whispered Archie, to the critic. "Let us leave them alone."

CHAPTER XX.

LIKE A STUCK PIG.

Hannibal was neither better nor worse, morally, because his color was black. There are men with white complexions who would have done exactly as he did. There are others as dark as Erebus who would have done nothing of the sort.

He was no ordinary negro. His intelligence was above the average. When he first entered the employ of Mr. Fern, that gentleman took every pains to encourage the aptitude for learning that he found in him. Hannibal accompanied his employer to his office, where he was entrusted with important commissions, which he seemed for a long time to execute with faithfulness and discrimination. At home he performed his duties in a way that gave great satisfaction. At the end of the first six months Mr. Fern would have hated to part with a servant that he believed difficult to replace.

But the great source of trouble arose gradually. Hannibal began to entertain a sentiment for his master's younger daughter that was impossible of fruition. Daisy treated him in the most considerate manner, never dreaming what was going on behind his serious brow. Millicent, ungovernable in all things, began early to show the bitterest enmity toward the negro, while her sister, seeing that her father liked and appreciated him, tried by her own kindness to compensate for the other's rudeness. What caused Millicent's feelings Daisy had no means of knowing, and she had not the least suspicion until she heard the conversation in the library the night the house was entered. Even then she did not take the subject much to heart, for she did not comprehend all that Hannibal had meant to convey in the brief and sarcastic expression he used. Daisy had a mind too pure to believe anything so heinous of her own sister as Hannibal had intimated.

The passion of love is a thing that grows in curious ways. What made it seem to Hannibal that there was hope for him was the discovery that Mr. Fern was committing forgeries and that the proofs might be his for the taking. If he could hold such a power as that over this gentleman, who

could say that even so great a *mésalliance* as his daughter's marriage to an African might not be arranged?

The negro proceeded cautiously. He secured the proofs he wished, and let Mr. Fern know tacitly that he had them. The terror, the undisguised fear that followed, the admittance of the menial to a totally different position in the household and the office, showed that the servant had not underrated the importance of his acquisition.

Not one word bearing directly on the subject passed between them. The condition of the merchant was more horrible than it would have been had his employé said outright, "I have the proof that you are a forger--I can send you to prison for twenty years, and I will do so unless you do so-and-so for me." He did not know how Hannibal meant to use his information. He was afraid to broach the matter to him. He could only wait and suffer; and suffer he did, as a proud-spirited, high-minded man who has made an error must suffer, when such a sword hangs over his head, ready at any moment to fall.

As Walker Boggs had said, Mr. Fern was not by nature a business man. After the former's retirement from active participation in the concern there was a series of losses. When Mr. Fern took his pen and began to imitate the signature of his late partner on a sheet of paper, nothing but some such course stood between him and bankruptcy. He felt certain that if he could tide over twenty-four hours he would be saved. Before he left his office he had made a note, written Mr. Boggs name across the back of it, and raised money thereon.

He did this many times afterwards, but finally, when he again wanted a name to save himself with, he dared not use this one. Boggs had called in to remark that he should withdraw the capital he had lent as soon as the term arranged for had expired. The sum was already infringed upon, had the investor known it. The next name used was that of Archie Weil. Archie had been to the house a good deal to see Millicent. Mr. Fern believed there was a love affair between them, and he caught at the straw of possible protection in case of discovery. The forgeries became numerous, and the

total amount on that day when the passage of a new tariff saved the venturesome speculator, was very large. Hannibal was at this time in foreign parts, or at least so the merchant supposed. He soothed his conscience with the reflection that this additional wrong act would enable him to right the others that preceded it. And things might have gone well had not the negro returned, consumed with the love he bore the younger daughter, and had not his love turned to vinegar by her contemptuous rejection of his advances.

An hour after Daisy left him, Hannibal had made up his mind to be revenged. He had faltered a little in the meantime, asking himself what good it would do to bring disgrace on the head of this poor old man, but his injuries were too strong for mercy. He was despised by them all; he would show them that, black as he was, his ability to hurt was no less strong than theirs. Roseleaf had made the first impression on that young heart he himself had craved. It remained to be seen whether he would wed the daughter of a convict. There would be something pleasant, too, in disgracing Millicent, who had once placed herself in a position where he could have blasted her reputation forever, and had afterwards dared to treat him as if he were the dirt beneath her shoes. Yes, Hannibal decided, he would go to Mr. Weil and Mr. Boggs, and show them the way this man had used their names, hawking them in the public market without their knowledge.

When Hannibal reached the Hoffman House and inquired for Mr. Weil, he was told that he was absent. An hour later he received the same answer. A visit to the residence of Mr. Boggs elicited a reply precisely similar. In fact, the day wore away and evening arrived before he found them.

In the meantime, Mr. Weil had not been idle. While Daisy and Shirley Roseleaf were tearfully exchanging their explanations, he sent a messenger to Mr. Boggs, asking that gentleman to come to him without delay. An hour later the messenger arrived with the gentleman, and having engaged a room for temporary use, and seen to it that Roseleaf wanted nothing at present but his fair nurse, Archie pulled Boggs in and locked the door securely.

"What's all this?" exclaimed Boggs. "You look and act as if there was the devil to pay."

"There is," was the short answer. "I want you to do one of the most creditable acts of your life. I want it as a personal favor, and I'm going to have it, too."

Mr. Boggs crossed his hands over his paunch and waited for further information.

"Are you a first-class liar?" was Mr. Weil's next question. "Could you, in an emergency, do yourself justice as an eminent prevaricator? Are you able, for a certain time, to banish truth from your vicinity?"

Mr. Boggs remarked, in response to these astonishing suggestions, that he could tell much better what his friend was about if he would drop metaphor.

Mr. Weil hesitated. He saw no way but to trust this man with the facts, and yet he dreaded the possibility that he might prove obstinate.

"By-the-way," he said, as if to change the subject temporarily, "have you been out to see Fern lately?"

Mr. Boggs shook his head.

"You ought to," said Weil. "He's improved a thousand per cent. in the last few weeks. His financial luck has made a new man of him."

"I'm glad of that," responded the other. "And I'm glad too that I've got my money out of his firm, for I had a strong suspicion at one time that he was running pretty close to the wall."

Mr. Weil nodded to show that he believed this statement, and then grew sober.

"Sometimes, when men get into a tight place financially," he said, "they do queer things. Supposing I should tell you that Mr. Fern had endorsed checks and notes in a way he was not authorized to do?"

The stout man opened his eyes wider.

"That would be a piece of news," he answered. "But, if he did, he's made it all right by this time, of course, and nobody is the loser."

Mr. Weil drew himself up in his chair, as if righteously indignant.

"Do you think that is enough?" he demanded, raising his voice. "By Gad, supposing I tell you my name was one of those he monkeyed with!"

The other did not seem much perturbed.

"If the paper is all in, I wouldn't make a fuss about it, if I were you," he replied. "Fern is a good fellow. He has gone out of business, and I hope he'll never go in again. Take my advice, if you have learned anything to his discredit, and keep it to yourself."

Weil could hardly control himself.

"Do you think I intend to let him forge my name on his notes and checks and not put him under arrest!" he cried; "when the proofs are beyond question?"

Mr. Boggs bowed and said he meant that, exactly. He further remarked that he was astonished that his friend had any other idea in his mind. The Fern family was one in which he had been favorably received and he ought to do everything possible to prevent harm to any of its members. As he proceeded in this vein, Mr. Boggs grew so earnest that he did not notice the broad smile of happiness that was creeping over the face of his companion, and was not prepared to find a pair of manly arms clasped around his neck.

"You--you!" Archie Weil was trying to say. "You dear, kind, sensible fellow. You've made me the happiest man on earth! Of course *I* wouldn't trouble Fern, but I was afraid *you* would. He used your name as well as mine, the rascal! Everything is paid up, and all the trouble now is that a miserable scamp has got hold of some of the paper and wants to blackmail him. And what I called you here to-day for is to get you to agree--with me--to acknowledge every scrap of that paper as being our own!"

The sudden change was more than Mr. Boggs could bear for a moment. He sat, to use a common expression, "like a stuck pig," staring at Archie.

"You remember the nigger that worked for Fern," explained Mr. Weil. "He got hold of some of these notes and checks, in Fern's office, and is coming to look us up to-day, for the purpose of having his employer arrested. A nice game, eh? But we will foil him, won't we? We'll show him a trick worth several of his! He's probably gone to the Hoffman House and he'll hang round till he finds me. I'll send word that I am to be home this afternoon at five. You will be there with me. We'll tackle him together. When he tells us that he has some forged paper in his possession we'll act astonished and enraged; we'll ask him to show it to us; and when we've got it all in our hands we'll say the signatures are our own, and kick him down stairs. Are you with me, Walker? Is it a go, old boy?"

The agreement was made without more ado. Mr. Boggs began to see the humorous element in the affair, and actually came nearer laughing than he had done since the day he discovered that the size of his waist placed him out of the list of eligible "mashers."

When everything was settled, Mr. Weil excused himself for a few moments, while he tiptoed to Roseleaf's door and knocked. Daisy came to open it, and when she saw who the visitor was she blushed charmingly.

"Come in," she said. "I am sure both of us are glad to see you."

Shirley's eyes met those of his friend with a strange expression. He knew now that all his suspicions were unfounded, that Weil had proved himself

noble and true. But the apologies that he owed could not be suitably made in the presence of a third person, and he made no reference to them. His changed appearance was enough, however, for Archie. The reconciliation with the girl of his heart was perfect, and the happiness that shone from their faces repaid their good friend for his sacrifice.

"I think I ought to take Miss Daisy to her train now," said Archie, after the exchange of a few ordinary remarks. "She can come to see you to-morrow again, and before many days we will have matters arranged with pater familias, so that Shirley can go out to Midlands in his proper capacity. Oh, you need not redden, little woman! The love you two have for each other does both of you credit."

Returning to Mr. Boggs, for the sake of allowing the young couple a few minutes for their good-bys, Archie dismissed that gentleman with the understanding that not later than half-past four he would join him in his room at the Hoffman House. Soon after he escorted Miss Fern to her station, and before he left the building Archie sent a dispatch to her father, asking him to come to the city and meet him at his hotel at four that afternoon.

Everything worked to a charm. Mr. Fern arrived at the time designated and went promptly to Mr. Weil's apartments. A brief explanation of what was about to occur threw the wool merchant into a state of extreme agitation, but he was assured that the last particle of danger to himself would be removed before he left the Hoffman House. He was asked to step into an inner room of the suite, the door of which was to be left ajar, and to make no move unless he was called.

Mr. Boggs came at his appointed hour, and Hannibal soon after. Delighted to find both gentlemen--accidentally, as he supposed--the negro began without delay to explain the cause of his visit. He stated the manner in which he had discovered the forgeries, and said he thought it only his duty to let the facts be known.

Messrs. Weil and Boggs exchanged glances of well-simulated surprise as the discoverer proceeded.

"How long is it since you first knew of this matter?" asked Mr. Weil, when Hannibal came to a pause.

"Something like eighteen months."

"And you allowed this swindle to go on all that time without saying a word!" said the questioner. "I am surprised, when I remember that for a long time you saw me almost daily."

"That is true," was the quiet response. "I could not easily bring myself to disgrace one whose bread I was eating. But that does not matter now. I have here a number of notes on which Mr. Fern has forged both of your names. The law will hold him just as strongly as if I had exposed him at the time."

He exhibited a package of papers, and unsuspectingly passed them to the two gentlemen. Undoing the band Archie Weil spread the documents on the centre table and went over them carefully with Mr. Boggs, separating those which bore their several names. A close perusal of all the notes followed, and finally Mr. Weil looked up and asked if there were any more.

"No, those are all," said Hannibal. "I believe there are thirty-six of them."

Mr. Weil consulted in a low tone with Mr. Boggs. They seemed puzzled over something.

"If these are really all the notes you have," said Archie, "there has been a great mistake on your part. These endorsements are genuine in every case. Where are the forged papers of which you spoke?"

The negro stared with all his might at the speaker.

"Genuine!" he repeated.

"Undoubtedly, as far as my name is concerned. I have lent my credit to Mr. Fern for a long time."

"That is equally true of myself," spoke up Boggs, slowly. "I wrote every one of these signatures and I am willing to swear to them."

Hannibal's eyes flashed with baffled rage. He had been trapped. These men had conspired to save his late employer from his clutches. They had lied, deliberately, and he was powerless against their combined assertions, although he knew the falsity of all they said.

"You will be as glad as we to learn the truth," said Archie, in a softly modulated voice. "It would have grieved you to know that your kind employer had made himself amenable to the criminal law. Your only object in this matter was to ease your conscience, and do justice. There is nothing, now, to prevent your returning at your earliest convenience to France."

The negro rose and took up his hat.

"This is very nice," he growled, "but I want to tell you that you are not through with me yet."

Mr. Weil rose also.

"I trust," he said, "that you are not going to be impolite. I certainly would not be guilty of discourtesy to you. But let me assure you of one thing: If you ever, hereafter, annoy in the slightest degree my friend, Mr. Fern, or any member of his family, you will wish heartily that you had never been born. We can spare you now, Mr. Hannibal."

With the last words, Archie waved his hand toward the door, and without further reply than a glare from his now blood-shot eyes, the African strode from the apartment.

"I want you to take a ride in the Park with me, for an hour or so, and then we will return here for dinner," said Mr. Weil to Mr. Boggs.

He did this to allow Mr. Fern to leave the house without Boggs' knowing he was there, and also to avoid a meeting that he felt would be too full of gratitude to suit his temperament just then.

CHAPTER XXI.

"WE WANT MILLIE TO UNDERSTAND."

Millicent Fern had been so busy on her second novel that she had hardly noticed the prolonged absence of Shirley Roseleaf from her father's house. Her first story was selling fairly well and she had received a goodly number of reviews in which it was alluded to with more or less favor. Not the least welcome of the things her mail brought was a check bearing the autograph of Cutt & Slashem, that tangible evidence which all authors admire that her efforts had not been wholly in vain. She had put a great deal of hard work into her new novel, and felt that, when Mr. Roseleaf added his polish to the plot she had woven, it would make a success far greater than the other.

Millicent thought she understood the young man perfectly. To her mind he was merely awaiting the moment when she was ready to name the day for their marriage. To be sure he had not asked her to wed him, but his actions were not to be misunderstood. She would accept him, for business reasons, and the romance could come later. Together they would constitute a strong partnership in fiction. While she was wrapped up in her writing it was quite as well that he remained at a respectful distance. Between her second and her third story she would have time to arrange the ceremony.

When Roseleaf made his next appearance at dinner, in the house at Midlands, Miss Fern smiled on him pleasantly. She remarked that he lacked color, and he replied that he had been suffering from a slight illness. Then she spoke of her new story, revealing the plot to a limited extent, and said it would be ready for him in about two weeks. The astonished young man saw that she considered his services entirely at her disposal, without question, whenever she saw fit to call upon them. He talked it over with Daisy.

"You know," stammered the girl, "that Millie thought you were in love with her. That would account for everything, wouldn't it?"

"But where did she ever get that idea!" he exclaimed, desperately.

"She says you tried to put your arm around her."

"Just to practice. Just to learn what love was like. I told you how ignorant I was, the same as I did her. Archie said she would show me, but it didn't amount to anything. It was only when I asked you, Daisy, that I began to understand. Do you remember how you stood on your toes and kissed me?"

The girl bade him be quiet and not get too reminiscent, but he would not.

"It taught me all I needed to know, in one instant," he persisted. "Ah, sweetheart, how much happiness and suffering I have had on your account!"

He stooped and kissed her tenderly as he spoke.

"And after this it will be happiness only," she whispered.

Another kiss answered this prediction.

"What can I do if she asks me to rewrite the whole of another novel?" asked Roseleaf, with a groan.

"I think you might find time to oblige her," said Daisy. "But you ought to explain things--you ought not to let her misunderstand your position any longer."

He said that this was true, and that he would act upon the suggestion. He had her father's consent, and nothing could stand in the way of his marriage to Daisy before the year ended. It was not right, of course, to go on with the implication of being engaged to both the sisters.

"But I wish I could escape doing that writing," he added. "I hate fiction, any way; I have been at work on one of my own that I fear I never shall finish. There is much sadness in novels, and I like joy so much better. I believe I shall abandon the whole field."

This she would not listen to. She said her husband that was to be must become a famous writer, for she wanted to be very proud of him. And Mr. Fern came in to the room, and having the question put to him, decided it in the same manner, as he was sure to do when he learned that his younger daughter held that opinion.

The retired merchant bore the appearance of a man from whose shoulders the severe burden of a great weight had fallen. The tiger that had crouched so long in his path, ready at any moment to spring, had been vanquished. Beyond the profound humiliation of knowing that his sin was exposed to the gaze of two of his intimate friends, he had no cause for present grief. Both of them had proved friends indeed, and nothing was to be feared from any quarter. Hannibal had disappeared immediately after the interview at the Hoffman House, and it was supposed had gone back to France.

There was to be no haste about the wedding, after all. Now that the young couple felt perfectly sure of each other they were more willing than they had been to wait. The freedom that an understood engagement brings to Americans was theirs. If Millicent had only known the true condition of affairs, and was content with them, they would have been perfectly satisfied.

An old story tells how a certain colony of mice came to the unanimous conclusion that a bell should be hung around the neck of a cat for which they had a well-defined fear; and it also relates that none of the rodents were willing to undertake the task of placing the warning signal in the desired position. Both Shirley and Daisy wished heartily that Millicent could be told the exact condition of their hopes and expectations, but neither had the courage to inform her. Many of their long conversations referred to this matter, and one day, when they had discussed it as usual, Daisy hit upon a bright idea.

"You don't suppose, do you, that Mr. Weil would tell Millie for us? He has done so many nice things, he might do one more."

Roseleaf wore a thoughtful expression. He realized how much Archie had already done for him--realized it more fully than Daisy did; but he said the matter was worth thinking of. He wanted very much to have it settled.

"Would--would you--ask him?" he stammered. "He would do anything for you."

"Yes," she responded, softly, "I will ask him. But we had best be together. I do not want to broach the matter unless you are there."

In a few days the opportunity came. Mr. Weil heard the voice he loved best explaining the situation.

"We want Millie to understand," said Daisy. "If she--if she still likes Shirley herself, there may be an unpleasant scene, and you will see how difficult it is for either of us to tell her. But you, who have done so many kindnesses for us, could convey the information to her without the diffidence we should feel. Will you, dear Mr. Weil?"

And Archie said he would, and that it would be a pleasure to him. And a bright light illumined the faces of the young people, as another stone was rolled out of the pathway their feet were to tread.

Mr. Weil did not know how to approach his subject except by a more or less direct route. One day he was talking with Miss Fern about her new novel, and she spoke of Mr. Roseleaf in connection with its nearness to the required revision.

"I don't know as Shirley will find time to help you out," he replied. "He is so busy just now with Miss Daisy."

She did not seem to comprehend him in the least.

"Oh, he is merely filling in the time, as a matter of amusement," she answered. "When I am ready he will be."

He looked at her earnestly.

"Is it fair to speak of love-making as a matter of amusement, Miss Fern?"

"Love-making? Is he, then, practicing for his novel with Daisy, also?" she inquired. "I am afraid he will get erroneous views of love in that quarter. She is such a child that she can have little knowledge of the subject."

She had evidently no suspicion of the truth, and he determined to become more explicit.

"Perhaps that is exactly what he wishes," said he. "The virgin heart of a young girl certainly affords tempting ground for the explorations of a novelist."

For the first time she showed a slightly startled face.

"I trust you do not mean that Mr. Roseleaf is deceiving my sister with pretended affection?" she said. "I did not think him that kind of man. If he is making love to her, as you call it, surely she understands that it is only for the purposes of his forthcoming novel?"

Mr. Weil drew a long breath.

"Is it possible," he asked, "that you do not know him better than even to hint that suspicion? Shirley Roseleaf is honor personified. He would not lead any woman to believe him her lover unless he truly felt the sentiments he expressed."

Miss Fern looked much relieved.

"I am glad to hear you say so," she replied.

Archie was plunged into a new quandary. He had evidently made no progress whatever thus far.

"No," he continued, slowly, "he has not deceived Miss Daisy. His love for her is as true as steel. I understand their engagement is to be announced in a few days."

If he had known the pain that these words would bring to their hearer--if he had foreseen the anguish that was portrayed on that brow and in those eyes--friend as he was of the young couple who had set him to this errand, he would have shrunk from it. Millicent made no verbal reply. Spasms chased each other over her white face. She seemed stricken dumb. Her hands, lifted to her forehead, trembled visibly. And Mr. Weil sat there, uncertain what to do, as silent as herself.

Gradually the force of the storm passed, and Miss Fern staggered faintly to her feet. Mr. Weil offered to support her with his arms, but she refused his aid with a motion that was unmistakable. She was making every effort to conceal her agitation, and she dared not trust herself with words. After taking a weak step or two, and finding that she could not walk unassisted, she rested herself upon the arm of a large chair, and signed to him to leave her. Much mortified, but knowing no other course, he bowed profoundly and obeyed the signal.

The next morning he received the following letter at his hotel:

"MR. A. WEIL:--SIR: If you are in any respect a gentleman--which I may be excused for doubting--you will not allude in the presence of any one to the exhibition I made to-day. Had I had the least preparation I could have controlled myself. You adroitly took me at a complete disadvantage, and you saw the result.

"I leave to-morrow for a new home. Never again shall I live under the roof of those who have betrayed me. Do not think I shall succumb to grief because of my sister's conduct. She is welcome to her victory. No answer to this is expected. Yours, M. A. F."

Luckily Archie had escaped from Midlands without meeting either Daisy or Roseleaf, and he obeyed as strictly as possible the injunction he received

from the elder sister. All he would say was that he had informed her of the engagement and that she had made no reply. When he was told a day or two later that Millicent had left the house, he merely remarked that he was not much surprised, as she was a girl of strong will and usually did about as she pleased.

Mr. Fern, at first much distressed over his daughter's action, grew reconciled when he thought of it more at length. He sent a liberal allowance to her, which she did not return, and made arrangements by which she could draw the same sum at her convenience at a bank in the city.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHERE WAS DAISY?

The wedding was arranged to occur in the month of October, and the preparations, so dear to the hearts of all young women, were pushed with dispatch. There were to be no ceremonials beyond the ones necessary, and the company to visit the nuptials was limited to a dozen of the family's most intimate friends. When the evening came, Walker Boggs was on hand, wearing an extra large waistcoat, and a countenance such as would have best befitted a funeral. Lawrence Gouger came, his keen eye alert, foreseeing several chapters in the great novel that Roseleaf was writing, based on the experiences of the next few weeks. But Archie Weil wrote a note at the last minute, regretting that a business engagement that could not be postponed had called him to a distant point, and sending a magnificent ornament in large pearls for the bride, to whom he wished, with her husband, all health and happiness.

Mr. Gouger had had many arguments with Mr. Weil, in opposition to the early date set for the wedding. He had shown that, according to the best models, the hero of Roseleaf's novel--which was practically the young man himself, ought to pass through some very harrowing scenes yet before his wedded happiness began. He feared an anti-climax, and was apprehensive that the wonderful romance would lie untouched for long months while Roseleaf sipped honey from the lips of his beloved. And he acted as if these things were entirely at the disposal of Mr. Weil--as if the young couple were mere marionettes whose actions he could control.

"You could put it off if you liked," Gouger said, complainingly. "You could introduce other elements that would be the making of the novel, and you ought to do it. They should not marry before next spring, at the earliest. You run the risk of spoiling everything."

"Good God!" cried Archie. "You talk like a fool. I would have postponed it forever, if I could, and you know it. But she loves him, and there is nothing to be gained by delay. Confound you and your old novel! With the

happiness of two human beings at stake you talk about a piece of fiction as if it was worth more than a blissful life!"

Gouger straightened himself up in his chair.

"It is worth a hundred times more!" he answered, boldly. "A novel such as Roseleaf's ought to be would give pleasure to millions. But I see you are bound to have your way. The only hope left is that there will be trouble enough after marriage to spice the story to the end. A milk and water, nursing-bottle existence for them would make all the work already done on this manuscript mere wasted time!"

Weil turned from his friend in disgust. Could the man talk nothing, think nothing, but shop?

But Archie did not come to the wedding. He knew the final strain would be more than he could bear. It was one thing to sacrifice the woman he loved and quite another to see her given into the arms of the rival he had encouraged. One may do the noblest things, at a respectful distance, and find himself physically unable to view them at greater proximity.

Of course Shirley Roseleaf was almost too happy to breathe. But even the happiest of lovers somehow manage to inhale a sufficiency of oxygen to keep life in them, though they have no knowledge of the process by which this is accomplished. He had seen several of his productions in type, some in the leading magazines, and he had a permanent position now on the staff of a great periodical. When the month he had allowed himself as necessary for a wedding journey was ended, he would settle down to work, and he knew no reason why he might not make a success in his chosen field. And there was Daisy--always Daisy--he would never again be separated from Daisy! Who that has loved and been loved can doubt the perfect content of this young man?

The saddest face at Midlands was that of Mr. Fern, who failed in his best attempts to appear cheerful. He was not sorry that his daughter was to be married, he would not have put a single obstacle in her way; but she was

going from him, and the very, very dear relations they had so long sustained would never be exactly the same again. It was the destiny of a woman to cleave to her husband. He found no fault with the law of nature, but he had clung to Daisy so devotedly that he could not welcome very sincerely the hour that was to take her away.

The marriage was to be early in the evening. Everything was ready, even to the trunks, filled with traveling and other dresses. The night was to be passed at the Imperial Hotel in the city, and the journey proper to be begun some time on the following day.

On the most momentous morning of her life, Daisy Fern announced that she had an errand to do in the city and would return shortly after twelve o'clock. As she was so thoroughly her own mistress nobody thought of questioning her more particularly. But twelve o'clock came, and one o'clock, and three, and five, and she neither was seen at Midlands nor was any message received from her.

By the latter hour Mr. Fern was in a state of excitement. The entire house was in an uproar. The servants were catechised, one by one, to see if perchance any of them could guess the young lady's destination. Word was sent by telephone to various places in the city, asking information, but none was received. She had left the house, ostensibly to go to New York, and nothing could be learned of her from that moment.

As Mr. Roseleaf was not expected until some time later, Mr. Fern went at last to the city and sought the young man at his rooms. He found him in the company of Lawrence Gouger, dressed for the ceremony, and impatient for the arrival of the hour when he should start for his bride's abode. It may be conceived that the news Mr. Fern brought was not the pleasantest for him.

"You--you have not seen Daisy?" came the stammering question, as the father paused on the threshold of Roseleaf's room.

"To-day? Why, certainly not!" was the stupefied answer. "I was just about to start for your house."

Mr. Fern sank upon a sofa just inside the door.

"Something--has--happened!" he groaned. "Ah, my boy, something has happened to my child!"

Roseleaf looked at Mr. Gouger, who in turn looked at Mr. Fern.

"She--went away--this morning--on an errand," enunciated the father, slowly, "saying--she would return--at noon. And--that is the last we--have seen--of her. Oh, it seems as if I should go mad!"

It seemed as if Shirley Roseleaf would go mad, too. He looked like one bereft of sense, as he stood there without uttering a word.

"Perhaps she has returned since you left home," suggested Mr. Gouger, on the spur of the instant. "Don't lose heart yet. Let me send to a telephone office and have them inquire. You have a 'phone in your house, have you not, Mr. Fern?"

The father bowed in reply. He was too crushed to say anything unnecessary. Touching a button, Mr. Gouger soon had a messenger dispatched for the information desired, and in the meantime he tried, by suggesting possibilities, to soothe the two men.

"You shouldn't get so excited," he protested. "There are a hundred slight accidents that might be responsible for Miss Daisy's delay. Perhaps she has met with an insignificant accident, and the word she has sent to her father has gone astray--as happens very often in these days. That would account for everything. Or she may have taken the wrong train--an express--that did not stop this side of Bridgeport, and hesitated to telegraph for fear of alarming you. 'Don't cry till you're hurt' is an old proverb. Why, neither of you act much better than as if her dead body had been brought home!"

They heard him, but neither replied. They waited--it seemed an hour--for an answer to the telephonic message, and it came, simply this: "Nothing has been heard as yet of Miss Fern."

The thoroughly distressed and disheartened father shrank before the gaze of the lover, when this news was promulgated by Mr. Gouger.

"What swindle is this?" were the bitter words he heard. "Have you decided on another husband for your daughter, and come to break the news to me in this fashion?"

Mr. Gouger interfered, to protect the old man whose suffering was evidently already too acute.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see that you are killing him? Be careful!"

Roseleaf waved him back with a sweep of his arm.

"Your advice has not been asked," he replied, gutturally. "I can see some things, if I *am* blind. That girl has gone to the man she loves--the man he," indicating the father, "wanted her to marry. He is rich, and I am poor, and he has won! It is plain enough! And he pretended, day by day, to my face, that he had given her up for my sake; and she put her arms around me, and beguiled me into confidence, in order to strike me the harder at the end. Well, let him have her! I wouldn't take her from him. But there's an account between us that he may not like to settle. When you see your friend, tell him that!"

Mr. Fern heard these terrible sentences like a man in a dream. It could not be Roseleaf that was uttering them--the man to whom his young daughter had given the full affection of her innocent heart! He was mad to talk that way. Mad! mad!

"You will repent these rash statements," said the old gentleman, rising faintly from his seat. "You will repent them, sir, in sackcloth. I wish with all my heart that Mr. Weil was here, for he would at least try to help me find my child."

Mr. Gouger suggested that Mr. Weil would be at Midlands soon, as he had an invitation to the wedding.

"No," replied Mr. Fern, chokingly. "I received word from him to-day that he could not attend. He is out of the city."

Roseleaf gave vent to an expression of nausea.

"Are you yourself deceived?" he exclaimed. "He will not attend *my* wedding; certainly not! He is attending *his own*. If, indeed, he does not compass his ends without that preliminary."

Weak and old as Mr. Fern was he would have struck the speaker had not the third person in the room interfered.

"Do you dare to speak in that manner of my daughter!" he cried. "Must you attack the character not only of my best friend but of my child as well? I thank God at this moment, whatever be her fate, that she did not join her life to yours!"

With a majestic step he strode from the presence of his late prospective son-in-law. Gouger, with a feeling that some one should accompany him, followed. But first he turned to speak in a low key to the novelist.

"Do not go out to-night, unless you hear from me," he said, impressively. "This may not be as bad as you think, after all. I will go to Midlands and return with what news I can get. Don't act until you are certain of your premises."

The young man was removing his wedding suit, already.

"I shall not go out," he responded, aimlessly.

"You might write a few pages--on your novel," suggested the critic, as he stood in the hallway. "There will never be a better--"

A vigorous movement slammed the door in his face before he could complete his sentence.

Hastening after Mr. Fern, Gouger accompanied him home, where the first thing he heard was that there was still no news of the missing one.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN AWFUL NIGHT.

It was an awful night for Wilton Fern. The presence in the house of Mr. Gouger and Mr. Boggs aided him but little to bear the weight that pressed upon his heart. It was better than being entirely alone, but not a great deal. Together they listened whenever their ears caught an unusual sound. Twenty times they went together to the street door and opened it to find nothing animate before them.

Morning came and still no tidings. The earliest trains from the city were visited by servants, for the master of the house was too exhausted to make the journey. And at nine o'clock the gentlemen who had passed the night at Midlands took the railway back to New York, with no solution of the great problem.

Mr. Gouger had not been in his office an hour before the door opened and in walked Archie Weil. The critic started from his chair at the unexpected sight, and remarked that he had not expected to see his visitor so early.

"I presume you heard the news and came home at once," he added, meaningly.

Mr. Weil was pale, and wore the look of one whose rest has been disturbed.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied. "I was called away on business that I could not evade, and came back as soon as I could. I fear the Ferns thought it rather rough of me to stay away from the wedding, but I could not very well help it. You were there, of course. Everything went off well, I trust."

The speaker had the air of a man who tries to appear at ease when he is not. His voice trembled slightly and his hands roamed from one portion of his apparel to another.

"Then you have heard nothing!" repeated Gouger, gravely. "Prepare yourself for a shock. There was no wedding last night at the Ferns'. Miss Daisy disappeared yesterday morning, and has not been seen since."

If Mr. Weil had been pale before, his face was like a dead man's now. With many expressions of incredulity he listened to the explanations that followed. He declared that the occurrence was past belief, and that he could see no way to account for it. Clearly something had happened that the girl could not prevent. She would never have absented herself of her own accord. She loved the man who was to be her husband, and if she had wished to postpone her marriage she could have easily arranged it.

"I can think of nothing but a fit of temporary insanity," he added, with a sigh. "And Shirley--poor fellow--how does he take it? Completely broken up, I suppose?"

When he heard the attitude that Mr. Roseleaf had assumed, Mr. Weil seemed stupefied. Little by little Mr. Gouger revealed to him the answers that the young man had made to Mr. Fern, finally referring to the charge that he (Mr. Weil) had eloped with the bride. Archie's face grew more and more rigid as he listened, but the anger that the relator had anticipated did not show there.

"He is crazy," was the mild reply. "I will go and see him, at once, and enlist his assistance in the thorough search that must be undertaken. Come, Lawrence, leave your work for an hour and go with me."

Remembering his promise to return in the morning with the latest tidings, Mr. Gouger put on his hat and coat and entered the cab which his friend summoned. He felt that he was about to witness another chapter that would make most dramatic reading in that great novel!

"You had best let me go in first," he whispered, when they stood at Roseleaf's door. "He is in an excitable frame of mind, I fear."

For answer, Archie brushed the speaker aside and preceded him into the chamber, without the formality of a knock. Roseleaf lay before them in his easy chair, bearing evidence in his attire that he had not disrobed during the night. He greeted his visitors with nothing more than a look of inquiry.

"I only heard of your terrible disaster a few moments ago," said Mr. Weil. "I learn that Miss Daisy had not been heard from up to nine o'clock this morning. We must bring all our energies to bear on this matter, Shirley. Her father is unable to help us much. For all we know she may be in the most awful danger. Rouse yourself and let us consult what is best to do."

Incredulousness was written on the quiet face that looked up at him from the armchair.

"Why don't you tell us what you have done with her?" said the bloodless lips, slowly.

Mr. Weil trembled with suppressed emotion.

"This is no time for recriminations," he replied, "or I might answer that in a different way. We must find this girl. Before we go to the police let us consider all the possibilities, for they will deluge us with questions. Did any one think," he asked, suddenly, turning to Gouger, "of sending word to her sister Millicent?"

Mr. Gouger replied that they had done so. A servant had been dispatched early in the evening to Millicent's residence and had returned with the answer that she had heard nothing of Miss Daisy and did not wish to. She had previously sent a sarcastic reply to an invitation to attend the wedding.

"And she never came to comfort her father in his distress!" exclaimed Mr. Weil. "What a daughter!"

They could get nothing out of Roseleaf. He answered a dozen times that it would be much easier for Mr. Weil to send Daisy home or to write to her father that she was in his keeping, than to attempt the difficult task of

deceiving the police, who would have enough shrewdness to unmask him.

"Then you will do nothing to help us?" demanded Archie, his patience becoming exhausted, though he kept his temper very well. "In that case we must lose no more time. Ah, Shirley! I thought you worthy of that angelic creature, but now--"

He checked himself before finishing the sentence, and went out into the hall.

"I think I had best go to Midlands and consult with Mr. Fern," he said to Gouger in a low tone. "There is a possibility that his daughter has returned since you came away. What an awful list of horrible thoughts crowd on one! If you can help me any I will send you word later."

When Mr. Weil was gone, Mr. Gouger opened the door and looked again into Roseleaf's room. The young man had not changed his position in the least.

"He has started for Midlands," he said. "What do you think of his explanation in regard to his absence last night?"

"I think--I know--it is a lie!" was the quick reply.

"You really believe she went away to meet him--and that he has passed the last twenty-four hours with her."

"Undoubtedly."

The critic waited a minute.

"Do you think they are married?" he asked.

Roseleaf closed his eyes, as a terrible pain shot across them. He wondered dimly why this fellow should delight in uttering things that must cause suffering. Gouger deliberated whether to say more, but thinking that he had

left the right idea in the young man's mind for the purpose he had in view, he softly withdrew from the chamber and left the house. When Roseleaf looked up again, some minutes later, he was alone.

* * * * *

Mr. Weil's hand was grasped feebly by the owner of Midlands, when he came into the presence of the gentleman. Though completely exhausted Mr. Fern had not been able to sleep. He listened wearily while his caller suggested possibilities to account for his daughter's absence, but could not agree that any of them were probable. When the idea was broached of communicating with the police he shrank from that course, but finally admitted that it must be adopted, if all else failed. In answer to a hundred questions he could only say that he had no idea of anything that could make her absence voluntary.

"She loved her chosen husband devotedly," said the old man. "When she hears what I have to tell her she will hold a different opinion."

"Then," said Archie, ignoring the latter expression, "she must either be the victim of an accident, a fit of aberration, or--"

He could not bear to finish the sentence, but the father bowed in acquiescence.

Lunch was served and Mr. Weil sat down to it, trying by his example to persuade Mr. Fern to take a few mouthfuls. Neither of them had any appetite, and the attempt was a dismal failure.

"I leave everything to you," said the host, as Mr. Weil prepared to take his departure. "You are the truest friend I ever had, and whatever you decide upon I will endorse. But I have an awful sinking at the heart, a feeling that I shall never see my child alive. Do you believe in premonitions? I have felt for weeks that some misfortune hung over me."

Before Mr. Weil could reply a servant entered with a telegraphic message that had just been received. Tearing it open hastily Mr. Fern uttered a cry and handed it to his companion:

"I am alive and uninjured. Look for me to-morrow.--Daisy."

A gush of tears drowned the exclamations of joy that the father began to utter.

"Alive!" he exclaimed. "And will be home to-morrow! Ah, Mr. Weil, hope is not lost, after all. But why, *why* does she leave me in my loneliness another night? Is there any way in which you can explain this mystery?"

Mr. Weil confessed his inability to do so. He tried, however, to show the father the bright side of the affair, and bade him rest tranquil in the certainty that only a few hours separated him from the child he adored. When Daisy came home she would explain everything to his satisfaction. In the meantime he ought to indulge in thankfulness for what he had learned rather than in regrets.

"Go to bed and get a good rest," he added. "I will make a journey to the telegraph office in the city and see if it is possible to trace this message. If I learn anything I will ring you up on the telephone at once. And remember, if you do not hear from me, there is a proverb that no news is good news. Daisy has promised to come home to-morrow. This is something definite. An hour ago we were plunged in despair. Now we have a certainty that should buoy us up to the highest hope."

Catching at this view of the case, Mr. Fern consented to seek rest and Mr. Weil took the next train to the city. Engaging a carriage he bade the driver take him with all speed to Mr. Roseleaf's residence. Notwithstanding the harsh manner in which he had been treated by his late friend, he wanted to be the first to inform him that Daisy had been heard from. He was smarting, naturally, under the imputation upon his own honor, and felt that the telegram in his hand would at least remove that suspicion.

"I couldn't help coming again, Shirley," he said, when he was in the presence of the novelist. "I know, despite the cruel manner you have assumed, that you still love Daisy Fern and will be glad to hear that she is safe from harm. Here is a telegram that her father has just received, stating that she is well and will be at home to-morrow."

His face glowed with pleasure as he held out the missive, but darkened again when Roseleaf declined to take it in his hand. The young man had not moved, apparently, from the chair in which he had been seen three hours before, and his expression of countenance was unchanged.

"Does she say where she passed the night--*and with whom?*" he inquired.

"No. But she says she is well and will return. Is not that a great deal, when we have feared some accident, perhaps a fatal one?"

The novelist uttered a sneering laugh.

"My God, Shirley, why do you treat me like this!" exclaimed Mr. Weil, excitedly. "I have been your friend in everything, as true to you as man could be! If I had done the dastardly thing of which you accuse me, why should I come to you at all? I could have taken my bride and gone to the other end of the earth. We need not have adopted these contemptible measures. But although I *did* care for this girl--more than I ever cared or ever shall care for another--I knew it was *you* she loved and I did all I could to aid you in your suit. Have you forgotten how I brought her here, as you lay in that very chair, and removed the misunderstandings that had grown up between you? As God hears me, I have no idea what caused her absence last night! I am going now to the telegraph office to trace, if possible, the message and find where she is at present, for I want to relieve her father's mind still more."

Roseleaf seemed partially convinced by this outburst. He left his chair, and began slowly to arrange his attire before the mirror.

"If you are sincere," he said, "I will accompany you. I will also do my best to discover the resting-place of this young woman. You must remain with me till she is found. If we do not see her before to-morrow morning, we will walk into her presence at Midlands together. Do you agree to this?"

"With all my heart!" was the joyous reply.

In ten minutes they entered the carriage at the door, and were driven to the station from which the telegram had been sent.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THIS ENDS IT, THEN?"

There was nothing to be learned at the telegraph office. As near as could be remembered a boy had brought the message, paid for it and vanished. Only one discovery amounted to anything. The original dispatch was produced and proved to be in Daisy's handwriting. Roseleaf attested to this, and he knew the characters too well to be mistaken.

It was not advisable, in Mr. Weil's opinion, to go to the police, after the receipt of this word from the missing girl. It would only add to the notoriety of the family in case the press got hold of the news. But he did think it wise to go to see Isaac Leveson and find a man named Hazen, whose reputation as a detective was great. He could rely on the absolute silence of both of them. The ride to Isaac's was consequently made next, and by good fortune Hazen happened to be in. He listened gravely to the situation as it was outlined by Mr. Weil, but expressed his opinion that nothing would be gained by doing anything before the next day.

"That telegram is genuine," he said. "It follows that, unless she is detained forcibly, she will be at home to-morrow. The writing in this message is not like that of a person under threats, like one compelled to send a false statement. Your best way is to wait till she comes home, providing it is not later than she indicates, and hear her story. Perhaps it will explain the mystery. If she declines to do this, I will undertake to probe it to the bottom, if you wish."

Mr. Roseleaf took no part in this discussion. He was becoming convinced that Archie Weil was innocent of any complicity in this affair, but he was still disinclined to talk much.

"Where shall we go now?" he asked, when they came out of the restaurant.

"To the Hoffman House?" said Weil, interrogatively. "I believe with Hazen that we can do nothing to-night."

Very well, to the Hoffman House they would go. But they had not been in Weil's room five minutes when a boy came up with a telephonic message from Mr. Fern, stating that Daisy was safe at Midlands.

"Let us return without delay," said Weil, enthusiastically. "We should not lose a moment in removing this terrible cloud! Come, Shirley, we can catch the six o'clock train if we hasten."

Mechanically the younger man followed his companion through the hall, down the elevator and into a carriage at the door. Forty minutes later they alighted from the train at Midlands and were soon in the familiar parlor at Mr. Fern's. A servant who had admitted them, stated that Miss Daisy had been home about two hours but that she was now lying down. He would inquire whether she would receive the visitors.

What seemed an interminable time followed before the appearance of Mr. Fern and his daughter. When at last they came in together, leaning on each other, they were two as forlorn objects as one can imagine. The sight of his sweetheart's woe-begone face smote Roseleaf like a blow. He regretted to the bottom of his heart the cruel things he had thought and said of her.

"Daisy!" he exclaimed, stepping forward. "Daisy--my--"

He could get no further, for Mr. Fern, with a majestic motion of his hand, waved him back. The presence of the intended bridegroom was evidently not agreeable to the old gentleman.

"Sit down," said Mr. Fern, in a quavering voice, addressing himself wholly to Weil. "I telephoned *to you* that my daughter had returned, for I knew *you* would be anxious." He bore with special stress on the word "you." "I--I did not know that you intended to bring--any other person."

The allusion to Roseleaf was so direct, that he could not help attempting some kind of a reply.

"Who could be more anxious than I?" he asked, in a tone that was very sweet and tender; in vivid contrast, the old man thought, to his manner of the preceding evening. "No one has a greater interest to learn where she has been these long, desolate hours."

Mr. Fern abandoned his intention not to recognize the fact that Roseleaf was present, and turned upon him with a fierce glare in his sunken eyes.

"What right have *you* to ask questions?" he demanded, pressing the trembling form of his daughter to his own. "You were the first to doubt her--even her innocence--this lamb that would have given her life for you only yesterday! She has returned to *me*, and henceforth she is *mine*! You could not have her though you came on your knees! You wish to know where she has been! Well, you never *will*! She will not tell you! It is her own affair. I am speaking for *her* when I say that we desire no more of your visits to this house; we are through with you, thank God!"

It would be hard to tell which of the two men who listened to this was the more surprised. Mr. Weil felt his heart sink as well as did Roseleaf. Daisy clung to her father, without raising her eyes, and there was nothing to indicate that she disputed his assertions.

All was over between her and Roseleaf! Nothing could bring them together again! And she did not mean to divulge the cause of her remaining away a day and a night--that day and night that had been expected to precede and succeed her marriage.

Shirley rose slowly. He bent his eyes earnestly on the father and daughter, and his voice was firm.

"When one is dismissed, there is nothing for him but to go. I regret sincerely what I said last night, when the horror of this thing came suddenly upon me. I love you, Daisy, and I know by what you have told me so often that you love me. Are the foolish utterances of a distracted man to separate us forever? Conceive the agony I was in when at the very moment I was to start for my wedding I heard that my bride could not be found! If I had not

adored you passionately would I have been on the verge of madness, saying and doing things without reason and excuse? I am ordered to leave you, my sweetheart, and if you do not bid me stay I can only obey the mandate. But I love you more at this moment than ever. All I ask to know is why you made this flight. If your answer is satisfactory there will be nothing on my part to prevent our marriage."

Archie Weil wished that he could have led this young man aside for just a moment, to show him that this was no time to make demands or exact conditions. He had no doubt that Daisy would explain everything, a little later. All that was wanted now was a revocation of the dismissal that Mr. Fern had pronounced. But he could not control the stormy ocean upon which they rode.

"You seem singularly obtuse," came the shaking voice of the old gentleman. "It is not for *you* to dictate terms. We want to see you no more. Is not that clear enough?"

It certainly did not seem to be. Roseleaf lingered, wondering if these were really to be the last phrases he would hear in that house--in that very room where he had expected to hear the words that would make this sweet girl his for life.

"Daisy," he said, addressing himself once more to the silent figure, "I cannot believe you have so soon learned to hate me!"

She looked up at the solemn face and then dropped her eyes again.

"You will tell me where you were?" he pleaded. "It is my right to know."

She looked up again, with a wild horror in her features.

"Oh, I *cannot*!" she cried. "I *never* can tell you. I never *can*!"

This statement shocked more than one person in that room. Up to this moment Mr. Fern had only understood, from the disjointed expressions of

his daughter when she entered the house, that she did not wish to be questioned at that time. She had also explained to him that she had sent the telegram to make the coast clear of all except her parent, as she did not wish to meet others on her first arrival. When he had urged the duty of informing Mr. Weil she had acquiesced, not dreaming that Mr. Roseleaf would be in his company.

And now the old man felt that there was more in the answer she had given than he had suspected--something very like a confession of wrong. Mr. Weil felt this also, though he could not believe Daisy meant anything very heinous, and Shirley Roseleaf had a dagger in his breast as he reflected what interpretation might be given to her words.

"You *cannot!*" he repeated, ignoring the position in which he stood, and the presence of the others. "*You must!*"

Mr. Weil made haste to allay the storm that he saw was still rising.

"Let us be considerate," he said. "Miss Fern is not well. She is tired and nervous. To-morrow, when she has rested, she will be only too glad to tell us the history of her strange disappearance."

Mr. Fern looked uneasily from his daughter to the gentlemen and back again. He loved her dearly, and in this new danger that seemed to threaten her--danger perhaps even to her reputation--he wanted more than ever to shield her from all harm. Whatever had happened she was his child. She should not be baited and badgered by any one. But Daisy did not give him time to speak in her defense. She answered Mr. Weil almost as soon as the question left his lips.

"It cannot be. Not to-morrow, nor at any other time, can I tell you--or any person--anything. You must never ask me. It would merely give me pain, and heaven knows I shall suffer enough without it. Let me say a little more, for this is the last time I shall ever speak of these things. To you, Mr. Weil, I want to give my warmest thanks. You have been a true friend to me and mine. I do not mean to seem ungrateful, but I can tell you no more. And as

for you, Shirley," she turned with set eyes to the novelist, "you know what we were to each other. It is all ended now. Even if you had expressed no disbelief in me when you heard I had disappeared, it would be just the same. I hold no hard feelings against you, whatever my father may say. It is simply good-by. I shall not remain here much longer. Do not let this make you unhappy any longer than you can help. Now, you must excuse me, for my strength is gone."

Daisy had been much longer saying these things than the reader will be in perusing them. They had come in gasps, as from one in severe pain, and there were pauses of many seconds. When she had finished she rose, and leaning heavily on the feeble old man who escorted her, walked slowly out of the room.

"Well, this ends it, then," said Roseleaf, gloomily, following the fair figure with heavy eyes.

"No, Shirley, it does not; it *shall* not!" replied Weil. "There is some dreadful mistake here, and a little time will clear it away. Have patience."

The novelist gazed at the speaker with a strange look.

"I have treated you like a brute," he said, slowly. "And I have treated Mr. Fern just as badly. My punishment is well deserved. But how can this puzzle of her absence be accounted for! Of course she would have had to satisfy me on that point before I could have married her."

The listener turned giddily toward a window.

"And yet you talk of love!" he said, recovering. "If that girl had done me the honor she did you I would not have *asked* her such a question--I would have refused to *listen* if it gave her the slightest pain to tell."

"I wonder she did not love you instead of me--for she did love me once," was the sober reply. "You would be a thousand times better, more suitable, than I."

There was no reply to this, but the two men walked slowly out of the house and to the station, where they took the next train for the city. On the way they talked little, and at the Grand Central Depot they separated.

Lawrence Gouger, who had in some strange way learned the news of Miss Fern's return, was awaiting Roseleaf in his rooms.

"Well, I hear the missing one is found," he said, as the novelist came in.

"Yes. She is with her father. But the peculiar thing is that she closes her lips absolutely about her absence. She not only refuses to speak now, but announces that her refusal is final."

Mr. Gouger hesitated what card to play.

"When does the marriage take place?" he asked, finally.

"With me? Never. I have been thrown over. Unless she had explained I could not have married her, any way; could I?"

The critic said he did not know. It would certainly have been awkward.

"And what is your theory?" he added. "Do you still lay anything to Weil?"

"No. I am completely nonplussed. But, never mind. It is over."

Roseleaf stretched himself, and yawned.

"Do you know, Gouger, I almost doubt if I have really been in love at all. I feel a queer sense of relief at being out of it, though there is a dull pain, too, that isn't exactly comfortable. I told Archie coming in that she should have married *him*. Upon my soul I wish she would. She's an awful nice little thing, and he has a heart that is genuine enough for her. Well, it's odd, anyway."

Astonishment was written on the face of the other gentleman as he heard these statements.

"You have at least gained one point," he said, impressively. "You have done the best part of the greatest novel that ever was written. Sit down as soon as you can and finish it, and we shall see your name so high up on the temple of fame that no contemporary of this generation can reach it."

"So high the letters will be indistinguishable, I fear," responded Roseleaf, with a laugh. "Where do you think I can get the heartiest supper in New York? I am positively starved. I don't believe I've eaten a thing since yesterday. If you can help me any to clear the board, let us go together."

This invitation was accepted, and Roseleaf began making a more particular toilet, taking great pains with the set of his cravat and spending at least ten minutes extra on his hair when he had finished shaving himself. He never had allowed a barber to touch his face.

"You won't lose any time on the novel, will you?" asked Gouger, anxiously, while these preparations were in progress. "You must take hold of it while the events are fresh in your mind."

"All right. I'll begin again to-morrow morning, and stick to the work till it's done. Where shall we go to supper? I'll tell you--Isaac Leveson's."

The critic could not conceal his surprise at the overturn that had taken place so suddenly in the young man's conduct. He stared at him with a look that approached consternation.

"You want to go there!" he exclaimed, unable to control himself. "You wish to dine with some pretty girl, eh?"

Roseleaf started violently.

"No, no! Not--yet!" he answered. "We can get a supper room without that appendix. I wish to be among men as mean as myself. I want to dine in a

house full of people who would cut a woman's throat--or break her heart--and sleep soundly when they had done it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNDISCOVERABLE SECRET.

The Ferns did not stay much longer at Midlands. Crushed by their misfortunes neither cared to remain near the scenes that had made them so unhappy, nor where they would be likely to meet faces which kept alive their grief. The father knew no more than at first concerning the strange conduct of his daughter. She had told him nothing, and he had not asked her a single question. It was enough for him that she was bowed with a great trouble. His only thought was to mitigate her distress in every possible way. He was old--how old he had not realized until that week when she changed from a happy, laughing girl, standing at the threshold of a marriage she longed for, to a sombre shadow that walked silently by his side. He was the one who under ordinary circumstances should have received the care and the thoughtfulness--but everything was altered now. He guided and directed the younger feet, even though his own were faltering and slow.

Where they had gone no one seemed to know. Archie Weil received one brief note from Mr. Fern thanking him again in touching phrase for his many kindnesses, and saying that Daisy wished to add her most earnest wish for his happiness. The letter said they were going away for some time; but no more. He went one day to Midlands, hoping to learn something from the servants, and found the home entirely deserted. A neighbor told him a real estate agent near by had the keys, but that the place was neither for sale nor to rent. The agent, when found, could add nothing to his stock of information. Mr. Fern had merely mentioned that he was going on a journey and asked to have a man sleep at the house during his absence, as a precaution against robbery.

Mr. Weil saw Roseleaf two or three times, but the interviews were so unsatisfactory that he felt them not worth repeating. The novelist told him, as he had told Gouger, that he did not believe he had ever really loved Daisy, and was actually relieved now that the strain was ended. No persuasion could turn him from this statement, which he made rather in

explanation of his present course than as a defense of it. Gouger had persuaded him that a love affair was necessary to develop his talents as a writer. Before he knew what he was about, such an affair had been precipitated upon him. He had felt its pleasures and pains to the uttermost, and now it was ended. All that was left as a result was a pile of MSS. which the critic pronounced wonderful. It was as if he had been in a trance, or mesmerized. Henceforth he would confine his writings to actualities or to poetic imaginings.

Talking with a man who held these views was not inspiring, to put it mildly, and Archie reluctantly gave up all hopes of making Daisy Fern a happy woman through this source. He had dreamed of unraveling the mystery that surrounded her and placing the young couple again in the position which, by some horrible mischance, had been so vitally changed in the short space of one day. Though he still loved Daisy with all the warmth of his nature, Archie had no thought of trying to win her for himself. She had given the fullness of her innocent heart to Roseleaf and he did not believe she was one to change her affections to another so soon as this.

What had happened! What had happened! He thought it over day by day, and night by night.

Among the things he did before leaving New York--for he felt that a journey was necessary for him--was to seek out Millicent. He found the elder sister adamant to every suggestion of love for her family. She believed herself injured by them, and would have nothing more to do with either. As to the strange affair regarding Daisy she declared she had no theory. She did not think it sufficiently interesting even to try to formulate one. Her time was given to writing, and she had found another assistant that quite filled Roseleaf's place. The firm of Scratch & Bytum had accepted her latest novel, as she did not care to have anything more to do with Mr. Gouger.

When she mentioned the name of Roseleaf, Mr. Weil looked at her intently, and saw that she uttered it with the utmost calmness. She had hardened. Her fancied grievances had made her a different woman. She was cynical

before, but now she was bitter. He would not have believed that such an alteration could have taken place in so short a time.

"What is your new book about?" he asked, trying to be polite.

"Crime!" she answered briefly. "It deals with the lowest of the low. It suits the mood I am in. I am writing of things so terrible that they will hardly be credited. To get at my facts I have to go into the most depraved quarters, and associate with the *canaille*. But I am going to make a hit that has not been equaled in recent years!"

He smiled sadly.

"Roseleaf had the same expectation," he said. "And yet he tells me that he is doing nothing on that wonderful tale over which I have heard Gouger rave so often. He has reached a point where he can go no farther, and unless he rouses himself, all he has done is merely wasted time."

Millicent closed her eyes till they resembled those of a cat at noonday.

"Keep watch for mine," she said. "It will be all I claim for it."

During the winter Mr. Weil was in California. As spring approached he returned to the East and visited a well known resort in North Carolina, where by one of those curious coincidences that happen to travelers, he found himself placed at table exactly opposite to Mr. Walker Boggs. The ordinary salutations and explanations followed, and then Mr. Boggs alluded to a more interesting subject.

"I think I can surprise you," he remarked, "by something that I learned the other day. Mr. Fern and Miss Daisy are living within five miles of here."

It was certainly news, and entirely unexpected at that. Those people might be in Greenland, for all Archie had known, and indeed he had supposed they were on the other side of the ocean. He listened with interest while Boggs went on to say that they had hired an old plantation house and

grounds and were living a strictly secluded life. The narrator had seen them in one of his drives through the country, and had talked a few minutes with Mr. Fern; but--and he said it with a touch of pique--he had not been invited to visit them, nor had any apology been made for the neglect.

"By George, I thought it rather tough!" he added, "considering the way you and I got him out of that nigger's clutches."

"But you must remember what he has since endured," replied Archie, mildly.

"And there's been no explanation, of any sort?"

"Not the slightest. I'd give half I'm worth if I could get a clue. It worries me all the time. A life like that girl's ruined--simply ruined--in twenty-four hours, and nobody able to tell why! It's enough to drive a man frantic!"

Mr. Weil did not drive immediately to Oakhurst, which he learned was the name of the estate that Mr. Fern rented, but he enclosed his card in a hotel envelope and sent it there by mail, without a word of comment. If they thought it best to see him he would be glad to go, otherwise he would not intrude on their privacy.

Several days after--mails were slow in the South--an answer came. It briefly requested that Mr. Weil and Mr. Boggs, if the latter were still in town, would come to lunch on the following Wednesday. Boggs fumed slightly at the apparent difference made between him and Weil, but ended by going with his friend to Oakhurst.

Mr. Fern did not look any worse than when Archie had last seen him--indeed, if anything, he had improved in appearance. Time helps most griefs to put on a better face, and though the marks of what he had passed through would not be likely to leave his countenance, the utter hopelessness had in a measure disappeared. When Daisy came into the parlor, she also wore a mien not quite so crushed as when she left the room at Midlands with her words of farewell. Whatever her trouble was, it had not left her

without something to live for. Her youth was doing its work, and it seemed to the anxious eyes of the onlooker that time would restore her nearly, if not quite, to her former radiance.

In the presence of Mr. Boggs, neither father nor daughter cared to discuss the past. They talked of the plantation on which they resided, of the pleasant drives in the vicinity, and of matters connected with the world in general, of which they had learned through the newspapers. But after the lunch was finished Archie found himself alone with Daisy, wandering through the extensive oak forest that gave the place its name.

"How long shall you stay here?" he asked her, as a prelude to the other questions he wanted to follow it.

"I don't know," she replied. "We shall probably go north during the warm weather, perhaps to the White Mountains."

He suggested that it must be rather lonesome at Oakhurst.

"Not for us," she said, quickly. "We are all in all to each other, and require no thickly settled community to satisfy us."

"Daisy," he said, after a pause, "there are things I must say to you, and I hope--with all my heart--you will find a way to answer them. In the first place, do you believe me, really, truly, your friend?"

She placed her hand in his for answer. The action meant more than any form of words.

"Then, tell me--tell me as freely as if I were your brother, your priest--why you stayed from home that night."

She withdrew the hand he held, to place it with the other over her eyes.

"It is impossible," she responded, with a gasp. "I told you that I never could explain, and I never can."

He looked sorely disappointed.

"I know no person on earth--not even my father," she proceeded, giving him back the clasp she had loosened, "that I would tell it to sooner than you. I have not given him the least hint. I know it leaves you to think a thousand things, and I can only throw myself on your mercy; I can only ask you to remember all you knew of me before that day, and decide whether a girl can change her whole mental and moral attitude in a moment."

He drew her arm caressingly through his, and breathed a sigh on her forehead.

"Not for one second have I doubted your truth!" he replied. "Believe that, Daisy, through everything. But I hoped for an explanation, for something that might assist me to punish the guilty ones, for such there must have been."

The face that she turned toward him was full of terror.

"Why do you say that?" she exclaimed.

"Because--"

"No, no!" she cried, interrupting him. "I do not want to hear you! We must not talk on the subject! There is nothing to be told, nothing to be guessed. This must be alluded to no more between us. It must end here and now!"

Thoroughly disappointed, he could do no more than acquiesce in the decision, and he indicated as much by a profound bow. Then she changed the conversation by an abrupt allusion to Roseleaf. When he told her, as he thought it wisest to do, how well the young man had borne his loss, she said she was very thankful. She had feared that he would suffer when he came to his senses, and it was a mercy that this reflection had been spared her.

He spoke of her sister, and of the call he had made upon her, suppressing, however, the disagreeable features of her remarks. Daisy said she had

written twice and received no reply. It was evident that the separation in the family was final.

Toward evening the visitors drove back to their hotel, discussing the strange events that had occurred. Archie Weil did not close his eyes that night. The love he had tried to suppress broke forth in all its original fervor. He could not sleep with the object of his adoration five miles away, so lonely and so desolate.

* * * * *

The next day Mr. Boggs went away, and the next after this, a new visitor carried from the north. On coming out upon the veranda to smoke, Mr. Weil found Shirley Roseleaf there.

The surprise was mutual. Dying of ennui, Archie was glad even to meet the novelist. They talked for hours and afterward went to ride together. It appeared that Roseleaf had come south to get material for an article in the interest of the magazine on which he was employed.

One night, a week later, Roseleaf came into Weil's room and asked if he would like to take a moonlight canter with him. Glad of any means to vary the awful monotony Archie accepted, and the horses were soon mounted. Weil noticed that the route was in the direction of Oakhurst, but as he supposed Roseleaf knew nothing of the presence of the Ferns there, and as the family were doubtless abed at this time, he made no attempt to induce him to take an opposite course. It was a sad pleasure to pass within so short a distance of the roof that sheltered the one he loved best. On they rode, until they were within a mile of Oakhurst, and then Roseleaf drew his animal down to a walk. A little further he turned sharply into a by-path and alighted.

"What's all this?" asked Archie, stupefied with astonishment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I PLAYED AND I LOST."

Roseleaf did not immediately reply. He busied himself by tying his horse to a tree, taking particular pains to make the knot good and strong. He apparently wanted a little time to think what form of words to use.

"I want you to see something that will interest you," he said, finally, in the lowest tone that could well be heard. "If you will follow my example and accompany me some distance further I think you will be paid for your trouble."

Mr. Weil was pale. He felt certain that this strange visit had been premeditated, and that some revelation regarding the Fern family was about to be made. The dread of an unknown possibility for which he had no preparation--affecting the girl for whom he had so deep a love--unmanned him.

"I have a right to ask you to explain," he responded. "If your statement is satisfactory I will accompany you gladly. I do not see the need of any mystery in the matter."

The younger man drew a long breath and looked abstractedly at the ground for some moments. Then he spoke again:

"There are subjects," he said, "that one does not like to discuss. There are names that one hesitates to pronounce. If you will tie your horse and go with me, your eyes and ears will make questions unnecessary."

A momentary suspicion flashed through the mind of the other--a suspicion that he was being beguiled to this lonely spot from a sinister motive that boded his safety no good. But it was immediately dismissed, and after another second of delay, Archie slipped from his saddle and followed the example of his companion.

"Lead on," he said, laconically.

Without waiting for a second invitation, Roseleaf began to penetrate the wood. He found a footpath, after going a short distance, and crept along it slowly, taking evident pains not to make unnecessary noise. They were going in the direction of Oakhurst, and in less than ten minutes the chimneys of that residence could be seen in front of them. A little further and Roseleaf stopped, placing himself in the attitude of an attentive listener.

The silence was profound. A slight chill permeated the atmosphere, but neither of the prowlers felt cold. On the contrary, perspiration covered the bodies of both of them. Roseleaf went, very slowly, along the path, till he came near a fence, and then, diverging from it, drew himself quietly into a thick copse, motioning Weil to follow. Here the leader sank to the ground, with a motion which indicated that the journey was temporarily, at least, at an end, and the second member of the party followed his example.

Half an hour passed with nothing to indicate the reason for these most peculiar actions. Half an hour that was interminable to Mr. Weil, torn with a thousand fears as to what it might all portend. At last, however, a faint sound broke the stillness. Some one was approaching. Roseleaf touched the shoulder of his companion to indicate the necessity of absolute silence.

Hardly ten feet away there passed a tall, athletic form, walking with a quick stride, as of one who has no suspicion that he is watched by unfriendly eyes. As the man's face became visible in the moonlight it was well that Roseleaf had a pressure of warning on his companion's shoulder. It was almost impossible for the latter to restrain an exclamation that would have ruined everything.

It was the face of Hannibal, the negro!

Horrified, Archie turned his bloodshot eyes toward Roseleaf. What could this strange visit of Hannibal's to that vicinity presage? Did he intend to murder the master of the house and abduct the daughter? What was he doing there, at an hour not much short of midnight? The terrors of his

previous imaginings gave way to yet more horrible ones.

But the mute appeal that he shot at his companion produced no answer, except a resolute shake of the head--an absolute prohibition against the least sound or movement.

Hannibal reached the fence and, without any attempt at concealment, climbed over it into the enclosure where were situated the house and outbuildings of the Oakhurst estate. He acted like one who knows his ground and has no occasion to pick his way. He went, however, but a little farther in the direction of the residence. In a place where the shadow of a smokehouse hid him from the possible view of any one looking from the windows, he waited in an attitude of expectation.

The difficulty of controlling himself grew stronger and stronger for Archie Weil. He wanted to end this terrible doubt--to spring over that fence, pinion this fellow by the throat and demand what business he had on those premises at that hour. Roseleaf realized all that was passing in his mind, and kept his hand still on his shoulder, at the same time warning him by signs that the least movement would ruin everything. It seemed to Archie, when he thought it over afterward, that he had never endured such pain. He knew beyond reasonable doubt that Hannibal was awaiting some one by appointment. Who could it be? That was the stupendous question that Roseleaf might have answered in a whisper, but that he preferred for some mysterious reason his friend should discover in the natural course of events. And that course was horribly, torturously slow!

Everything has an end, and the dread of the watcher changed to another feeling as he saw distinctly one of the outer doors of the residence open and Daisy Fern's form come out. Without glancing to the right or the left she walked in the direction where the negro was waiting. For an instant, overcome by his apprehensions, Archie closed both his eyes in despair. The voice of Roseleaf was at last heard in his ear, a whisper nearly inaudible, conjuring him not to betray his presence whatever the provocation.

When Archie opened his eyes again he saw that Hannibal stood in an attitude of respect. When the girl approached he bowed, without offering any more intimate courtesy. Daisy had the look of one who has made up her mind to endure an unpleasant interview and desires to end it as quickly as possible.

"Well?" she said, in a low tone.

"I am going to-morrow," he replied, in a voice that shook with emotion.

"Yes."

"And, as I told you, I want to say good-by once more."

Archie breathed a trifle easier. He could not tell what fears had crowded upon him--they were indistinct in their horribleness--but some of them had already flown.

"You are as cold as ever," continued the rich voice of the negro, in a cadence that was meant to be reproachful.

"Do you think I could be anything else?" was the quick reply, as if forced from lips that had meant to remain silent. "Has your conduct been such as to make me like or respect you?"

The negro's eyes fell before her indignant gaze.

"No," he answered, humbly. "I expect nothing; I ask nothing. I can see my mistakes now. And yet, it would have been no different had I played the part of an angel toward you. The entire question with you was settled in advance by the fact that my skin was black."

The pressure on Weil's shoulder grew heavier, from time to time, as his companion realized his temptation to break from his covert.

"If it had been as white as any man's who ever lived," replied Daisy, boldly, "your conduct would have earned the contempt of a self-respecting person! A blackmailer, an abductor, a conspirator against the peace of mind of an old man and a young girl who never harmed you! I wonder you can talk of other reasons when you created so many by your wicked acts!"

Hannibal shrugged his shoulders.

"It is true, nevertheless," he replied. "I am a negro. In a moment of insanity I dreamed I was a Man! I dreamed I might gain for my wife a woman whose ancestors had been born in a more northerly clime than my own. To gain that end I took the only course that seemed open. I possessed myself of an influence that would make her father fear me. Well, I played and I lost--and then, like other players and losers, even white ones, I was desperate. You were to be married to another--a man I hated. Life had lost its only charm, I could not bear that you should be his bride. My torture was intense. I asked but for death."

These revelations, so novel to at least one of the listeners, smote him with terrific force.

"You asked for more!" said the girl, hoarsely. "You asked for my death as well as your own. And you wanted me to die in such a situation that all the world would say I had perished willingly with you. Could anything more cowardly be conceived! Was anything more dastardly ever devised! It was the morning of my wedding day; my father was waiting for me at home; my promised husband was preparing for the bridal; my friends were invited to the ceremony. What were all these to you? With Mephistophelian cunning you sent me a letter in another person's handwriting, saying that, if I would come to a certain address, and pay fifty dollars, several forged notes given by my father would be returned to me. You knew I would respond. You knew I would tell no one where I was going, as I did not expect to be detained more than an hour, and there was apparently the strongest reasons for secrecy. And when I was completely in your clutches you gave me the alternative of *marrying* you--ugh!--or of taking the poison you had so carefully prepared. Oh, how *could* you! how *could* you, when

you professed to *like* me!"

There was a low gurgle in Archie Weil's throat, that he could not suppress. Fearful that it might be heard in that dead silence, Roseleaf shook his companion slightly. Mingled with his other emotions there now came to Weil a stupefied wonder at the apparent coolness of the novelist.

"When one is willing to die for his love, it should not be questioned," said the negro. "I could not have you in life--I wanted you in death. I wanted the world, which had despised me, to think a beautiful woman had preferred to die with me rather than marry a man she did not wish to wed. But why should we recall that dreadful day and night? You won the victory. You, with your superior finesse, triumphed over the African as your race has always triumphed over mine. I demanded love or death. You dissuaded me from both. And the next day I permitted you to depart, and saw vanish with you the last hope of happiness I shall ever feel."

The rich voice of the speaker broke completely at the close, but the girl who heard him seemed to feel no sympathy for his distress.

"Always yourself!" she exclaimed. "Do you ever think of the life you left to *me*--a life hardly more kind than the murder you contemplated. Before you opened the portals that you had meant for my tomb you made me swear never to reveal where I had passed those hours. Never, no matter what the provocation, was I to utter one word to implicate you in the tragedy that had ruined two households. *You* were the one to be protected--*I* the one to suffer! Had it not been for the sacrifice to my reputation in being found there with you dead--no explanation being possible from my closed lips--I would have accepted the alternative and swallowed the poison rather than live to bear what I do to-day!"

Weil closed his eyes again. His brain was swimming.

"And you are sure," asked the negro, after a pause, "that you have not violated that promise? You can still swear that you have never, even by a hint, given the least cause of suspicion against me?"

"Never!" said the girl. "I consider my oath binding, notwithstanding the manner in which it was obtained. You may live in what peace your conscience allows you, free at least from that fear."

The negro evidently believed her, for he heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well, good-by," he said.

"Good-by," she replied. "And--you are not to come again, remember. There is nothing to be gained from another meeting between us. If--if you want money--I can send it to you."

He lifted his head rather proudly at the last suggestion.

"I do not want any," he said. "I am not low enough for that. I took the sum from you to go to France, because I hoped--in my infatuation--that I could make myself something that you would not despise. If I had wanted money I could have got thousands out of your father, and I could still, notwithstanding the pretence of those men that they wrote the signatures I saw him forge. No, I mean to give you back what I had from you, if ever I can compose my mind enough to go to work and earn it. I have no ambition. I stay in my mother's cabin, day after day, unable to make the least effort. Perhaps I can do something--in time."

The negro took a step away, and then turned, as if unable to go so abruptly.

"Good-by," he said, again.

"Good-by," answered Daisy, impassively. "I want to tell you, now I think of it, where I got that \$1,000 I gave you. It was lent to me by the man you hated so, Mr. Roseleaf."

Hannibal did not seem to care for this information.

"He did not lend it for any good-will to me," he replied. "I have heard, by-the-way, that he did not mind losing you--this man for whom you

spurned a heart that worshiped your very footprints. I believe some day I'll take a shot at him."

The girl shuddered.

"It would be like you," she said, "if no one was looking, and he did not know of your presence. I don't believe, with all your claims, there is a manly trait in you."

The tall form drew itself up and the athletic arms were folded firmly.

"Take care!" said the red lips, sharply, and the ivory white teeth gleamed.

"Oh, I am not afraid," replied Daisy. "My maid is watching us from behind the blinds of my room. I told her my own story about why I was to meet you, but should harm happen to me the alarm bell would ring out."

Startled visibly at this information, Hannibal glanced in the direction indicated, and then began to take his departure in earnest.

"All right," he said, as he mounted the fence. "Keep your word and I'll keep mine. But if you play any tricks, remember that's a game for two."

The men could not arise without startling Daisy, who would undoubtedly have uttered a loud scream had they suddenly appeared before her vision. They saw her stand there for at least ten minutes, before she went into the house. When she was out of sight, Weil crawled into a safer place and rose to his feet.

"I am going to follow that cur!" he muttered, between his teeth.

"To-morrow is soon enough," was the calm reply of his friend. "I know where he lives."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ABSOLUTELY BLAMELESS.

Most men who are by nature excitable surprise their friends on occasions by exhibiting great calmness. Shirley Roseleaf, who had often been thrown into the greatest heat by far less important happenings than the one just narrated, seemed a picture of repose as he walked through the wood with his friend in the direction of the horses they had tethered.

"How did you discover they were going to have this meeting?" asked Weil, nervously. "I am all at sea."

"I have been on his track ever since the day I was to have been married," was the reply. "I didn't intend to leave a mystery like that unsolved. I discovered that the Ferns were living here, and that Hannibal originated a few miles further on. I found that Miss Daisy was still a little afraid of him, that he was using an influence over her which was to say the least strange. Before I got at the truth I had some queer misgivings, you may believe."

Mr. Weil stared at his companion.

"But how did you learn all this?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Roseleaf, with a slight laugh, "I've been in this neighborhood for two months. They haven't met once but I heard every word they said. Little by little I gained the truth of the matter. And to-night, as it was perhaps the last time they would be together, I wanted you to understand it perfectly."

Archie frowned at the thoughts that crept in upon his brain.

"Excuse me for saying that you don't appear to mind it much," he muttered. "If you have heard many conversations like the one to which I just listened, and could go away without expressing the thoughts you ought to feel, you are made up differently from me."

"That may be so, too," smiled the other, good-humoredly. "But remember that things are changed. I once was a man in love--now I am simply a writer of romance."

The elder man shivered.

"Could one be actually in love with a girl like that and then recover from it?" he asked, half to himself.

"I don't think I ever was very much in love," was the quick reply. "But never mind that. Let us talk of Hannibal. You spoke of going after him. What would you have done had you carried out that intention?"

Weil had not thought of the matter in this concrete form. He had wanted to punish the negro for his crimes against the woman he so dearly loved, against the old man for whom he had such a warm affection. How he would have accomplished this he had not decided. The first thing was to follow and tax the wretch with his offense. Subsequent events would have depended on the way Hannibal met the accusation. Certainly the temper of the pursuer would have been warm, and his conduct might have been severe.

"I don't know," he said. "I should have told him for one thing that he would have to reckon with something more than a weak girl or a poor old man if he annoyed that family again. In case he had been impertinent I cannot say what I might have been tempted to do."

"All the more reason for congratulating yourself," replied Roseleaf, as they reached the horses, "that you did not follow him. He has promised to keep away from the Ferns, and I think they have seen the last of him. What is done can't be undone, ugly as it is. Now," he continued, vaulting into his saddle, "your course is reasonably plain. You must visit Miss Daisy soon, let her know that the extent of her misfortune is in your possession, and after a reasonable time, ask her to marry you."

Archie Weil, who had also mounted his horse, came near falling from the back of the animal at this very abrupt suggestion.

"That is just what you should do," continued Roseleaf, without allowing him to speak. "You are desperately in love. Daisy likes you very well, and it would take but little effort on your part to induce even a warmer sentiment. Her father thinks you one of the angels that came down to earth and forgot to return to heaven. She ought not to go through life alone. Her only trouble is the suspicion that rests on her name--a suspicion she considers herself bound in honor to do nothing to lift. Show her that you know how innocent she is, and you will bring a new light to her eyes, a new smile to her lips."

"But," asked Archie, catching at the straw, "how can I tell her--how can I explain the source of my information?"

Roseleaf laughed.

"By the novel method of using the truth, or at least a part of it," he said. "Tell her you were out riding and saw Hannibal, and followed him. You needn't count me into it. Why, you've got to let her know, or else I have. It's a thing she would almost give her life to have revealed without her aid. Go like a man and take that heavy weight off her young soul."

Finally Weil consented. He would not discuss the question of whether he would afterwards speak of the hope that lay nearest his heart. But he would go to her, as Roseleaf suggested, and relieve her of the strain that had worn so deeply. He would go the very next day. The sooner it was accomplished the better. The more he thought of it the more delighted he grew that he could carry such tidings. He could make Daisy happier. That was enough for him--at present. If he could make himself happy at a future date--but there was time enough for that.

He sat upright in his saddle and exulted as his horse bounded nimbly over the ground. Why was it not already day, that he might turn the beast in the opposite direction! The hours would be very long before the sun rose and

he could start on his joyful errand. The sombre hue of his countenance disappeared before the contentment that began to fill his breast.

He slept well, notwithstanding the fact that he expected to lie awake all night when he retired. In the morning, on going down to breakfast, he found that Shirley had left still earlier, leaving word that he had started on a quest for game. Weil did not mind. He had enough before him for one day. He was going to see Daisy, and he had that to tell which would lighten the load she had so long felt compelled to carry.

He waited until after nine o'clock, feeling that some regard must be paid to *les convenances*, even on such an important occasion as this. When he was in the saddle he rode as slowly as he could bring himself to do, to make his arrival still later. At last he reached the gate of Oakhurst, and when he had summoned the porter he sent him for Mr. Fern, stating that he had happened to ride in that direction and wanted merely to make a short call.

It was but a few minutes before the servant returned, and the hospitable master of the premises came with him. Mr. Fern upbraided Weil for using so much ceremony, remarking that although he was living in a retired way, there was always one friend he was glad to see. Giving up the horse, Archie accompanied his host to the house, where the latter said he would send at once for Daisy.

"A minute," interpolated Archie. "I want a little talk with you first, alone."

Mr. Fern looked up curiously. He believed he knew what his visitor was about to say. He had long suspected the feelings which Archie entertained for Daisy. He knew also that his daughter would consent to wed no man, no matter who, while there hung over her fair fame the terrible mystery of her wedding night.

"I want to tell you," pursued Archie, before his host could interrupt, "that I have made a great discovery--one of the utmost moment to your family. I know what happened on that day so sad to all of us, and--listen to me, Mr. Fern!--I know that your child is absolutely blameless in the matter."

The listener's face grew very white. He understood imperfectly, but it seemed to him that a tale he could not bear to hear was about to be forced upon him.

"Mr. Weil," he said, earnestly, "I hope you will not continue this subject. I do not know what occurred--I do not wish to know. I have consulted my daughter's sentiments entirely. She prefers to have the veil unlifted, and I respect her wish."

The visitor could hardly contain himself for impatience.

"That has been true hitherto," he replied. "But Miss Daisy herself will be more than delighted when she knows I am aware of the entire facts--which she has been prevented, by a promise extracted from her, from revealing. Call her, let me tell her that I know everything, and how I know it, and you will see the happiest girl in America."

Mr. Fern shook his head doubtfully. He was much afraid of doing something to injure Daisy's feelings. He could not believe she wanted to have the trouble that had crushed her raked up by any one. Archie persisted, however, and his arguments at last won the day.

"You do not think I would come here with any tidings I did not believe agreeable?" he said, interrogatively. "You know I care too much for--for both of you--to do that."

When Miss Daisy was summoned, which she was at last, and Mr. Weil gently let drop a hint of what he had to tell, the girl was hardly less agitated than her father had been. Instead, however, as the visitor expected, of relying on her natural protector during the expected recital, she whispered to Mr. Fern, who obediently rose and let her lead him out of the room. Presently she returned, and took a chair opposite to Mr. Weil. Her face was so pathetic, her attitude so entreating, that he quite forgot what he had come to tell, and leaning toward her, took her hands in his.

"Daisy," he said, "I--I--" and he could go no further.

"Yes, I know," she answered, in a low voice. "But there is a reason why I cannot listen to you. I have told you that before. I ought not even to say as much as this. I should not even remain in the room while you explain the least thing."

He choked down the rising in his throat and hastened, lest she should follow literally the sentiment she had outlined and leave him to himself.

"This has all been true, until now," he said. "You were under a promise, an oath. But--Daisy, last night I heard all that passed between you and your persecutor, and there is no longer any need for mystery between us."

She gasped, as if her breath was going.

"You--you heard!"

"Everything. I was within forty feet of you. Are you sorry that the awful cloud is blown away--that your perfect innocence is proved without a violation of your plighted word?"

For the girl was crying, slowly, without hysteria, crying with both her hands tightly clasped over her eyes.

"I did not need it, not I," continued the man, earnestly. "I knew you had done nothing of your free will that the whole world might not know. But I knew, too, that you would be pleased to have your innocence established. And I was glad for another reason. I love you, Daisy. I have loved you a very long time. Your sister was right in that. Had you not shown such a marked preference for my friend I would have done my best to win you, months and months ago. While you felt that you were an object of suspicion I knew you would not consent to be my wife. Now, that obstacle is gone and--Daisy--I want you."

The hands were withdrawn from the tear-stained face, a handkerchief was hastily passed over it, and Daisy turned half away from the speaker.

"You will not refuse, my love," he murmured, bending again toward her.
"You will promise?"

One of her hands strayed toward him, and was clasped joyfully in his own.

"But, in relation to that other matter," said Daisy, some moments later, when the sweet tokens of love had been given and taken, "I must be as silent as before. I have listened to you, but I have not replied. You can understand the reason. Never speak of it to me again, if you do not wish to inflict pain. It is something I cannot discuss."

"I may tell your father, though," he whispered.

"It would be best not. He is content now. No, I beg you, say nothing to any one."

And he promised, like the lover he was, and sealed it with another kiss on her pure mouth.

"I may tell him of--of our love?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; we will tell him of that together."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRAPPING A WOLF.

When Shirley Roseleaf left the hotel that morning he carried a fishing rod, a rifle, a gamebag and other accoutrements of the sportsman. In his earlier years, before he ever came to the city, he had been accounted something of an expert with these implements. Since being in this country where there was so much to tempt a Nimrod he had made a number of similar excursions. Although it was some distance to the locality where he intended to go the young man did not take a conveyance of any kind. He walked briskly over the road, breathing the pure air of that early hour, and whistling in a low tone to himself as he went along.

Among the other things he carried was a light lunch, for he did not care to break his fast so early in the day. He had, besides, a contrivance for making coffee and for broiling the fish he expected to catch. Even if his jaunt lasted till night his physical needs were well provided for. One would not have imagined, to see his free and easy swing over the road, that he had anything of greater moment on his mind than to watch for some stray rabbit, or a possible deer track.

Not less than six miles from his starting point, he came to a small lake, to reach which he had followed a narrow path that led through the wood. On the shore was a primitive rowboat, or rather canoe, which he had purchased on another occasion from a native for an insignificant price. Into this boat the novelist stepped, and after safely depositing his traps, took up the paddle and used it skillfully. When he had reached approximately the centre of the lake, he sat down, prepared his fishing tackle and began to angle for the denizens of the water below.

With the patience of a true fisherman Roseleaf sat quietly for two hours, during which time he had drawn out but few specimens. The long walk had, however, given him the appetite he needed, and he now pulled his frail craft toward the shore, with the intention of lighting a fire and preparing a meal. But even when he had nearly reached land he saw splinters flying beneath

his feet, and immediately after heard a dull sound which showed what had caused the trouble.

A stray bullet, from some careless hunter, had penetrated his canoe. The hole was large enough to render the boat useless, for the water began to come in rapidly. With two more stout movements of the paddle Roseleaf forced his craft against the shore and sprang upon dry land. Then he quietly picked up the things he had brought with him, and walked a little away from the scene.

"These fellows are getting altogether too careless," he muttered, as he inspected his damp belongings. "A little more and that thing would have been tearing splinters in me."

Scraping some dead wood together, he soon had a fire started, and the cooking of his breakfast was begun. He went about the work methodically, whistling again in that low key he had used when on the way from his hotel, and stopping now and then as the noise of a woodbird or some wild quadruped of the smaller kind came to his ears. He sniffed the coffee that was boiling furiously and the freshly caught fish that sent out an appetizing aroma. No meal served at the Hoffman, the Imperial or the far-famed Delmonico restaurant, could equal this primitive repast, for him.

Finally, all was ready. Helping himself to a large plateful of the delicious food, and pouring out a huge tin cup of the coffee, Roseleaf sat down as if to take his ease while breakfasting. But, instead of touching the viands he had been at such pains to prepare, the next thing he did was to fall prone on the ground. And at the same instant a second bullet whizzed past him and buried itself with a tearing of bark and wood in the tree just behind him.

If Roseleaf had laid down with suddenness he rose with no less speed. As he sprang to his feet he picked up his rifle. He made a dozen steps forward, and then, bringing the weapon to his shoulder, cried to some one in front of him:

"Halt, or I fire!"

A human form that had been creeping away on its hands and knees, now stood upright. It was perhaps thirty yards from the speaker, and when it faced him he saw that the countenance was black.

"Don't come any nearer and don't go any farther off," said the novelist, gravely. "You are at a convenient distance. I can shoot you best where you stand."

The negro looked considerably crestfallen. He seemed doubtful whether to break and run or stay and try to face it out.

"I can't help an accident," he said, at last, when the other remained covering him with the rifle.

"No," was the answer. "An accident is liable to happen to any one, they say. But two accidents, of the same kind, on the same day--accidents that might either of them have been fatal if you were not such an awfully bad marksman--are too many. When *I* get ready to fire, there will be no accident."

The negro was plainly uneasy. He cast his eyes on the ground and writhed.

"You have dropped your gun," said Roseleaf. "That was right. It would have incommoded your flight, and its only cartridge was used. You would have had no time to reload. I know that gun very well; I have heard it many times in the last six weeks. I knew the sound of it to-day when you fired the first time. A rifle has a voice, like a man; did you know that? I knew it was your gun and that you were at the end of it. With that information in my possession, of course you couldn't catch me napping twice. I pretended to watch my cooking, but in reality I watched nothing but you. There is no need that you should say anything, Hannibal. You could not tell me much, if you tried."

The speaker examined his rifle carefully, still keeping the muzzle turned toward the person he was addressing. The latter did not seem to grow less uneasy.

"I spent some time last evening," continued Roseleaf, presently, "in listening to a little conversation you had with a certain young lady living a mile or so from this spot. That surprises you, does it? I thought it might. I learned how you had ruined her peace of mind, how you had artfully contrived to make her appear the opposite of what she really was. Now, you have tried twice within the last hour to murder me. For this I could have forgiven you. What you did to that young woman is, however, a more serious matter. I don't think anything less than pulling this trigger will expiate that."

He placed the rifle to his shoulder again, as he spoke, and glanced along the sight. The negro half turned, as if of a mind to attempt an escape, and then, realizing the hopelessness of such a move, sank on his knees and raised his hands piteously.

"If you have anything to say, be quick!" said the hard voice of the man who held the rifle.

Then Hannibal blurted out his story. He told how he had been led, step by step, to hope that he might rise above his station, until the wild idea entered his brain that he could even make Daisy Fern love and marry him. He pleaded the disappointments he had suffered, the terrible revulsion of feeling he had undergone, the broken life he had been obliged to take up. He did not want to be killed. If allowed to go he would swear by all that was good never to cross the path of the Ferns, or Roseleaf, or any of their friends again. When his treaties brought no verbal response he grew louder in his tone, feeling that something must be done to move the deaf ears to which he addressed his petition.

"If I allowed you to leave here, you would try to shoot me the next time you had a chance," said the novelist. "I should merely be giving my life in exchange for yours, which I do not consider a good bargain."

"No, I swear it before God!" came the trembling words in reply.

"I cannot trust you."

A slight sound attracted the attention of Roseleaf as he uttered the latter words. It was the sound that oars make when dipped in water. With a quick glance to one side he beheld a rowboat, in which were seated Archie Weil and Daisy Fern, and they were coming directly toward him.

"Here are some of the others you have wronged," he said, pointing. "I will wait to see if their opinions agree with mine."

Daisy saw him first, as Weil was handling the oars, and she called her companion's attention to him. Archie called his name.

"Come here!" was Roseleaf's reply. "I have winged a black duck and I cannot leave."

A few more movements of the oars brought the boat to the shore, and the surprise of its occupants can be imagined when they saw the tableau that awaited them. Hannibal was still groveling on the earth, and the attitude of Roseleaf plainly showed the cause of the negro's terror.

"What has he done?" was the first question, and it was Daisy's voice that asked it.

"Let him tell," replied Roseleaf, nonchalantly. "Tell the lady what you did, Hannibal."

With a courage born of his knowledge of the young lady's kind heart, Hannibal now turned his attention toward her. He begged her to plead with his would-be executioner to give him one more chance for his life, and reiterated his promises to cease meddling with all of their affairs if this was granted. As he spoke Daisy crept nearer to Roseleaf's side, and when he paused for a moment to gain breath, she laid her fair hand on the rifle.

"You would not kill a fellow creature?" she said, gently.

"A fellow creature?" he retorted. "No! But a wolf, a snake, a vulture--yes."

She shook her head slowly, while Mr. Weil looked on, uncertain what to do or say. He wanted more than anything else in his life to lay hands upon the cause of all her woes.

"You have not told me yet what he has done," she said.

"He shall tell you," replied Roseleaf, sharply. "Stand up, Hannibal, and answer truly the questions I am about to propound to you."

The crouching figure tottered to his feet. The negro was weak from fear.

"Did you try twice this morning to murder me?"

"Yes," replied the shaking voice. "But I was insane with my troubles--I did not realize what I was doing--I--"

Daisy's slight hand, still on the barrel of the rifle, was bearing it steadily to the ground.

"Once," she said to Roseleaf, impressively, "you told me you loved me! Have you regard enough left to grant me a favor?"

He shook his head.

"There are favors," he said, "that are crimes. It is one's duty to exterminate vermin, in the interest of the human race."

But, even as he spoke, she was having her way. Her slight strength had taken the weapon from him.

Then, with the face of a forgiving angel she turned toward the negro and uttered very softly one word, "Go!"

Glancing at the others to see if he might safely follow this direction, Hannibal disappeared in the thick woods behind him. He walked with an unsteady step. There was a strange lightness in his brain. Some distance

away he found the boat in which he had come, and entered it, staggeringly. Pushing from the shore with a feeble touch on his paddle he set out for his home.

* * * * *

The negroes who found his body, a week later, could not decide whether he had perished by accident or by deliberate intention. The boat was not capsized, but it was partially filled with water, indicating either that he had tried to sink the craft or had leaned too heavily to one side in something like a stupor. When his gun was discovered on the shore, new speculations were set in motion.

Those who knew him recalled that he had been moody for a long time--in fact, ever since he came from the north. They remembered him as a young fellow, four or five years previous, not very different from his mates; and they had stared in wonder when he returned with fine clothes and money in his pocket. The dislike between him and his old acquaintances was mutual. They could not understand him; and what an inferior mind does not comprehend it always views with suspicion.

A grave was made near the border of the lake, and the single word "HANNIBAL" was written on the board that marked the spot. But later some envious hand scrawled beneath it:

"HE WANTED TO BE A GENTLEMAN!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THE GREATEST NOVEL."

Archie Weil and Daisy Fern were married in June. There was no need of waiting longer. It was a case of true love sanctified by suffering and devotion. The bright eyes and ruddy cheeks of the bride testified to her renewed health and spirits. The news of Hannibal's death--albeit it brought a tear to her eyes, had removed the only shadow that stretched across her pathway.

Shirley Roseleaf did not come to the wedding, to which he was the only invited guest. He wrote that an important mission from his magazine made it impossible to accept the invitation, but he sent a handsome present and a letter to Archie, congratulating him in the warmest manner.

For some time Lawrence Gouger had been urging the novelist to hasten the wonderful story that was to make his fortune and give a new impetus to the house of Cutt & Slashem. They had consulted together a hundred times, and the thirty chapters already finished seemed to leave but a few weeks' steady work to be accomplished. Shortly after the wedding Gouger went to Roseleaf's rooms, one evening, and begged him to lose no further time.

"What is there to wait for now?" he asked. "All the dramatic incidents have occurred. You only need to wind up with a glory of fireworks, showing virtue triumphant and vice buried under a North Carolina sycamore. Come, my dear boy, when may I expect to see the work completed?"

Roseleaf did not answer for some seconds.

"There is a part of this story that you do not comprehend," he said, finally. "A chapter is yet to be written at which you have not guessed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the listener.

"Yes," nodded the other. "So far the character that is supposed to represent myself appears that of a heartless, cold, unfeeling wretch. Do you think I shall be satisfied to leave it that way?"

The critic stared at the speaker in astonishment.

"I--I do not understand," he replied.

"I thought not," said Roseleaf, soberly. "Well, this story, to be truthful, must do justice to the one who is supposed to personate its author. And, in the first place, to avoid all circumlocution, let me tell you there has never been a moment since I first loved Daisy Fern that she has not been the dearest thing on this earth to me!"

Mr. Gouger could not reconcile this statement with the events that had taken place, and his puzzled countenance said as much.

"I acted like a villain, did I not," continued Roseleaf, after a slight pause, "when the news was brought that she had disappeared? I seemed to have no faith in her, no confidence in Archie, no trust in that poor old man, her father. Why? I was so madly, insanely in love that every possible phantasy got possession of my excited brain. To lose her was to deprive me of all hope, all ambition, all care for life. So far, I acted my real self. If what I supposed true had been proven I think there would have been a murder. Not of Daisy; ah, no! but of the man who had robbed me of my treasure. Then I went to Midlands with Archie and I saw her. I heard her speak, and like a lightning flash it came to me. He was as honorable as a man could be and she cared more for him than for my unworthy self. She had contrasted us and discovered how much he was my superior. And I said to myself at that moment, 'I will give her up! If it costs me my happiness as long as I live I will give her up! No matter what happens, I will unite these people, who have been so faithful to me and toward whom I have acted the part of a cur and a coward!'"

The young man was speaking with perfect composure, but with intense earnestness.

"The first thing to be done," he continued, "was to take myself out of their way. The next was to unravel the mystery that had made the trouble. I knew, when my mind had resumed its natural state, that, whatever had occurred, Daisy was blameless. I knew that something far out of the common line had caused her to commit the act which had cast a blight over her reputation. For weeks I could find no clue. Then, one day, in the street, I saw Hannibal, the negro for whom she had borrowed my money and who I supposed was still in France. I cannot help the quick temper I have inherited, and I confess that the sight of that fellow aroused my suspicions against this girl, only they took a new and more horrible form.

"I remembered distinctly what a strong hold Hannibal had on the Fern family. I recalled, with frightful distinctness, the manner in which he attended Daisy at table, his interest in her health, the \$1,000 she had given him, her quick movement to prevent my striking him when his answers insulted us both. Perhaps--but I will not dilate on the things that came to my distorted imagination. It was enough for me to put a detective on his track. I engaged Hazen, and in three days he came to tell me that a white woman had passed the night with Hannibal at a house on Seventh Avenue, the date corresponding with the one on which I was to have been married!"

Gouger listened spellbound. It seemed to him that the most exciting chapter of this weird tale was yet to be written.

"If I had lost control of my senses before," pursued Roseleaf, "what do you suppose happened when this information was brought to me? But then I found an excuse for my beloved one. I considered her the victim of one of those forms of hypnotism of which there can no longer be any doubt. She could not have gone there without the demoniac influence of a stronger personality. He had charmed her from her home by the exercise of diabolic arts. My fury was entirely for him. I sought him at once, only to learn that he had left the city a few days before, leaving absolutely no trace. I could not give over the hunt, however. If he was on the earth I must find him and be avenged for the wrong he had done. It occurred to me that an influence so strong as he had exerted would not be given up. Wherever the Ferns had gone, he would probably be found. I discovered the whereabouts of the

family, after a great deal of effort, and went to North Carolina. With the patience of a dog and the cunning of a fox I laid in wait for weeks, and one night I saw and heard Daisy Fern and Hannibal in conversation!"

There was no movement on the part of the critic. He sat as still as a block of stone.

"When they began to speak I could have sworn that my recent guesses were correct ones. It was at about the hour of midnight, and she had crept quietly and alone out of her house to meet this African. But the first dozen sentences that were uttered gave me a new version of the affair. It was by no mesmeric power, but by a threat of injury to her father that this fellow held her under bond. I learned that Mr. Fern had done something--I could not then tell what--which rendered him liable to imprisonment. I learned, also, beyond question--for they spoke without restraint, supposing themselves alone--that, whatever the purpose of Hannibal when Daisy came to his rooms on the day she was to have been married, it had not been accomplished. She was afraid of him, but only for her father's sake. And I discovered beside, though not with perfect clearness, that a promise of secrecy accounted for her refusal to explain the cause of that absence which had altered the whole course of our lives.

"I have said I had watched with patience. I determined to continue my watch till I understood the entire situation. About once a week they met in the way I have described, and as the next date was always arranged in my hearing there was no difficulty in my keeping the appointment. In the meantime I learned that Hannibal was born in the vicinity, that he was living a hermit life, and that nobody knew of the surreptitious visits he was paying to Oakhurst. Then one day I heard that Archie was at the hotel, and thinking it time that I let him into the secret I went there, pretending I had just arrived from the north, when in reality I had been boarding for months five miles away. The rest you know. I was enabled to prove to him as well as to myself what had actually happened. Since then justice has been done to us all."

Mr. Gouger had to speak at last.

"To *you*?" he asked. "Do you admit that all this is just to you?"

"Without doubt," said Roseleaf. "I forfeited every right to the woman I had insulted by my suspicions. There are certain metals that can only be tried by fire. I was placed in the crucible, and found wanting."

The critic shook his head sagely.

"You are a regular Roman father to your own delinquencies," he answered. "But tell me another thing. Would you have shot Hannibal if Mr. Weil and Miss Fern had not made their appearance?"

"I have not the least doubt of it. He was in my eyes at that moment a crawling adder, whose fangs were liable to penetrate the flesh of some one if he was not put out of the way. But I am more than glad I was spared the infliction of his punishment."

Gouger wore a strange look.

"And yet he had one most human quality," said he.

"Yes, I admit that now," was the reply. "In his passionate, barbaric way, he certainly loved. When I revise my novel I shall try to deal fairly with him."

"And you will finish it very soon now?"

"As soon as possible."

A month later Lawrence Gouger received at his office a package marked on the outside, "From Shirley Roseleaf." He could hardly control his excitement until he had untied the strings, taken off the wrappings and disclosed the tin box inside. It was a square box, just the right size for manuscript paper such as he had seen Roseleaf use, and the heart of the enthusiast beat high as he took it in his hands. A jewel case filled with the costliest stones would not have seemed to him more precious. The fame of a new author would soon resound through the world! *Cutt & Slashem*

would have the greatest work of fiction of recent years in their next catalogue! And he, Lawrence Gouger, would be given the credit of discovering--one might almost say of inventing--this wonder!

Opening the box, the critic looked at its contents and then dropped it with an exclamation. It contained nothing but a small sealed envelope and *a heap of ashes!*

Ashes! Ashes made from recently burned paper!

When he recovered enough to open the envelope, this note was found within:

"TO LAWRENCE GOUGER, ESQ:--DEAR SIR: Enclosed herewith you will find the novel for which you have waited so long. I hope it will please you in all respects, as I certainly have taken the greatest pains with it.

"On reading it over I thought it best to more thoroughly disguise the personality of the characters, lest any of them might be injured by its publication. There was the happiness of a newly-made bride to be considered; her husband's ease of mind; her father's serene old age; her sister's feelings. There was even a black man who had perhaps suffered enough, and a critic employed by a large publishing firm who would not like his true character made manifest in type. In order to protect these people I have applied a match to the pages. You can best tell whether I have performed the work too well.

"If this novel does not bring me the fame you anticipate I shall not much care; I have lost some of my ambitions. If it fails to add to my fortune, never mind; a single man has no great need of wealth.

"I go to-night on board a steamer which sails for Europe at daybreak. When you read this I shall be on the sea. I have secured a position as resident correspondent abroad for one of the great newspapers. Perhaps I never shall return. Truly your friend, S. R."

"*The idiot!*" cried the reader, as he finished perusing this letter. "*The imbecile!* Was there ever such a fool born on this earth!"

Then he apostrophised the heap of ashes that lay in the box before him.

"There never was and never will be so great a work of fiction as you were yesterday! And yet a little touch of flame, and all was extinguished! How like you were to man! Let him have the brain of a Shakespeare, and a pound weight falling on his skull ends everything.

"There was a flood in Hungary last week, in which a thousand people were drowned. There was an earthquake in Peru where five hundred perished. A vessel went down off the Caroline Islands. Taken all together, they did not equal to this world your loss.

"The poet knew what he was saying: 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied.' Oh, to think that a mind that could execute your thrilling pages knew no more than to destroy them!

"I will not cast you, sublime ashes, to the winds of heaven! I will keep you reverently, as one preserves the cloak of a great man, or the bones of a mastodon. Behold, I close you again in your covers, where the eye of no mortal shall henceforth behold you."

With the words the disappointed critic performed the action. And to this day visitors to his room read with wonder the inscription he has placed on the box:

"The greatest novel that ever was written."

THE END.

* * * * *

Transcriber's note:

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible, including obsolete and variant spellings. Obvious typographical errors in punctuation (misplaced quotes and the like) have been fixed. Corrections [in brackets] in the text are noted below:

Table of Contents: typographical error corrected

I. A Rejected Manuscript 1[9]

page 41: possible typographical error queried (not changed in the text)

would[wouldn't] touch the mooney, maundering mess. It makes my flesh creep, sometimes, to read it." v

page 106: duplicate word removed

playing at love with each other, might afterwards find that [that] they were experimenting with fire.

page 108: possible typographical error queried (not changed in the text)

arm around her again, checking himself with difficulty from completeing[completing] the movement) "and dull, and wanting in manners, but you are the only young

page 116: typographical errors corrected

about this matter. She shought[thought] the innocent man at her side had not quite guaged[gauged] the interest that Mr.

page 118: typographical error corrected

caught her passionately in his arms, and knew no better way to bring her to consiousness[consciousness] than to rain kisses on her cheeks. As might be expected this

page 126: typographical error corrected

abilities of Mr. Weil, and he had no idea of disputing[disputing] the conclusions of that wise guide.

page 133: typographical error corrected

"To me? He would not dare?![!] What angers me is the way he speaks to the rest of you. He

page 149: typographical errors corrected

called the Good side nothing stronger than[than] wines were found on the bill of fare. On the Wicked side every decoction know[known] to the modern drinker was to

page 155: typographical error corrected

sexes. He half believed that Jennie Pelham and Mrs. Delevan[Delavan] were sitting by his bed, more brazen

page 194: typographical error corrected

young novelist. More than this, she would have sufficient[sufficient] on hand to send the future amounts that

page 251: typographical error corrected

Roseleaf waved him back with a sweep[sweep] of his arm.

page 278: typographical error corrected

countenance, the utter hopelessness had in a measure disappeared[disappeared]. When Daisy came into the parlor, she

page 297: typographical error corrected

came with him. Mr. Fern upraided[upbraided] Weil for using so much ceremony, remarking that although he was

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