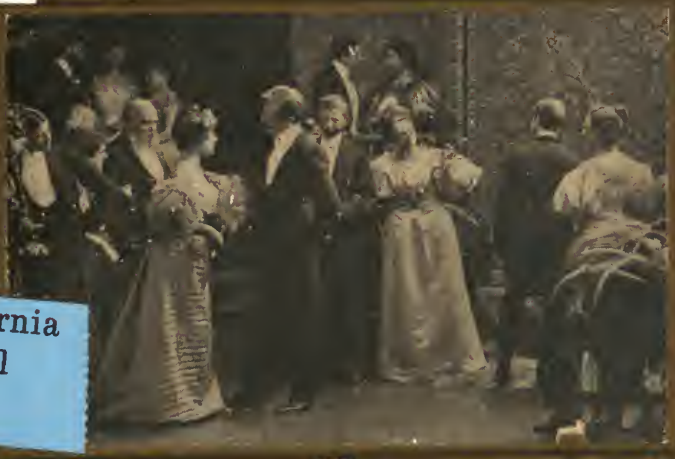
A 000 071 300 8
UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

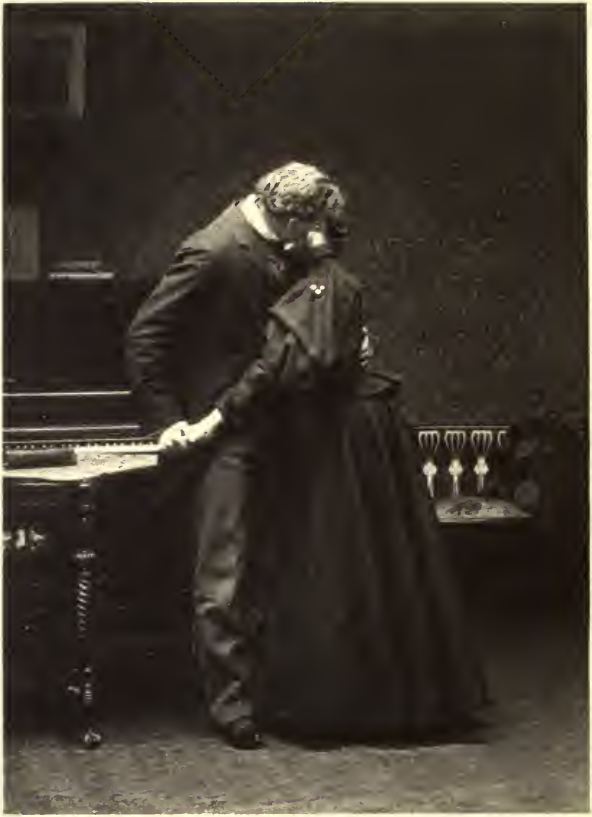
A CAPITAL COURTSHIP



California
egional
cility

By ALEXANDER BLACK

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY. LOS ANGELES



A CAPITAL COURTSHIP

BY

ALEXANDER BLACK

Author of "Miss Jerry"

WITH SEVENTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LIFE PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

NEW YORK MDCCCXCVII

COPYRIGHT, 1897, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
[*All rights reserved*]

TO

M. H. B.

2125574

NOTE

"A CAPITAL COURTSHIP," like "Miss Jerry," was written for oral delivery before audiences, and is here much expanded and otherwise changed to meet the requirements of book publication. In this fuller form the story, as such, receives many elements which in the "picture play" come within the province of the concurrently used pictures.

The author begs the privilege of expressing his obligation to President Cleveland, President McKinley, Sir Julian Pauncefote, Speaker Reed, Colonel Lamont, Commodore Melville, General Greely, and Professor Mason, as well as to the many unofficial sitters whose courtesy and patience made possible the new adventure in pictorial realism represented by his second "picture play."

The illustrations in the present volume, selected from the two hundred and fifty plates used in the "picture play," have been chosen with a view to their individual interest as well as to their illustrative office.

June 24, 1897.

THE PICTURES

A CAPITAL COURTSHIP

A CAPITAL COURTSHIP

I

ONE night in the spring they had a whist party at Colonel Winfield's. The whist mania had been rather late in reaching North Pines, but when it came it came with some violence, and in three months everyone in the place was in some degree under the spell. In the days when the big Silsbee barn was turned into a roller-skating rink, Deacon Harris had been induced to go and dislocate his shoulder; but when whist came, even Parson Atwick was heard asking whether whist was anything like old maid, and the Episcopal rector was positively known to have expressed the opinion that "second hand low" is far from being a safe rule.

The difficulty in North Pines was that of getting men enough to go around; and it became necessary on all such occasions to label certain ladies who con-

sented to facilitate the due balance of partnership. The labelling usually was accomplished with the aid of a handkerchief tied about the arm—a kind of inverted badge of mourning for the obliterated sex. There were ladies who always took this badge upon them. Miss Parker, for example, who taught in the High School, wore it by habit and preference, until Dr. Binsbury formed the practice of calling her "Mr. Parker," and used to tie the handkerchief for her with a well-worn set of jokes, including the comment that she was not "a perfect gentleman."

At the time of this Winfield party the epidemic was at its height. The cookery class, the physical culture club, and the Browning Society, all simply had gone to pieces. It was whist that regulated the new social code. A woman who was slow at dealing found her most precious accomplishments under a cloud; and a man who had trumped his partner's ace had every immediate reason for wishing that he never had been born.

So that the scene in the little Winfield parlor was entirely characteristic of the place and the time. That disproportionate excitement which is aroused by a game of cards, and which is at once a eulogy and a satire on the game, was here accompanied by

much of real human picturesqueness. If the Colonel's interest fell far short of a passion, that of Miss Warner, who had been spending a month in Boston, and who was introducing a new phase of the game, arose to the height of religious fervor. Dr. Binsbury, too, took his cards very seriously. He would much rather have guessed his opponent's hand than his ailment.

Perhaps this intensity of interest heightened the effect of a crashing noise in the dooryard of the house and a perceptible jarring, as if from the violent falling of some object without. A unanimous gesture of alarm recast the outlines of the group of players. One of the women near the front windows screamed, and young Haines made a peculiar noise in his throat.

Then, while a dozen voices were gasping some variation of the inquiry, "What has happened?" Colonel Winfield and the Doctor disappeared into the hall, and in a moment returned, leading between them a man who quite evidently had participated in the crash. The Colonel plainly wished to get the stranger into the light. "A runaway," muttered the Doctor, and two of the younger men slipped out of the house.

The new-comer turned to Winfield. "You will

have to excuse me, Colonel, for so unceremonious a visit. I just dropped in, you know, and I seemed to land on my head. The truth is, I didn't expect to call on you till to-morrow."

"Didn't think I knew you," said the Colonel, studying the white face, perplexedly. "Is he broken anywhere, Doctor?"

"No, seems not," returned Binsbury, "but I guess he's pretty well shaken up. Must be made comfortable somewhere immediately — let me see——"

"Don't know me, Colonel? Don't remember Jack Gerard?"

"Well, upon my—Jack, my boy, I didn't know you, for a fact! But look here! you're hurt—Lydie, see that there's a room fixed for Mr. Gerard, won't you?"

"Hold on, Colonel! I wouldn't think of bothering you. I'm all right——"

"Young man," interposed Binsbury, "I suppose you'll get over this, but you will please regard yourself as somewhat injured for the present."

"At any rate," remarked the new-comer, grimly, "I guess I'm not exactly fit for company. You see, Colonel, I was bound for my uncle's—missed the

A man who quite evidently had participated in the crash.

train and was driving over from Lawson's Junction. They told me that the horse was a trifle lively at times. He was more than lively; he was riotous. What became of him?"

"Repenting at a tree down the road," reported young Haines.

"Look here, Gerard," said the Colonel, authoritatively, "you'll stay right here. You've got lots of sand; you always had; but that horse smashed my front fence with you, and you want time for meditation. Come, the Doctor and I will help you upstairs."

The victim of the runaway made as if to start off toward the door on his own account, but with a grim smile that was half a wince he accepted the support of Winfield's arm, and those who remained behind heard his step falter on the stair.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Miss Moseley, "you don't mean to tell me that is *our* Jack Gerard! Why, he was a dreadfully plain boy."

"I'm afraid we'll have to deal again," Miss Warner was saying, with great severity, at the table near the piano.

"Ellen!" ejaculated Miss Warner's mother. "How *can* you think of the game after—why, do you know, I'm all upset!"

"Anyway," said young Haines to Miss Winfield, "we can't go on without your father, your aunt, and the Doctor." Which seemed to be true, for the company forsook the cards in the climax of Miss Warner's experiment with the new phase. Miriam Winfield and three or four others went out to inspect the broken buggy, Miss Warner's mother settled down to reminiscences of runaways, and Miss Moseley was conscious of an unvoiced query as to how far the accident might affect the question of refreshments.

The Colonel came down to protest against an early dispersion, but even the agreeable entertainment in the dining-room did not banish the feeling that it would be appropriate to go early.

"I'm glad it was only the buggy that was broken, Gerard," said the Colonel, when he returned to the guest's room later in the evening. "How are you feeling now—better get to bed, hey?"

"Don't you worry about me, Colonel. The scratch on the head doesn't amount to anything. This bruise on the hand is about all I have to complain of, and the Doctor has been very clever with that."

The Colonel had taken a seat tentatively.

Gerard went on: "I've just been grinning to myself over my arrival in your company. Quite like a comic opera entrance, wasn't it?"

"Came near being a tragedy, my boy. Yes, sir, you might try that ninety-nine more times and not have the joke on the fence again."

"Sheer luck," said Gerard, making some experimental passes with his arms that seemed to confirm his faith in his shoulders.

"Now that I come to look at you," remarked the Colonel, "you are getting to be of age, aren't you? Let's see; how long is it since you left here?"

"Seven years."

"Well, well! is it so long? Then you must be——"

"Thirty, Colonel; not a day less."

"You don't say! But that's a fact, you were a grown man when you left here for Illinois. Is that bandage of yours comfortable? . . . And what have you been doing, Gerard?"

"Hustling most of the time."

"Yes, I've no doubt; I should have expected that to be in your line."

"Eternal hustle is the price of progress, Colonel."

"And where have you hustled yourself to?" the Colonel asked, with something of the quizzical scrutiny of an older man.

"Well, incidentally into Congress, if you want a bill of particulars."

"No, Gerard!—you're joking!"

"Fact."

"Then we're going to be confrères, my boy."

"What! you, too, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir. I never expected any such thing; but it sort o' came my way, and I let it come. It's a mighty interesting game, politics, whether you win or lose. And so you're elected from Illinois?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid I'm going to feel pretty lonesome. There are not many of us in the next Congress."

"You don't mean to say——"

"Yes, Colonel, Democratic."

"Gerard! and you such a promising boy!" Gerard laughed heartily. "What would your father have said—your father, who was the leading Republican of this county for twenty years!"

"It is too bad, Colonel, when you look at it historically; but looking at it practically——"

There was a knock at the door. "Father!" came

Miriam's voice, "don't you think you had better let Mr. Gerard get some rest?"

"Looking at this practically," said Winfield, "I guess that suggestion is good."

"Don't make an invalid of me," the younger man protested.

"At any rate, Gerard, I wouldn't worry about that political point to-night, anyway, if I were you. Your good behavior will be a great extenuating circumstance with me!"

"Good-night, Colonel!"

"Good-night!"

Gerard felt that after all life was not wholly destitute of the picturesque. The manner of his entrance upon the scenes of his boyhood was altogether different from anything that he might have expected. He found his hand trembling a little as he lighted a cigarette. Perhaps the stimulated condition of his nerves made thoughts of the past particularly vivid. Even a trifling accident like this could make a man think of what might have happened. He remembered a day when he lay on his back on the Yale field, with a dislocated shoulder, excitedly ordering his companions of the rush line to let him alone, that he would be all right in a minute. There

were ruptured tendons, and he was not all right in a minute, nor in a month. But these things are accepted in college days. They are part of the training.

In the morning Gerard found himself scarcely the worse for his mishap of the night before. Save for the bruised hand and a stiffness in one arm he was so far free from damage, that he made up his mind to get over to his uncle's before noon.

When he came downstairs he discovered no sign of life in the sitting-room, but peering into the dining-room he found Miriam, in a fluttering house-gown, at work over the table, and saw the silhouette of Aunt Lydie Jane in the kitchen beyond.

"Why, Mr. Gerard! how you frightened me!" The girl had started visibly.

"I didn't mean it. You will pardon my curiosity. But I felt lonesome out here."

"But aren't you ill, or broken, or something?"

"No; I'm all right. You seem almost disappointed."

"Well, I was sure you would be worse in the morning. People don't always know how badly they are hurt in the first excitement. Excuse my going ahead with the table."

"If you will let me help."

"You see our girl became engaged to be married last night while we were playing whist and while you were breaking our fence. She's to be married this morning, and is going on her wedding tour this afternoon."

"These things always do seem so sudden."

"It's awkward, anyway, for it's awfully hard to get a new girl here."

"What's the matter with your clock?" Gerard had stooped with both hands full upon hearing a faint guttural sound from the mantel.

"None of us can find out. It's the funniest clock in the world. We discovered that it wouldn't go unless it was tipped up that way and had the door open."

"Evidently wants lots of air. Seems as if it was getting ready to strike or do something." After further guttural noises that culminated in a sound resembling a politely muffled sneeze, the clock did strike three.

"It always strikes three when it means eight," laughed Miriam.

Gerard stared at the clock, which had the angle of the Tower of Pisa, with affected awe. "What a beautiful training in mathematics a clock like that must afford in a family."

"Put those plates here," directed the girl; "it's a

miracle you didn't drop them all, carrying them like that, though I suppose I shouldn't scold you with that bandaged hand."

"Oh, I don't mind doing an occasional miracle," observed the Congressman-elect, still affecting to be fascinated by the clock, "just to keep my hand in—that is to say, the other hand, of course. Do you know that timepiece there makes me think of a man out in Makanda who married a little woman not more than four feet high. He grew over that way trying to be sociable when they walked together."

"Why didn't she walk on the other side sometimes?"

"There was the trouble; his good ear was on that side."

Miriam laughed again until her heaps of saucers rattled.

"Careful there!" exclaimed Gerard. "Now that you've got me interested in this show, I don't want to see anything broken."

"That favorite attitude of the clock," remarked Miriam, "always makes me think of father's hat."

"I can't see how."

"Well, you know that when father has his hat on straight you simply can't do anything with him.

But let him have it tipped up a little on one side, and you can—own him! His hat is a perfect barometer of his feelings."

"That's funnier than the clock, isn't it? Where shall I put this dish?"

"There's father now. He's in a good-humor this morning. I can tell by his step without waiting to see his hat."

"Well, I want to know, Gerard!" The Colonel swung into the door-way with his hands in the pockets of his walking-coat. "I thought you were in bed, where you ought to be, I suspect, and I wouldn't call you."

"Nonsense, Colonel. Do I look damaged?"

"No; can't say you do—and you surprise me. But be careful. I hope this isn't a bluff. A bluff is all right in politics, Gerard, but don't try it with your doctor, or your head nurse. I've been out for a constitutional," the Colonel went on when they had begun breakfast. "Been looking over the field of the disaster. When you come to see our front garden-bed, Gerard, you'll realize that you have made a great impression here."

"I'm sorry," Gerard returned, with a twinkle, "that circumstances prevented me from making a

more modest approach. But I mustn't abuse your hospitality. I shall have to ask you to drive me over to my uncle's this morning."

"Hold on, young man! Can't you stop hustling for a little while? Don't be in such a steaming hurry. I want to talk politics with you for a while."

"Please don't," urged Miriam.

"I suppose you think it might be dangerous," suggested the visitor.

"Oh, we are not likely to be explosive, are we, Gerard? And she must get used to it before we go to Washington."

Miriam declared her impatience for the coming of December. "I wonder if you men are as eager to go as I am. It will be great fun."

Aunt Lydie Jane was quietly smiling her assent to this suggestion. She was thinking of the relics and souvenirs she anticipated picking up at the capital.

"You really must give Aunt Lydie a souvenir of your accident, Mr. Gerard," said Miriam, mischievously, "unless you wish to force her to be content with a little button which she picked up out there by the front fence."

"Hush, Miriam!" protested Aunt Lydie, over her coffee.

"I've been looking over the field of the disaster."

"By the way, Colonel," said Gerard, who had been studying Miriam's finely cut face, "I haven't asked after your other daughter, Miss—Viola."

Gerard had scarcely spoken when he became aware that he had touched an unwelcome theme.

"Miss Viola is not at home just now," the Colonel began, and Miriam contrived to change the direction of the talk. "You have scarcely eaten anything this morning, father," Miriam said, a little later. "I don't believe you will be entirely normal again until you have talked politics with Mr. Gerard for at least three consecutive hours."

"As for that matter," said the gentleman from Illinois, "I'm afraid the gentleman from Massachusetts will find me rather tame."

"Am I to conclude, Gerard, that you are not going to demand a chairmanship from Mr. Reed?"

"Yes, Colonel, I'm going to be modest by force of circumstances. Now, it will be a good deal harder for you, in the majority, to be as truly modest and retiring as I expect to be, natural as that impulse might be to you under other conditions. Hello! there's Uncle Morris!"

A nimble, elderly man in a gray suit was hitching his horse in front of the house.

II

JACK GERARD'S arrival in North Pines occasioned considerable talk on the day following the accident.

The members of the whist party naturally exhibited an especial solicitude in the case. Even Miss Warner, who had been not a little disconcerted by the incompleteness of her experiment in whist, had acquired some anxiety over night, and was actually eager in her inquiries as to Gerard's condition; and Miss Moseley, who had secreted her regret that the refreshments should have been hurried, solicitously assailed a carriage which she mistook for Dr. Binsbury's, but which turned out to be another with Gerard and his uncle inside.

Randy Ellis, who was questioned frequently as much for the flavor of his opinions as for the exactness of his information, was stopped at least three times on his way down to Main Street by people who wanted to know whether it really was

true that Gerard had both legs and one arm broken.

"Who said that?" demanded Randy. "Why didn't they say the other arm, too? If that feller's as strong as he was when he licked me for turnin' loose his father's trottin' mare, yer couldn't muss him up by droppin' him off the M. E. Church! I'll bet it was Hackett said that. Y' know, it sounds like Hackett. Some people bother yer because they lie sometimes. But Hackett, he's lyin' all the time. Yer kin depend on him." And Randy went on his way again, whistling a monotonous, meaningless tune, that began nowhere and ended in the same place. Randy's whistle was part of him. It was impossible to think of him without it.

Randy's philosophy was, in some respects, superior to his talents as a farmer. At least his father, a matured edition of the same lank and angular form, was in the habit of expressing his convictions to this effect. An immediate result of Randy's habits of thought was his discontent with North Pines as a point of vantage for an outlook upon life.

Indeed, it was well understood by everyone in North Pines that Randy intended to break away some day and do something heroic. During the

winter, while he was learning to set type for the North Pines *Patriot*, he first declared his intention of going to sea on one of Uncle Sam's war-ships.

"Seems to me," Randy said, "as if that's about the cheapest way of gettin' around and seein' somethin'." And when the spring set in he began to take on the air of one who is soon to depart. When he learned that Gerard was a Congressman-elect, he found occasion to call on the newcomer, and to inform him, as he had Winfield, of his ambition to serve the nation in another department. The visit which accomplished this purpose was made ostensibly for inquiry as to Gerard's hurts, of which Randy made circumstantial report to all questioners before the afternoon had set in.

"That man's almost as good as new already," Randy remarked to the Colonel, whom he found superintending repairs on the courtyard fence.

Winfield welcomed the news.

"You'll have a bill agin him for this?—or maybe agin the livery man, hey?" and Randy shook his lofty shoulders.

Aunt Lydie Jane was stealing a few minutes at a book from which she was intermittently diverted by the fence.

Miriam Winfield bent over her shoulder at the window. "What are you reading, Aunt Lydie, 'When His Hair Turned Gray?'—why, you were reading that a month ago!"

"Yes, Miriam, but, you know, I read very slowly. And when it gets exciting I always fall asleep and lose the place. Besides, I can't seem to keep my attention on the book to-day. It seems as if ever since breakfast I haven't been able to get Viola out of my head."

Gerard's inquiry and her father's distress had returned to Miriam many times during the day, calling up as they had the image of her absent sister.

Viola! Throughout the whole of her life Miriam's sister had been to her a personality, strange, unreadable, unreachable. They had not, indeed, been uncompanionable in the early days, when they had romped together with no more, perhaps, than the usual number of little sisterly quarrels, their minds less frequently at variance than at a later time when the peculiar, stormy, unmanageable nature of Viola began, as it seemed, to isolate her.

To Miriam few memories were more painful than those of scenes between Viola and her father. As Viola approached womanhood something akin to an

antipathy grew up between father and daughter. Each had that facility in misunderstanding the other which contributes so much to the misery of people whose incompatibility often seems wholly blameless.

Winfield found no comfort in the discovery that Viola repeated the tempestuous personality of her mother. Eugenie Guymard, whom Winfield married in 1872, was the daughter of an officer in the service of the Compagnie Generale Transatlantique, and an English woman who married Guymard at Havre, and afterward separated from her husband, taking her child with her to Southampton. When Eugenie was five years old her father died, and her mother then married an English jeweller named Westwick, who brought them to the United States.

Winfield's marriage was called romantic, doubtless because Miss Eugenie was a pretty foreigner; for there was little that was romantic in the circumstances attending the making of the match, unless this element may be found in the suddenness with which Winfield made up his mind that he was very much in love, and in the precipitation with which he communicated the fact to the young lady. Winfield was always a handsome man. Miss Eugenie thought

he was the handsomest man she had seen in America. They met and married in Boston.

The five years preceding Mrs. Winfield's death in 1877 were years in which Winfield learned to marvel at the distressing degree in which charm and acerbity may alternate in a woman. Eugenie frankly hated all of her neighbors. North Pines, which began by thinking her impractical, ended by regarding her as a species of morose tigress, elegantly savage, and always unavailable.

The two daughters presented one of those contrasts that tease and delight students of heredity. If Miriam reflected the character of her father, the elder sister as emphatically reincarnated the spirit of her mother. Twice while a mere child Viola had left home, to return again as fitfully and inexplicably as she had gone. Winfield came to dread punishing her in any manner for an offence lest she should commit some retaliatory act.

In the autumn, just before the Colonel's nomination for Congress, and two or three days after a quarrel with her father, Viola went away for a third time, sending word that she had taken a position as governess in a New York family. Her fragmentary letters during the winter were sent to Miriam. They

presented a strangely incomplete reflection of her state of mind.

On the evening when Gerard came to say that he was going back to Illinois, Miriam told him of a letter from Viola, saying that the Chilton family was going to Newport in July; and the first letter from Newport was singularly cheerful. It also was notable as containing this passage: "I hope father is well."

Viola enjoyed her life with the Chilton children, who gave many signs of their affection for her. She had the faculty often owned by isolated natures of winning the sympathy of the young. Little Arthur heard her stories with breathless interest and admiration. When she said: "And so the giant took his knotted stick and strode down the side of the mountain," his eyes fixed themselves upon hers in the profoundest flattery of attention; while Marjorie, grown to be twelve, but still under the spell of primitive romance, would ask with an eager concern that had in it more than curiosity, but something also of reverence for the gentle wizard who invoked the dryads and the cavaliers, "And did the Prince come back again?"

At Newport, as elsewhere, Viola was seized by moods in which all rule, habit, and association be-

came intolerable. Under these impulses she fled to the bluffs. In the solitude of certain favorite turns in the cliff path she could enjoy the wind and the smell of the sea and the surf symphony that wafted itself softly upward through the salty air. Oftentimes she clambered to a far point of the rocks and brooded there motionless with hair unbound, like some sombre spirit of the deep. In the exultation of those hours she loved to look the ocean in the eye, and let the spray sting her face; to peer far seaward when no living thing was in sight, and to feel the intoxication of being supremely alone.

One day in August, when the children wished her to "play queen" with them, and while she sat in the little blue sitting-room with a rough wreath of flowers on her head, and Arthur and Marjorie filling the remaining rôles of prince and princess, a shadow fell across the curtained doorway opening upon the veranda, and Viola became conscious that a man in a golf suit was staring fixedly at her.

Count Rudolf, an Austrian of uncertain connections, veneered by Paris, a hanger-on among the foreign legations at Washington, and variously reported as a military spy, a tariff propagandist, and an ordinary social mountebank, was enjoying his

first impressions of Newport. He was enjoying them frankly as his habit was. He studied Viola as he would have studied the Chiltons' trotter in harness.

When the children scampered away at the sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel path, the Count glanced obliquely across the veranda, and then remarked to Viola, who was gathering up the flowers, that she was a very pretty girl; a fragment of information which Viola received with an impassive silence that puzzled him.

"Very pretty—indeed," continued the Count, strolling into the room. When he touched her, Viola struck him full in the face with a force so clearly indicative of real anger that the Count for once lost even the mask of self-possession, and could not find a word until she had left him standing there tingling under the blow.

When Arthur came back a moment later he saw the Count pick up a yellow rose that lay near the middle of the floor.

For half an hour a glittering stream of carriages had been moving in the direction of the Casino. Viola, escaping unobserved from the western gate of the Chilton grounds, followed the procession with a purposeless step. Her face was still hot with anger.

Viola struck him full in the face.

It was the day of the semi-finals in the yearly tennis championship matches. A cloudy morning had been followed by a brilliant noon. Under that incomparable Newport sky the gowns of the most extravagantly dressed women in the world lost nothing of that theatrical splendor which society permits itself to create at the crisis of each season.

The grand-stand was crowded. There was a kaleidoscopic shimmer of color, the hum and flutter of fashionable life. A few moments before the game began Mrs. Chilton and her daughters made their way to seats on the fourth tier.

As Mrs. Chilton adjusted herself she suddenly turned and stared at the person on her left.

"Viola! you here!" she almost gasped, in her astonishment. The Chilton girls leaned forward to stare with bewilderment at the governess. For a moment Mrs. Chilton was stupefied with anger and embarrassment.

The elder Miss Chilton muttered, "How ridiculous!" and her sister leaned over to ask, "Did you say she might come?" But Mrs. Chilton appeared to hear neither of them.

At this moment Viola turned her inscrutable face, and said, quietly, "I am no longer the governess."

"I could have told you that," returned Mrs. Chilton. And neither spoke another word.

There was a cheer from the crowd. Neal had made a superb return, and was offering brilliant opposition to an adversary who seemed to pervade the entire region beyond the net. The white spheres flew back and forth between the two combatants, who, with every nerve strained, and dripping in the heat of the struggle, were fighting a modern bloodless battle with all of the intensity that could have marked the tournaments of old.

But it was to Hovey that the victory was to go—Hovey, before whom, three days later, the champion fell in an exciting conflict of agility that aroused the gloved enthusiasm of all Newport.

When it is all over in a discordant murmur, punctuated with shouts, a clatter of heels on the grandstand, a swish of silk, a grotesque dissolving of the kaleidoscopic colors, a babel of talk on the lawn, and a rumbling of wheels on the avenue, Viola is hurrying back to the house, from which, in the early morning of the following day, she started for home.

Under that incomparable Newport sky.

III

THE home-coming of Viola was a momentous event in the Winfield household. Characteristically, it was an unheralded return on the part of the absent daughter. Although Miriam had long anticipated her sister's coming, it was quite impossible to guess when she might appear at North Pines.

When Miriam clasped her sister at the gate, in the late afternoon of that autumn day, it was with moist eyes, and a quiver of happiness, whose quality could be understood only by one who knew the history of their lives.

The Colonel's delight made it hard for him to speak. He withheld no sign of that delight, avoiding only any allusion to the past, which by instinctive agreement remained unvoiced among them, except in so far as Viola herself might choose to speak.

"What a jolly winter we shall have together in Washington!" exclaimed Winfield. "We'll be

great chums together, and go everywhere and see everything, and——"

"And listen to daddy's speeches in the House," said Miriam.

"Better not count on those. At any rate I should be a useful Congressman with two such able counsellors."

The picture of the two sisters, of Miriam's open happiness and of Viola's quieter content, was one that long lingered in the Colonel's memory. The way of life now seemed a little smoother and simpler.

The father's happiness in Viola's return was indicated in many ways. He took up riding again because she loved the horse, and she was gayer and chattier with him than he had known her to be in recent years. They made long excursions into the rolling country. There was no jealousy in the feeling with which Miriam watched them ride away. Pleasure in the reunion dominated every other impulse.

Winfield and Viola talked of many things on these long rides. Sometimes the Colonel began to think he understood her better than he ever had before. There were depths in her nature that he never hoped

to fathom. She was too much like her mother to be explicable. Her personality seemed to illustrate the tritest cynicisms as to the paradoxes of femininity. Miriam was not at all complex. There was a New England straightness in the logic and manner of her life. She was not a prude; but she was prudent. She had force without being severe, and all the charm of one who is original without eccentricity. In Viola there was a singular contrast to this simplicity. She had that fascination which we sometimes find in eyes with a slight cast. Her contralto laugh piqued the imagination, and even her silence had a quality of personal meaning.

"Viola," said Winfield one day, when they were off on one of her favorite roads, "do you know that I have almost stopped being lonesome any more?"

"I'm glad of that. I have never been happier."

The acknowledgment was borne out by her own demeanor, which had begun to seem less quiet, though she still fell into reveries in which she seemed to forget that he was with her; and he could fall behind, watching her graceful silhouette against the gray-green and purple of the road-vista, and admitting her infirmities of impulse with the softened resentment of an old sorrow.

To Viola herself there came something like real peace. The autumn suited her mood. It had no sadness for her, but only a kind of finished quiet. The summer always seemed noisy and effusive, while in the gray stillness preceding the storms of winter came the deep, silent, thoughtful interval of the year. Viola looked into the depths of that silence with questions that were not mixed with impatience. She yielded herself to its soothing spell, and when she was utterly alone dreamed day-dreams of a time when all the world should be set right, and there should be no more bitterness anywhere.

One person remained ever secure from Viola's petulance or inconstancy. Miriam was to her sister a being apart, a choice and exceptional creation. There might have seemed to be something of obstinacy in Viola's attachment. It made no conditions. Whether she spoke or was silent, in this sentiment she was steadfast.

On a certain afternoon in the autumn, when Viola sat on the porch in the shadow of the old vine, her eyes wandering down the road, she became conscious of two figures that moved together over the foot-path in the direction of the house; two figures that strolled without excessive deference to each other's

step, yet with that companionable harmony in which it is not difficult to detect a sentiment of accord.

Viola recognized Miriam at once, but not the man with her. It was not until they had reached the gate that something in the man's face recalled Miriam's letter, with its account of the spring visit of Jack Gerard.

"I scarcely knew you," said Viola.

"I am getting old," Gerard declared.

"Careful!" warned Miriam. "We both knew you when you were very young."

Gerard found Viola rather quiet, though not greatly different from the sort of young woman his early knowledge of her might have led him to expect. He felt her watching him narrowly. He fancied her eyes spoke some resentment. Possibly the degree of this resentment might have been measured by the extent of the friendship she saw in Miriam's treatment of him.

Gerard had come back to give further personal attention to certain property matters. To Miriam he explained, with some definiteness, the business necessity for his visit; but he stayed for over a week, and so far as the Winfield family was concerned, he did not talk politics with the Colonel the whole of the

time. Twice they had had a four-handed game of whist, Gerard and Miriam suffering defeat at the hands of the Colonel and Viola. It was an inevitable defeat, for Gerard played listlessly, in spite of Miriam's rebuking comments.

One afternoon Gerard met Miriam at the post-office, and he induced her to walk home by a circuitous route. He pointed out many spots that recalled his boyhood, and assured her that to revisit them in such company was more than interesting.

She remarked that he had changed greatly since he went away.

"I dare say," he admitted.

"You know you were a most offensive dude when you came back from Yale."

"I believe you."

"And now I think that perhaps you are drifting in the other direction."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you think that you are becoming quite negligent about your clothes? Perhaps you are cultivating a certain effect for political purposes."

"I hadn't thought so. But you don't expect a man to keep on being a dude after he gets some

sense, do you? And a Congressional dude would be out of the question."

"Unless it might be in a community where women voted."

"No, no!" laughed Gerard. "It is a matter of whiskers in that case. Do you know," he went on, "I think you New England women are changing wonderfully."

"With the rest of them," Miriam added. They had stopped before the wreck of an old cabin.

"I remember that old Watts, the shoemaker, used to live in that crib," said Gerard. "Poor old Watts! What became of him?"

"Went to the Legislature."

"Old Watts?—no! What a joker you are."

"It was no joke for old Watts. He inherited a lot of money from somebody, was nominated by an accident or a mistake, and got himself elected. You never saw an old man so happy or so ridiculous. Then when he failed to get a renomination he quietly drank himself to death. Take warning."

"I was going to say," Gerard continued, absently, "that you New England women don't appear to despise clothes in the transcendental way that used to be the fashion." Miriam was peering into the cabin.

"And I don't think you believe in love in a cottage any more, either."

"It always would depend on the cottage," said Miriam, speaking into the abandoned hut. "Viola has told me about some cottages at Newport that I think I should like—with ten acres of lawn and two acres of greenhouse."

"Just what I might have expected," complained Gerard, studying her outline against the dark of the door-way. She wore a trim gown of cadet blue, with white collar and cuffs, and a little shoulder cape with a high ruffle. There was something very fine in her whole personality, he thought.

"Just what I might have expected," he repeated. "You almost make me afraid to ask your advice about something that has been bothering me a great deal lately."

"Advice?" Miriam glanced up at him with frank surprise.

"It does sound odd; but that's the word; and if there is anything in the fact of my asking you that you may find to be discreditable, I am willing to accept that as part of my punishment."

"You are deliciously mysterious."

"Well, the mystery shall stop right here." He

paused a moment. "To begin, then, I am engaged to be married—but I am not in love with the lady I am engaged to."

Miriam lifted her eyebrows.

Gerard could never have fancied how stupid the announcement would sound. "I hope," he continued, "that I feel the absurdity, the full discredit of being in such a position."

His listener's perfect attention made him exceedingly nervous.

"She is a widow—a charming woman; any man might feel honored by her—affection. Well, I said something to her one day that she took more seriously than I had intended—wait a moment," he added, when Miriam made a movement as if to speak; "I'm not going to plead the baby act. I liked her very much—and I asked her to marry me. May I go on?"

"I'm afraid you never should have begun."

"But I have begun, and I should like to go on. I wish to tell you that she accepted me. I wish to tell you that very soon I found that I was not really in love with her; that I was so sure of this that I couldn't feel that it was honest to have asked her."

He fancied that she was laughing at him.

"I don't think I am a coward, and I haven't any yearning to be ridiculous either." He added this with a feeling of protest. "When I came out here in the spring I made up my mind to think the thing over. But thinking it over hasn't been a success at all." He turned to her abruptly. "What should you do if you were I?"

"I only know what I should do if I were the widow."

"What should you do if you were the widow?"

"If I were the widow—and knew—I think I should despise you."

He looked at her hopelessly.

"Do *you* despise me?"

Randy Ellis in a buckboard wagon hove in sight just ahead of them, and Miriam did not answer.

"I shall always feel sorry," Gerard said, a moment later, "that you couldn't justify me in——"

"In changing your mind."

The sun was going down. But then the sun has gone down a great many times. How one feels about it depends greatly upon purely personal conditions. Sometimes it sets in perfect glory, and sometimes its glory seems to be veiled in gloom.

"Of course," said Gerard, "I realize that this is a

somewhat unconventional confidence. Perhaps I should not have bothered you."

"I'm sure," Miriam remarked in a tone that made him feel as if she were confirming this suspicion, "that I wish I had the wisdom to counsel you. But how should I know——"

"That's true," exclaimed Gerard, with an effort to rescue the situation from utter sombreness. "You are neither a man nor a widow," and he laughed uneasily. "But you must at least forgive me for intruding this theme. There is one thing about my imbecility, it is symmetrical. There should be something mitigating in that circumstance. What a beautiful sunset!"

The sky was tumultuous with color. Yet Gerard had seen sunsets that he liked better.

IV

THE first day of December fell on a Sunday, and Congress opened on the second. The Capital presents an interesting spectacle when the great legislative shop takes down its shutters for the resumption of business. Something in the opening of a new session affects the city like a stimulant that animates without exciting; for Washington never loses its poise, nor sacrifices a certain self-possessed relation to circumstances under any conditions whatever. It is as much without violence as without a vote.

On Monday morning the big palace on the hill began to hum like a hive. The nation's delegates buzzed in and out of the hive at the little southeastern basement door—the kitchen entrance in the great façade. It is a shock to the sentimental observer that the delegates should not mount the front steps in a more elegant and spectacular way; but it is notorious that this is not the only manner in which the delegates ignore romantic and pictorial requirements.

Standing in the outer corridor of this basement entrance, you find an arched frame in which an interesting portrait gallery appears in a series of faces and figures covering the most picturesque range of types that is to be observed anywhere in the world.

There was a peculiar animation in these quickly changing pictures on this Monday noon when the men who composed the new House, and hundreds of people who were not Representatives, made the great hallways hum and the sleepiest corners of the old Capitol take on an air of resumed business. The members' lobby was surcharged with political energy. The pages hopped and chattered like a lot of sparrows. The doorkeepers strenuously attacked the problem of remembering the faces of new members, and the new members strove with varying methods, and with varying degrees of composure, to adjust themselves to the novel conditions.

When the turmoil of the opening days had in some measure subsided the most self-possessed man in the city remained as before, Speaker Reed. The Speaker's room was the focal point of much of the early excitement, but Mr. Reed's mastery of all possible human complications was nowhere more significantly illustrated than in those intervals when the Congres-

sional captain might entrust the wheel of the legislative ship to another, and find time to glance at the thousand and one things that demanded his attention in the snug little cabin off the members' lobby.

But first I must tell you that the Winfields found habitation in a comfortable, homelike house on Massachusetts Avenue, near Thomas Circle, presided over by a Mrs. Barlow, who belonged to a very old and a very good family, and whose house betrayed evidences of a respectability that was neither complaining nor assertive. The fact is that Mrs. Barlow's father had been a Senator, and her uncle a Minister, under Lincoln.

Mrs. Barlow was a nervous, exact, and unhumorous woman, who gave the impression of always being in process of changing her clothes; for in any crisis it invariably happened that she was unable to do more than protrude her head tentatively from a doorway, with one hand closing an imperfectly buttoned gown. Her gray hair was strained back uncompromisingly from her shining temples. The window curtains throughout the house were looped in the same undebatable tension. No one remembered when anything about Mrs. Barlow or Mrs. Barlow's house was in the slightest degree different.

The most self-possessed man in the city, Speaker Reed.

The boarders at the Barlow household were heterogeneous, and made up a not inharmonious group; that is to say, those inhabitants of the rambling old house who were at all gregarious got along very well together on short acquaintance. It is characteristic of the Capital that the people in it adjust themselves to new people as patiently as they relinquish those who must go away.

Of an evening you were likely to meet in the parlor the more socially inclined of the boarders, conspicuous among them Captain W. Freestone Hartley, who frequently had been called the Prince of Wales of the Army. The Captain, in whom a likeness to the British heir-apparent was, indeed, remarkable, had become a somewhat mature bachelor without developing any easily detected cynicism toward the opposite sex. The Captain's social situation appeared to be due less to conviction than to procrastination. He had given serious and consecutive thought to the matrimonial question, but remained without clearness of mind. An old maid seemed too formidable, the self-possession of widows frightened him, and a young girl seemed like too great an educational responsibility. His manner had, therefore, little of that satirical hopelessness that characterizes men who may

not have made their last move, but who have given up winning the game.

Mrs. Bannister, who came but a few days before the Winfields, was a youngish widow, whose manner suggested a comparatively remote bereavement, and who soon made known her interest in a pension bill, "not," she explained to the Captain, "on my own account, but for a woman whom circumstances have wronged very cruelly." Mrs. Bannister's good nature assured her popularity from the outset, the more certainly because her vivacious contentment was indifferent to this result.

Catlin, a department clerk from Ohio, filled the rôle of younger bureaucrat without opposition. He was a well-groomed, well-preserved young man, who was often pinched for money, but was never known to lack an opinion. Catlin, indeed, took occasion to touch life at many points. He tingled with modernity. Captain Hartley had been heard to say that he thought Catlin had everything—the smoker's heart, the writer's cramp, the fencer's shoulder, the Wagner frown, the theatre neck, and the bicycle face.

Sometimes little Miss Perrine, who was in the Congressional Library, would play on the old piano, which, though it had not been tuned since 1873,

emitted a real sparkle of melody and rhythm under Miss Perrine's ivory white fingers.

"Do you know, Captain," said Winfield, quizzically, "that I should have suspected you of being a ladies' man?"

It was on one of the most heterogeneous evenings, and the Captain and Mrs. Bannister were becoming further acquainted in a nook by the piano.

"I hope, Colonel, that you don't intend that in any disrespectful sense."

"On the contrary, Captain, I envy you. And think of being disrespectful to an army man. It's inconceivable. I outrank you in title, Captain, but then I'm only an upcountry toy soldier from the National Guard."

"Ah! Colonel, what is so nice as a nice woman?"

"Nothing, my dear Captain; nothing but another nice woman."

Mrs. Bannister chuckled. "He could not do better if he had come from Virginia," she called over to Miriam, who was at that moment talking to Jack Gerard. It was the evening of Gerard's first visit to the house.

"Something tells me," said Gerard, with a glance

toward Mrs. Bannister, "that I don't need to tell you that she——"

"Is your widow," said Miriam.

"No—she isn't my widow any more. We ended all that. But how did you know? She didn't——"

"No, she didn't; it was sheer sagacity on my part."

"Easy to guess, though, if she said she knew me——"

"Why do you wish to rob me of the credit of a real divination?" asked the girl.

"You are capable of any witchery."

"None that you seem afraid of."

"You don't know me. I am very timid."

"I don't think *she* would say that of you."

"Now you are severe."

"You are always tempting Providence."

"Or the Fates—they were feminine."

"And there is safety in numbers."

Gerard looked at her—at her profile; she had been talking to him at the elusive angle of forty-five degrees. He wondered whether it was twice as hard to guess a woman from half her face as from the whole of it.

"You don't look—vindictive," he said, quietly.

"Vindictive?"

Then he saw the whole of her face.

"That isn't precisely the word," he pursued, "though I did wish to express the idea of persistent cruelty. I haven't made you understand me—that is to say, the case."

"You don't either of you seem to be feeling at all gloomy about that."

"N—no. We were too good friends before it began to be bad friends afterward. I suspect that you think a little less of me because I seem to be taking it so lightly."

"I haven't analyzed my feelings."

"You haven't stopped to think that the absence of gloom on my part might arise from a sense of justice done to her, and to myself, and to another feeling——"

"You almost seem to be trying to justify yourself."

"Almost seem? Won't you believe me, I *am* trying to justify myself."

"But why should you? I *wish* you wouldn't."

"If you insist on it I shall be ruthlessly complacent from this time forth."

"Jack!" called Mrs. Bannister to the young Con-

gressman, as their eyes met, "I have been wanting to see you so much. I have a very important bill that you are to help me with."

"Delighted, I am sure, Harriet."

"You see, I have begun work promptly, because I want to rush the thing through. Not that I'm in a hurry, but the other widow is."

"I have to admire your enthusiasm," remarked the Captain, a little later in the evening, with a glance that had a reasonable degree of admiration in it. "And you know so well how to communicate it."

"Oh, I shall communicate some of it to you, Captain, if I find that you have any influence in the House. But I'm afraid your leave of absence will expire presently, and then you won't be of any use to anybody."

"Cruel, cruel woman! You don't deserve to know that I have saved up three months' leave and am going to take my fourth month on next year."

"How good your country is to you."

"Are you a new woman?" the Captain asked, when the company had left them with the parlor to themselves.

"No—not quite new. But I'm not an antique, either. Have you been trying to classify me?"

"Are you a new woman?" the Captain asked.

"That's about it."

"I think, Captain, that you had better classify me as simply practical. I am terribly practical."

"You make me a little afraid of you when you talk like that."

"Oh, I am very harmless, too."

"Yes, I have no doubt, but are you looking out for the future?"

"So you think it's time I began!" The widow laughed softly. "That reminds me of what I said to Major Tetley the other night. 'Major,' I said, 'you are not providing for the future.' 'Whose future?' said the Major. 'Why, her future,' I said. 'But there isn't any her,' snorted the Major. 'Ah! that's the trouble, Major,' I said, 'there should be a her. What has the United States been framing pension laws for all these years, if you, a Union soldier, are doing nothing to leave a widow to your grateful country?'"

"But you weren't willing to help him out, were you?" demanded the Captain.

"Of course not. I am the most *impersonal* woman in the world. Besides, I consider myself entirely too young to marry—again."

"Perhaps you don't believe in love at second sight," mused the army man.

"Of course, I can understand the Major's position precisely. I have become so confirmed in the habit of not proposing that I have almost given up hope of ever being able to break myself of it."

"And I have become so accustomed to refusing——"

"Yes, yes, I dare say you illustrate that modern feminine principle of natural rejection. Well, when a woman says she won't, sometimes she won't. But beware of the haughty modern attitude, my dear Mrs. Bannister. Blessed are the meek, for they shall be married."

At which the widow laughed softly again, and rewarded the Captain with a twinkle that struck him as superior in quality to anything he ever before had observed.

V

AUNT LYDIE JANE usually kept aloof from the parlor gatherings, preferring the quiet of the Winfield sitting-room on the second floor, where she could stitch, read, or ruminate in quiet comfort. Her relic-hunting and souvenir-gathering occupied most of her leisure and her thoughts. The Capital was a mine which she worked without fatigue or disenchantment.

She invaded the Smithsonian in a glow of almost scientific ardor. By dint of enthusiasm and persuasion, and Professor Mason's sense of humor, she even gained the privilege of access to some of the cases, and handled Massachusetts specimens with rapture and envy. Professor Mason marvelled at the range of her information in matters related to archæology and ethnology. "You would make an excellent curator for a museum," he said to her.

Her invincible good-nature carried her past all obstacles to an interview with General Greely, whom

she found in the library of the War Department, and who was very patient throughout her inquiries as to certain indexes and records of the Civil War.

"O Miriam!" she cried, one day, in front of the old Corcoran Art Gallery, "it would be delightful, wouldn't it, if, when they finish the new gallery, we could get one of these lovely lions for our front yard!"

On another afternoon Miriam found her again absorbed in "When His Hair Turned Gray," and gave vent to her amused astonishment. "Hasn't his hair turned gray yet, Aunt Lydie? What a time it is taking. He must be pretty well advanced in years by this time."

"Miriam!" exclaimed Aunt Lydie, with an enthusiasm which Miriam knew could have but one origin, "did I tell you——"

"Another find, Aunt Lydie?"

"A triumph, Miriam. Look at that!"

Miriam's plump and enthusiastic aunt had quickly produced from the recesses of a box on the mantel a fragment of granite that tottered in her affectionate palm.

"What is it, Aunt Lydie?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Haven't an idea."

"Why, a piece of the Monument, of course!"

"The Monument?"

"Isn't it *grand*, Miriam! You know I was down there this afternoon and just by the luckiest chance I saw a little tippy piece of stone just ready to break off, about as high as this ceiling from the ground. I suppose the weather had made it crumble somehow. Do you know, my heart just gave a thump. But I tried to be calm, and looked at it from several points without letting any one notice. Then I saw a boy, and I said to him, 'Boy,' I said, 'haven't you got a putty-blower or a bean-shooter, or something?' 'No, ma'am,' he said. It was aggravating, but I said to him, 'Could you get one if I gave you the money?' 'Yes, ma'am,' he said. And so I gave him ten cents, and pretty soon he came back with a—putty-blower I guess it was. 'Now,' I said, 'you see that tippy piece of stone up there—I want you to blow at it with your blower and blow it off.' You must understand, Miriam, that it was just ready to drop. *Somebody* would surely have it anyway. And the boy blew at it several times until I was all upset with nervousness. Then off it tumbled! And just as it struck the pavement, out came the

elevator-man! You could have blown me over with a blower! But I was perfectly calm, and standing over the stone I said to the boy, 'Here's five cents for you,' I said—it was a good deal, wasn't it—but I *was* a little excited, and that piece of stone is worth fifty dollars if it's worth a cent!"

"Well, Aunt Lydie, it will be a good thing for us if the *police* don't discover this."

"Miriam, don't be foolish! I don't believe you *half* appreciate what a *grand* souvenir this is." Aunt Lydie fondled the fragment with the ardor of a connoisseur. Miriam envied her the inexpensive joy. "If I could only get something of George Washington's! I believe they have most of his clothes locked up somewhere, and I don't suppose they would be within my means anyway. By the way, did I tell you that Randy Ellis promised to bring me something from his cruise?"

"I'm afraid, Aunt Lydie, that Randy won't get very far on his adventurous voyage. He has written to father asking him to get him off at Newport News. He's tired of being a marine."

Randy had indeed made a start toward realizing his long-cherished ambition. When he looked over the fence at his father and said, "Pop, I guess I'm goin',"

the old man muttered, without looking up, "Waal, I guess I can't prevent yer, Randy, if yer want t' be such a fool." And Randy found his way to New York, where he enlisted on the Maine, which was fitting out at the Brooklyn yard.

At first he was much delighted with his new life, and he might have continued in his contentment had it not been his fate to have a quarrel with another tall fellow from Connecticut. Big Meach, a stalwart and pugnacious blacksmith, was the terror of the ship, and he resented the superior inches of Big Ellis, whose slighter angularity placed him, for purposes of pugilism, in a somewhat lower class.

One day when some of them went to Coney Island and had their pictures taken at a "tin-type factory," as Meach called it, there was another quarrel with Meach which resulted in Randy's visit to the hospital that night. There was another disagreement on the day when Meach's Brooklyn cousin, a pretty girl with a loud voice, came down to see him; and Randy always felt that this was the most unjust of all of Meach's injustices.

Things had gone from bad to worse in the matter of Meach when Randy wrote a pathetic letter to the Colonel. "I hope to Heaven you can do some-

thing to get me out of this," he pleaded; and when he got his discharge at Newport News, he was as happy as he had been in breaking away from North Pines.

It was in the early period of the Winfields' Washington experience that Isaiah, the handy man of the Barlow household, seemed a little perplexed when he told Miriam that there was a man "askin' fo' 'any o' th' Winfield people;' he says his name is Mister Ellis."

"Mr. —— Oh, tell him to come right up, Isaiah."

But, characteristically, Randy was already on his way, his erratic and gusty whistle shaken by the movement of each footfall. When he loomed in the doorway Miriam's smile had as much of amusement as of cordiality.

"Randy! How do you do?"

"Glad to be standin' plain, on dry land again, anyway."

"And so you got tired of being a marine."

"N—no," muttered Randy, peering for a chair, "I didn't git so tired o' the Navy as I did o' some o' the people in it." He almost joined in Miriam's laugh. "I liked the ship well enough, though there was a kind o' sameness about it after a while. But

y' see, I got inter trouble with a feller named Meach —Big Meach they called him, and he was pretty big and pretty heavy and pretty strong." Randy looked up grimly from his hat. "And Big Meach just spent his time a-huntin' me till there wasn't no fun in the thing. I kinder made up my mind that it would be better if I could get away; and so here I am."

Randy placed his hat on the floor. "But what d' yer think, Miss Miriam—that cuss Meach got off somehow, too, and I believe he's in this town now. I want t' git the Colonel t' tell me how t' take the Civil Service and git a job here somehow. An' I ain't goin' to stand any more o' Meach, either—that's fer sure——"

"Randy!"

The visitor had drawn a formidable revolver from one of his coat-pockets.

"What are you doing with that?" Miriam started toward him.

"I got that to subdue Meach with. But yer don't need t' be afraid. I ain't goin' t' use it on 'im, unless he makes me desperate. The worm will turn over sometimes."

Miriam made as if to take the weapon from him.

"Randy! you leave that here with me. If you're not able to punch Meach's head, why just—run."

"Waal," drawled Randy, with a grim look, "that shows you don't understand Meach. When Meach gits interested in yer, y' can't git away from 'im! What y' goin' t' do with that?" Miriam had possessed herself of the revolver.

"I'm going to keep it for you. You know we may have a war, and in case you may wish to try the Army next time, this will be useful."

"No—I guess I'll try bein' just a plain citizen for a little while. When d' yer expect the Colonel in?"

It was under these circumstances that Randy became a regular visitor at the house on Massachusetts Avenue. "I'm about wearin' a path t' this house," he used to say.

The young women counted Randy among the diversions of the winter; and of diversions there were many. It was a winter with skating, either with the aid of artificial ice at the Convention Hall, or with the old-fashioned sort on the Potomac, where the gleaming shaft of the Monument looked down upon a merry company on favoring afternoons. Miriam and Viola were among the most inveterate skaters,

Viola often setting out alone, and haunting the most unfrequented spots in her silent moods. Miriam on several occasions found her sister skating where the ice was threateningly thin. To a frightened warning she answered only with her perplexing contralto laugh.

Gerard had accompanied them on one occasion when they went over in the morning. Miriam's passion for the open air interested and sometimes distressed him, though he sought to accommodate himself to what he called her strange mania for walking.

"The Capital seems to have made a hit with you," he said one day when a fresh wind was scurrying through the avenues.

"Oh, I am delighted with Washington. I shall never want to go home. Please don't hurry with this session."

"I would do a good deal to please you, and if you say so I shall introduce a resolution keeping Congress in session during the whole period of our terms."

"Thanks. I should appreciate that so much."

"Well, I am bound for the House now. Will you come?"

"I should like to if you will walk."

"Haven't you discovered that they have an excellent cable service in this town?"

"But I like to walk. And all of you Congressmen should walk. It would improve your dispositions and the quality of your wisdom."

She made him climb the western steps of the Capitol. "Do you mean to say that you like this wind?" he demanded.

"I think you are sorry you came."

"Not at all, if you mean that I am sorry *you* came. I will make a bargain to walk to the House every day, if you will come with me."

"Then you should carry a dinner-pail to complete the picture."

She did not make the bargain, but he frequently took walks with her and sometimes to the Capitol.

"Sit down a moment," she said one day. "I believe you are a little ahead of school-time."

When he hesitated a moment she laughed merrily at him. "Are you afraid that Mr. Reed will come out and punish you for truancy?"

"I don't suppose it strikes you as rather droll for me, a Representative, and you, a Representative's

daughter, to be seen sitting here on the Capitol steps at high noon?"

"If you think it might make a scandal I'll get up."

"Don't think of it if you enjoy it here. Good view of the new Library."

"You like to tease me, don't you?" he said to her one February afternoon, when they had reached Massachusetts Avenue, after walking from the Cosmos Club. "And I wonder whether it is because I am particularly good game. Do I really afford you a great deal of amusement?"

"No, I can't put it exactly that way. I shouldn't call you actually an amusing person."

"I hope that you don't mean by that that I am something of a bore?"

"There now, Mr. Jack Gerard, don't beg for a soothing compliment. I wouldn't spoil you for the world."

"I'm afraid you are spoiling me—but not with compliments. Hello! Harriet!" Mrs. Bannister, out of breath, and flushed with the excitement of the legislative chase, met them at the door of the parlor.

"Jack! you're just the man I want to see!"

"That's flattering, Harriet."

"You know that the bill comes up to-night."

"Yes; isn't everything all right? Good-by," he added to Miriam, who was slipping away.

"It was—I hadn't worked all winter for nothing, but Mugridge is just wild about that warehouse bill. He knows that you and the Colonel are interested in that, and he says flatly that if I don't pull you and the Colonel away from that bill he will go up to-night and raise the quorum question on the pensions."

"Friday," mused Gerard. "And what do you expect me to do?"

"Why, let me pull you away from the warehouse bill, of course."

"I'm sorry——"

"Now wait a moment, Jack, until I explain."

He listened attentively. "In the olden time, Harriet, when temptation was being depicted, the tempted one took an attitude like this," and Gerard threw himself into a melodramatic pose, "while plausible allurements, accompanied by an odor of sulphur, drifted over his right shoulder. Whether he kept that shoulder cold or not depended, I suppose, upon his nose and his nerve. Nowadays it is all

"You like to tease me, don't you?"

different. The tempter comes in the guise of a charming lady, with no crimson about her save in the silk lining of her skirt, which she has an artistic reserve in showing—a charming lady asking an entirely unreasonable thing in a charmingly reasonable way——"

"Jack Gerard! You're talking very silly, and I'm dead tired, besides being in an awful hurry."

"Harriet, I simply can't do it." She was going to be scornful when he called her back. "But I'll tell you what I will do." She listened and exclaimed, "Splendid! Jack, you're a genius of statesmanship. It's only a question of time when you will be President."

"Yes, I guess that's about all," he called after her.

VI

GERARD saw Mrs. Bannister talking to Major Tetley that night at a reception given by Senator Tiffin, where the friendship of Colonel Winfield brought many of the Massachusetts contingent together. Mrs. Bannister called Tiffin one of her Senators. "Deliciously unsenatorial," she said of him. Catlin thought Tiffin lacked dignity. "But," he added, "Tiffin fits into our highly seasoned and extremely indigestible society." Catlin always spoke of "our society" in a large and authoritative way, as if he were discussing American institutions with Emperor William.

A social occasion in Washington, unless wholly unofficial in purport or association, acquires a picturesqueness in its scope that is not frequently paralleled in any other quarter of the globe; a fact which appeared in the instance called up by the course of the present unromantic and circumstantial narrative.

"You young people seem to be in command to-

night," said Major Tetley, with one of his winning glances at Mrs. Bannister.

"Yes," assented the widow, maliciously. "It's a sort of evening-out party for Miss Dottie Tiffin, and I don't see how *you* came to be invited, Major. Do you know who that is over there by Senator Simms?"

"The Vice-President."

"No, no! on the other side."

"Oh, Count Rudolf!—a nuisance."

"I have heard of him. An Italian?"

"An Austrian, I believe, though I'll bet the legation wouldn't own him. Anyway, an adventurer, even if Mrs. Arlington has taken him up."

"I wouldn't call her discriminating."

It was, indeed, a miscellaneous company. Count Rudolf himself thought so. "This is a remarkable country," he said to the Major. "At Newport I see a girl and she is a servant in one of ze family zere. I come here to-night and *mon dieu!* she is a Congressman's daugh-tere! This is a remarkable country—so quick ze change! so, vat you call—meex up! ha! ha!"

The Count fluttered about with much dexterity during the evening, dispensing his elaborate compli-

ments and shop-worn cynicisms. "Ah! Mrs. Arlington!" he exclaimed to that lady, "it is not so much what a woman says zat makes her fascinating in conversation; it is vat ve may say to her."

"Hello!" Mrs. Arlington's gaze fell upon a lithe figure in a noticeable gown of lemon-colored silk flecked with black lace. "There's Jerry."

"Jerry; who?" asked the Count.

"Jerry Hamilton. That girl made a hit in London last season. Her husband is only a newspaper correspondent, but the Lady Maveling set took her up, and they tell me that no other bride had any show in comparison."

"Jerry, it is a strange name for a woman," said the Count. "I have not heard it before."

"I believe her name is Geraldine or something of that sort. She is rather pretty."

Young Mrs. Hamilton had come in from the music-room with Lieutenant Landwell. "Just like him," remarked Mrs. Arlington.

The crowd in the door-way thickened, and when Mrs. Arlington again caught sight of Mrs. Hamilton that young woman was with Colonel Winfield, and Miriam, with the Lieutenant, had just been presented.

"I'm sure," said Winfield, "that Miriam wants to

"Hello!" cried Mrs. Arlington, "there's Jerry."

ask you whether it really is true that you used to shoot Indians out there in the West when you got tired of playing marbles with the cowboys."

"No," said Miriam. "I only wanted to ask you whether you ever heard anything more about that man with the awful wife—you know whom I mean, the cowboy fellow."

"Oh, Pink!" Jerry Hamilton laughed her merriest laugh. The thought of Pink Loper and his terrible wife, whom she had known in her childhood days at the Panther Mine and on the ranch: who had tried their fortunes with the rifle on the stage of a Bowery museum; who had invaded the legitimate drama with Pink as business manager, and who in the dark hour of pecuniary disaster had sought to join Buffalo Bill's show in Pink's hope of meeting Jerry again in London—the thought of this peculiar pair, like some grotesque creation of comic opera, always tempted Jerry's levity.

"Poor Pink!" she continued. "You know they went back to Colorado last spring after spending all their money on 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

Senator Tiffin soon took Miriam away to the dancing-room with a gay crowd of the younger people following after. There certainly was the sparkle

of youth in this occasion, and the Colonel, the youngest man of his years in Massachusetts, was quick to respond to the spirit of the hour. When there was an overflow set from the dancing-room, Winfield sprang into the arena with Mrs. Hamilton, and to the fling and rollick of music from a romantic light opera they danced one of those lanciers that make you forget all but the moment, the murmur of merry talk, the rustle of silk, the twinkle of bright eyes, and the flash of flowers in women's hair.

At midnight Viola, passing with Professor Thorley, was startled to see Count Rudolf talking to Miriam. She was so deeply affected by the sight that even the absent-minded Professor felt the trembling of her hand on his arm. If the Count could have seen her eyes he would have shrivelled.

When Viola could get away from the Professor the Count had disappeared.

"Miriam!" cried Viola, in a tone that made no disguise of her excitement. "Where is that man who was with you a moment ago?"

"I sent him for some water—you know, he's a live count! What's the matter?" She saw the expression in Viola's face.

"He hunted *me* out," said Viola, inconclusively;

"had the impertinence to be introduced, and I turned my back as soon as I could. Miriam, you must not see him again," and Viola clutched her sister's wrist until Miriam winced. "He is the brute who insulted me at Newport."

They moved through the passage to the main drawing-room.

"I wish we could go now," muttered Viola.

The Colonel had been looking for them. "Let us go," said Viola, in a quiet tone which had the flavor of a command.

"You are tired," said Winfield to Viola in the coach.

"No," she said, and did not speak again on the way home. When the sisters were alone Viola exclaimed without preface: "I have watched that man and I know what he is. You must not encourage Count Rudolf — you must not speak to him again!"

"Encourage him? I can't understand your anxiety, Viola. I have no wish to see him again and probably sha'n't."

"I hope not," Viola said, quietly. "I hated to see him so near you, and to see you even seeming to give him any footing of acquaintance. Who presented him?"

"Mrs. Arlington."

"Adventuress!"

"Viola!—the General's wife!"

"What of that? Are there no adventuresses in official society? I hate that snakey woman."

"I hope you won't worry about me, Viola. I am not a very flirtatious person, am I?"

Viola, her cloak thrown back, stood at the door for a moment without speaking. "I shouldn't need to warn you. It shines out of him—he's a beast!"

The intensity of her sister's feelings were scarcely a surprise to Miriam. The mood was characteristic. Viola either loved or hated. One prejudice was as hard to anticipate or to explain as the other, and she invested every mood with the sombreness of her own inscrutable nature. Even her gayety had in it the touch of tears.

There could be no doubt that Viola hated, or thought she hated, the Count, yet Miriam could not be unconscious of something in Viola's attitude which had more than the elements of a simple aversion. The resentment seemed disproportionate, though Miriam was not conscious at the time of any doubt as to the natural force of Viola's feeling.

There was, indeed, nothing in the situation to pre-

pare her for an extraordinary thing which happened before the end of the month. Walking one day in the Mall, she saw Count Rudolf sauntering with Viola. Halting for a moment in a kind of stupor, and reassuring herself as to the identity of the two figures in the path before her, she turned abruptly and walked hurriedly home.

An hour later Viola came in. Miriam did not hesitate, but crossed the room and placed her hands on her sister's shoulders. "Viola, I have been walking in the Mall."

When Viola turned, Miriam saw that she was very pale.

"I shall never see him again," said Viola. With a gesture that was unanswerable she turned to her room and did not appear again that evening.

For a long time Miriam sat at the window looking down toward the Circle. If she had been able to solve this mystery it would have been because she was able to read the most puzzling paradox of the human heart. If she had been able to explain how a woman might hate and yield, it would have been because she had penetrated the veil that hides the innermost machinery of human motive.

Viola had said that she should never see the Count

again; but within the week Miriam had occasion to know that he accosted her without visible rebuff in the gallery of the House, and that he walked with her as far as the cable on Capitol Hill before she dismissed him. This information came from Gerard, who was utterly astonished at the incident and placed the matter before Miriam with no concealment of his anxiety.

"She is a bewildering woman," said Gerard. "She must know that the fellow has an unsavory reputation."

Miriam's grief shone in her wet eyes.

It turned out that Winfield had seen the Count talking to Viola in the House gallery. There was something characteristic of his caution when dealing with Viola in the fact that he contented himself with an ostensibly chance allusion to Rudolf in Viola's hearing. His characterization of the man was, however, without ambiguity. No one need have doubted his actual sentiments.

On a certain evening soon afterward, Viola, returning home from the Avenue, saw in the light of a street lamp the figure of the Count. She sought to avoid him by crossing the Circle at a sharper angle, and supposed she had eluded him, when a ring

at the bell followed her own entrance into the house.

When she herself swung open the door it was, perhaps, with the thought of sending him away; but when he saw her he made no hesitation in stepping into the hall, and she led him into the parlor without speaking.

Colonel Winfield left a dinner at the Metropolitan Club early that evening to attend to some letters. He was hurrying up to his room when he caught sight of the Count in the parlor, and of Viola standing near him. Turning impetuously, he confronted the uninvited visitor. A sudden anger had filled him.

"Pardon me, sir!" he exclaimed to the Count, who had turned at the sound of the footstep, "for remarking that it would please me greatly if you should never enter this house again!"

The Count almost staggered, but retained the outward signs of self-possession, reconsidered an impulse to make some reply, and bowed himself from the room.

The Colonel turned to his daughter.

"Viola," he said, with an effort to speak quietly, "I have tried not to be unreasonable with you. I

have tried, and nothing in my life has been harder, to remember, when you have crossed and worried and defied me, that you are my daughter, and that I must be patient; that perhaps because I didn't understand you as a father could wish to understand his daughter, I was in danger of doing you a wrong." Something tortured his throat. "But it seems to have been ordained that you should be a grief in my life, that in spite of every effort I could make something should always put your purposes against mine."

She had not said a word.

"You have heard me speak of this foreign hanger-on; you know what I think of him. You know that he is a scoundrel. And yet you recognize—yes, and receive him. I find him here—I don't say," he went on when he saw her protest, "I don't say that you asked him. He may have intruded under some pretext. But you have encouraged him in some way. You seem bent not only on annoying, but on *shaming* me!"

He could see her anger.

"Are you through?" she demanded, coldly.

"No, I am not through, now or ever. I do not, and I shall not, relinquish my right to defend you

even from yourself, Viola. Do you understand what you are doing?"

"But you don't hesitate to insult me!" Her anger stifled her.

"Do I insult you when I protest against your interest in a viper like that? If that is an insult——"

"I am not a child, to be berated here in a public parlor! Even my father might remember——"

The Colonel had stepped closer to her. "Your father remembers always that you are his daughter, and he commands you to refuse countenance to that man! Do you understand me?"

"And I refuse to be commanded!"

"Father!"

Miriam had almost screamed the name. Standing in the door she heard Viola's rebellious words, and saw the father's trembling hand move as if to strike her.

"God!" he gasped, "that I should have such a daughter!"

Perhaps it was the thought that he might have struck her that made him sink quivering into a chair.

Miriam would have said some word that might

have drawn them together, but no happy inspiration brought the word to her, and torn by conflicting impulses, she had to see Viola, incontrollably angry, beaten by the storm of her passionate resentment, leave the room in a silence that made her own heart quake with dread. She felt her father's fingers quiver as she knelt there stupidly beside him, and she could have cried despairingly for Viola to come back. But it seemed to be too late.

VII

A WASHINGTON winter is full of surprises, and the atmospheric vagaries were never more perplexing than during the winter of 1895–96, when even the Weather Bureau lost its composure.

But especially and particularly, this was a winter of wars and rumors of war—certainly of rumors, of which every one talked before Lent set in; when by way of having an alternative topic, people began discussing the approaching Presidential conventions.

These were the days when the jaded interest even of the resident Washingtonians was aroused by thoughts of the activities behind the sombre exterior of the State, War, and Navy building; when the State Department became invested with mysterious and impressive possibilities. Yet the scenes within doors might have given a shock to the senti-

mentalist, for the vast administrative and diplomatic machinery moved with the same noiseless motion as at any other time.

The Secretary of War, for example, betrayed no sign of that excitement which appeared in the headlines of the newspapers. Despite the pugnacious and sanguinary things men were saying in print and out of print, there was not the slightest evidence of flurry in the War Department, nor in the demeanor of its indefatigable chief, Colonel Lamont.

"I was over to see Lamont to-day," remarked Winfield to Miriam, "and you certainly wouldn't know there was any war talk to see them in there. They seem to know how to take in a Pickwickian spirit the things that other folks get excited over. It certainly is a good thing that they know how to keep quieter than some of the editors and some of the Congressmen."

"Same in the Navy," said Gerard. "They are all very cool—as cool as Olney. I had a talk with Commodore Melville——"

"What is he?" asked Miriam.

"Chief Engineer; remarkable man with a wonderful record—the Jeannette rescue and all that—more than a man of iron, a man of steel, wizard of the

The Secretary of War.

engine-room. Some of the fellows he saved in the ice called him a brute—he wouldn't let them die. That sort of a man fascinates me."

"They are all alive over there," continued the Colonel. "They are like the men in the engine-room of a big ship obeying impassively but courageously the signals from the bridge."

"And what rôle are *you* playing?" Miriam queried.

"Oh, Gerard and I are only seamen in the Ship of State," laughed the Colonel.

"With Tom Reed for boatswain," added Gerard.

"Well," pleaded Miriam, "if you can arrange it conveniently, I hope you won't have any war."

"I promise," said Gerard, "not to climb upon my desk in the House and shriek for Spanish and English blood, straight or mixed."

Nevertheless, these were days of some anxiety to diplomatic Washington. Despite the outward serenity, a nervous tension affected the life of those official circles which were touched by the current of international affairs. Venezuela's controversy with England, and Mr. Cleveland's message asserting the Monroe doctrine in unequivocal terms, directed new attention to the distinguished diplomatist represent-

ing the Court of St. James, Sir Julian Pauncefote, the most conspicuous figure in the ambassadorial circles at the Capital. The British and Spanish representatives were marked for much observation.

These were the days when the light burned late in the President's room; when the White House was the scene of momentous conferences by day and by night; when certain visitors entered and left the building with a quickened step.

Indeed, these were the days when the diplomatic storm centre hung very close to the President of the United States, whose severe routine of labor felt the added strain of these perplexing and momentous conditions.

It is characteristic of the extent to which private interest affects life at the Capital, that Mrs. Bannister used to dream that she saw the President bending over her pension bill as if to sign it, and then wondering whether he should or not; and she had dreamed of going to the White House and of telling Mr. Cleveland that this was the most spotlessly deserving, essential, and altogether inevitable bill that ever had been passed. But when she tried to fancy how she should begin when the President looked up inquiringly at her, she couldn't find a word.

Commodore Melville, Chief Engineer.

One day she actually yielded to an impulse to visit the President, and turned into the White House grounds, her heart beating a little quicker, and her face becomingly tinted by the thought of her own daring. When she reached the foot of the stair leading to the offices, she saw that the East Room was half full of people. Evidently it was a reception day. It would be impossible to get at the President, anyway, unless—— She passed into the East Room, and when the line was formed took her place in the somewhat grotesque procession. Fifty feet away was the President. At the first glance she began to doubt her right to deliberately dim his cordiality by being ridiculous—yes, the thing did begin to seem to be ridiculous. By the time the President was only twenty feet away she had begun to wish she hadn't even entered the line, though there was no reason why she should not go through so perfunctory a ceremony. The fact was that she felt guilty of her original design, though she had abandoned it thirty feet away. Just then she became conscious of a little woman in black, immediately in front of her, who turned a colorless face, and said, "Do you know, I am dreadfully nervous!" Whereupon Mrs. Bannister at once regained her composure, fortified the

nerves of the little woman in black, smiled a little at her own recent trepidation, and when the President took her hand, behaved in a manner to convince herself that no trace of guilty conspiracy appeared in the face she turned to him.

"I hope, Colonel," said Mrs. Bannister to Winfield, after narrating this mild adventure, "that you won't let the Cuban resolutions prevent you from remembering that they actually get around to my bill tonight."

"Oh, I sha'n't forget you, Mrs. Bannister. We must pass your bill, if we have to let Cuba go to the dogs."

"Well, it won't hurt Cuba to wait another day, and my widow is getting *so* anxious."

"Naturally. Now, you've got Gerard on the track of this thing, I suppose?"

"I should say so! Why Jack is working night and day."

"What are you two plotting?" demanded Miriam, who perceived in her father's face an anxiety not associated with the pension bill.

"It isn't a plain plot, Miss Winfield, it's a conspiracy."

"How exciting and dramatic!"

Sir Julian Pauncefote, the most conspicuous figure in Ambassadorial circles.

" It's an awfully slow drama getting a bill through Congress," sighed the widow. " There's the difference between real life and a play—in the last act of a play everybody gets *something*. I wish Cuba would sink into the sea."

But Cuba was destined long to be a topic of debate and consideration at the Capitol. One of the first messages which President McKinley handed to Private Secretary Porter related to the pitiful condition of things on the war-devastated island. Mrs. Bannister's pension bill was duly passed, but Cuba did " wait " many a day.

" I suppose, father," said Miriam, "that if there should be a war, you would insist upon leading a regiment."

" I haven't begun to worry about that."

Miriam knew the real meaning of the distress in his eyes.

" Are you still fretting about *her ?* "

He turned and took Miriam's face in his hands. " I'm afraid I must always fret about her."

She kissed him, and said, reassuringly : " It will be all right."

Viola had become ominously mute. She brooded alone, smarting under her father's words. He had,

she thought, needlessly humiliated and belittled her. His arraignment of the Count was insulting to her. It was in resentment of her own chagrin that she made it possible for the Count to see her again. She admired the manner in which he made her discomfiture a matter for his own apology.

"I would rather have given my right hand," he exclaimed, "than have had you suffer."

He had made her believe that he understood her better than they, and indirectly incited her rebellion. "It ees too bad," he would say, with the appearance of real grief, "that they cannot see your fine nature. They are blind. *Mon Dieu!* it ees a crime! But they do not know; we must not blame them—no! no!" —he would defend them from her with vehement eloquence.

And they did not understand him, either, she thought. They never could. They did not know him. They believed all they heard, without investigation. There were brilliant qualities in him, and qualities of sympathy which she permitted herself to think were a response to something that came to her in the French blood of her mother.

Miriam instinctively felt the progress of this sinister courtship, while deluding herself with the hope

President Cleveland's Message.

that Viola would, in her own time, emerge from the complication as from one of her moods.

It is doubtful whether anything might have prepared her for the shock which came one afternoon in March, when she found on the floor of the sitting-room a crumpled note from the Count, asking Viola to meet him at the Pennsylvania station at seven o'clock. "We shall reach New York in five hours," he said.

A sense of horror stole into Miriam's heart. A tragedy was opening in the path of her life, and something in her rebelled against its harshness, its deadliness, its vulgarity. Why should it be permitted to happen now that chance had given to her an instrument of defence?

She must act at once if at all. To speak to Viola was impossible. To cross her in such a crisis would be worse than useless. An appeal to her father would mean a terrible scene and a scandal. Nothing would restrain him from seeking and attacking the Count. Miriam thought for a moment of hurrying to Gerard, but shrank from communicating her sister's secret, even to him. And why endanger Gerard's peace? If only there were some way in which she could act alone!

She ran softly to the landing and called Isaiah. That young man appeared with unaccustomed alacrity, as if something in Miriam's voice had made him feel the urgency of the situation. His shining face was an interrogation in brown and white.

"Isaiah!"

"Yes, Miss."

"Listen to me, Isaiah, and you mustn't ask me any questions about it."

"Yes, Miss."

"You told me one day, Isaiah, that you knew a waiter at the Hemisphere Hotel."

"Yes, Miss."

"You must go to him, Isaiah, and find out for me the number of Count Rudolf's room."

"Yes, Miss."

"And you used to be a coachman, didn't you, Isaiah?"

"Yes, Miss." Isaiah's wonderment was growing.

"Now I want you to go and get a carriage, a coupé, somehow, and drive it yourself, Isaiah, into the Circle, on the north side, and wait until I come. Then I want you to drive me to the side entrance of the Hemisphere Hotel. You understand, Isaiah?"

One of President McKinley's first messages.

"Yes, Miss."

"And I want you to wait there until I come out, and then to drive me back to the Circle."

"Yes, Miss." He was becoming more deeply dazed, and it was all he could say.

"And you will not speak a word to anyone, Isaiah, and when you have come back you will forget that you have done it."

"Y—es, Miss."

"Hurry, Isaiah! You are sure you understand—Oh, here is the money. *Please* don't make any mistake, Isaiah—it's *very* important." She pushed him out of the room.

Her heart had begun to beat wildly. She must make no mistake now. To fail in any particular would be ruinous. In her imagination the Count stood forth as something mysteriously despicable and dangerous. She not only loathed but feared him. Her fancy endowed him with supernatural wickedness. It was for this reason, perhaps, that she impulsively opened the drawer of the table and took out the revolver that had lain there since the day when Randy came up from Newport News, and stood there in a moment of debate with her fingers trembling over the weapon.

It had been a dismal day. In the morning a thin film of snow covered the city, and snow fell fitfully during the morning, melting as it fell. The switchman at the Peace Monument remarked upon the utter badness of the weather, upon the utter unreasonableness of the winter as a whole, and was in his most morose mood. In the afternoon came a steady rain that washed humanity out of the streets.

The weather suited the mood in which poor Miriam in the coach reached the Hemisphere Hotel. She climbed the stairs leading from the ladies' entrance with tremulous resolution. She never could remember what immediately preceded the moment when she stood with her back against the door of the Count's room.

The Count sat at a table by the window.

"Vat ees it?" he asked, with his head over his writing. He evidently thought she was a bell-boy with a card or a message. When he did look up his astonishment was in proportion to the novelty of the situation.

"Mees Miriam, vat——"

"Please be seated," she demanded, with a fragment of her voice, her right hand hidden in the fold of her cape.

"I do not understand——"

"I must ask you to *sit down*, please, and to *remain* seated," she repeated, with all the firmness at her command. But she was trembling under her poor attempt at calm, and the revolver tumbled to the floor.

"Permit me——" the Count began, with mingled irony and doubt, moving as if to pick up the revolver.

"Sit down!" she demanded again, fumbling for the weapon. "I have something very important to say to you."

"But, my dear Mees——"

"Keep quiet, please, until I have explained! You are writing letters. I wish you to write one for me."

"Certainly," said the Count, a little amused and much perplexed.

"I will dictate it, if you will permit me."

The Count, completely puzzled, prepared to write.

"'My dear Viola.'"

"'My dear Viola'—remarkable," muttered the Count.

"I am sorry that I cannot keep my appointment to-night. I am called out of the country and must leave at once."

"*Sacré tonnerre!*" The Count, with his face contorted, half rose to his feet, glared at Miriam, and then at a letter which lay near him on the table. The Count had just read this letter. It was brief, but pointed. This is what it said:

"COUNTY OLD MAN:

"The Bank has the Papers you must skip the town to-night sure, and if you don't take to-morrow's steamer you are my definition of a blasted fool.

"STEINWOLTEN."

It was impossible that Miriam could know anything of that letter, or of its origin. And yet there was an almost incredible coincidence in her intervention.

"But my dear Mees Miriam," expostulated the Count, with growing annoyance, "this ees ridiculous! Vat do you mean? I cannot write such a letter!"

"I am sorry," said Miriam, standing very straight, her lips white, the revolver in full view. "I think that you must. I don't wish to make any trouble." She paused, and realized that she was less frightened than at the beginning, though she was inwardly praying that the situation might now demand nothing more of her than getting away. "I think it will be best for you to write it."

The Count looked contemptuously at the revolver. It would make a noise to begin with, and the girl might faint; in any case the game was spoiled; and trusting to avoid a scene, the Count took up the pen again.

"'I have not deserved the honor of your affection,'" Miriam dictated. "You may sign it 'Rudolf'—just as you signed the note you sent to-day."

"Leetle devil!" grunted the Count.

"Don't seal the envelope," directed Miriam. "I want to see what you have written—and don't get up—throw it to me," and she picked the thing from the floor, as if it had been unclean, continuing, with a new courage in her voice, "I have done this to save my sister, but I have saved you from a great danger. If you are a wise man you will avoid the chance that my father may yet hear of this, and leave Washington at once—on the seven o'clock train; it will get you to New York in five hours."

"Excuse me," appealed the Count. She stood with one hand on the knob of the door and he had arisen without protest from her. "Do I understand that anything vill be said?—or that this letter vill be all?"

"This letter will be all—if you leave to-night."

The Count maintained his ironical salute as she disappeared.

Back to the coach, back to the house, to the sitting-room. In all the journey Miriam had but one clear thought—Viola would be saved.

The revolver she replaced in the drawer of the table, and having left the letter with Isaiah, fled to her room, where only the consciousness of an impending scene in the drama saved her from collapse. She had forgotten to instruct Isaiah definitely as to the delivery of the letter, but Isaiah was equal to the emergency.

"They's a letter on the table fo' you, Miss," she heard him saying to Viola.

"A letter, Isaiah?"

"Yes, Miss."

The Count's handwriting!—a letter from the Count! Viola tore the envelope unemotionally, though her eyes spoke her perplexity. The words stupefied her in the first moment. She could not believe them. The Count throwing her over! Out of her stupor came a rush of anger, of a half-savage rage that put a hot fire in her brilliant black eyes. While the anger blazed in her brain, the room grew dark.

Miriam heard the fall, and with a new and different terror she faltered to the door. Viola lay prone near the table, her loosened blue-black hair shimmering in the dim light and partly hiding the Count's letter. Seeing her sister there, stricken as by her hand, Miriam felt her courage, until that moment unbroken, utterly give way, and she threw herself despairingly beside the fallen form.

"Viola! Sister!" It was on her tongue to cry "Forgive me!" and to confess the origin of the letter; but she held back the words. "Viola! you have hurt yourself! . . . What can I do! what can I do!"

There was no response from the white face on her shoulder. She brushed back the heavy masses of hair, and clung appealingly to the half-inanimate body.

"Viola! You won't grieve at anything, will you, without telling me and letting me help you? I'm a stronger comforter than you think, Viola. Are you feeling better? There, there!—just let me help you to your room and care for you for a little while."

Viola pushed her away, then, repenting the gesture, turned and clung tremblingly to Miriam for a moment.

"Miriam, you are a good sister, but I wish you would leave me alone."

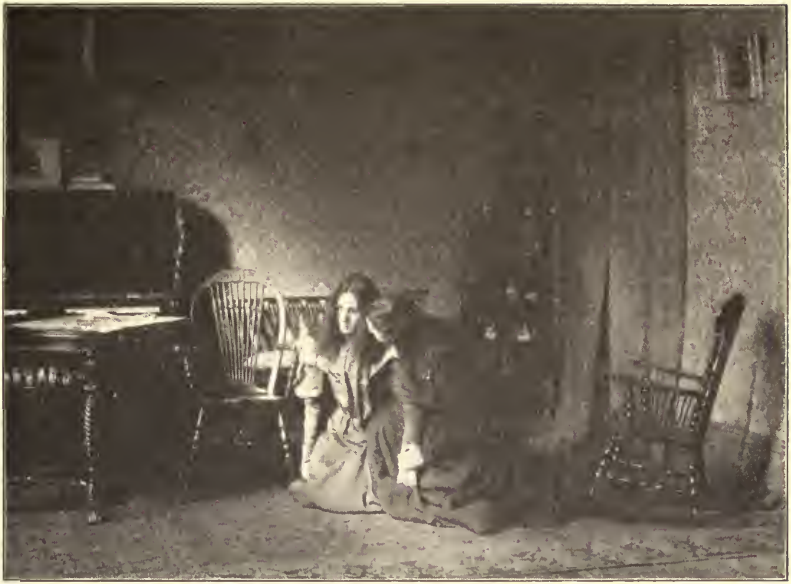
"But not here, Viola!"

"Let me sit here a moment, Miriam. The world is better to you. Let me stay here a moment."

Miriam left her sitting dumbly at the table. The world had gone wrong again. And all was irreparable. "I was born to be miserable when others are happy." It was an old thought coming back with new momentum. And she had tried hard enough to steal some happiness from life; but life had grudged it to her, had taunted her with it and taken it away. The world did not understand her, and she did not understand the world. The blood in her was relentless, carrying with it the sad strain of her mother's unhappy nature.

Her mother!

That strange union of turbulence and of sweetness, of sunlight and of gloom—that inexplicable woman whose face was only an indistinct memory rising in the crises of her life like that of some attendant spirit that felt its kinship. The face seemed almost to shine faintly beside her at that moment; a sweet and a terrible face, longing, threatening, melting, hardening, loving, hating, repelling—appealing.



"Are you feeling better?"

What was the good of a life that seemed to be a mistake? What was the good of a life that was worthless to its owner and a pain to those who looked upon it? Would it pay to go on battling with this legacy of bitterness?

There were ways of stopping it all. Viola's eyes, in which the fires were smouldering now, caught the gleam of metal through the incompletely closed drawer of the table. She drew forth Randy's revolver, and held it without repulsion in her listless hands.

How much of a sin was it to snap the ties and end everything? Was it cowardly to be afraid to live? Was it cowardly to hesitate to die?—How many in the world had debated this question in hours of lonely agony!

How sweet it would be to end the struggle in an eternal sleep! One supreme pain and then——

A low, irregular whistling came from the hallway. Its origin could not be misunderstood. In a moment Randy's angular length swung through the doorway.

"How are y' Miss Viola? Is the Colonel in?"

"No, Randy, he is not in." She spoke in the shadow of a voice.

"Is that so? I'm sorry. Bein' no session t' day thought I might find him here. Wanted t' ask him about the Civil Service matter."

Her face was turned from him. "Randy, I wish you would go away."

"Go away?" He looked his uncertainty.

"Yes, Randy, please go away. I am not feeling very well, and I——"

"All right, I'll go—I'll come in again soon. I want t' see the Colonel about that thing. Good—eh—good-by!" And he stared at her again, as if realizing at this moment of his going that her appearance was extraordinary. As he drew aside the portière he shook his head slowly, and went uncertainly down the stair.

The revolver gleamed in the drawer where Viola had mechanically dropped it at the first sound of Randy's coming. She looked at it again now, but could not touch it. The dusk deepened, and she sat there without stirring. House and street were peculiarly silent. From a distance that seemed immeasurably vast came the deep melancholy note of a bell.

She knew the note. It called up the image of a sombre building, a red, blind-faced building; the

"All right, I'll go."

image of a woman on the steps of the building, a woman whose white face looked from a whiter linen frame in the shadow of black. . . .

In fifteen minutes the bell sounded again—two strokes.

Viola was writing, her hair falling about her face like a cowl. Her mother had been reared behind convent walls. There would be a fitness in the step that carried her whence her mother came. . . . Perhaps this was a destiny. At least it was a destination. Miriam should know when she read these lines. The pain to them would soon be past; and in that moment she hoped that they might be able to think some good things of her.

The Count—she did not love him. . . . No, her first impulse had been true. But why had she let him come into her life? What was it in him that had mastered her? Heaven only knew that. She would not have him back. Behind him there had been an abyss. . . .

The distant bell tolled the strokes of the three-quarter hour.

Miriam heard Viola go to her room; but she did not hear her leave it. And when she read Viola's

letter, which lay on the sitting-room table, she had no suspicion that the writer was at that moment hurrying impetuously through the twilight. A sense of loneliness smote her and wrenched quick tears from eyes that ceased to see the lines on the paper, but that saw through the mist a shrouded face that bore the hurt of pain, a face reflecting the grief of a gloomy soul, a face that already seemed to have gone forever.

When she had read the words a second time she yielded to an impulse to go to Viola's room. No answer came to her soft knock at the door. Perhaps Viola had cried herself to sleep.

Miriam noiselessly turned the knob. The room was empty.

VIII

"MIRIAM!" Aunt Lydie Jane had called from the stairs, but was at the door almost before Miriam could answer. "Success at last, my dear! I told you I never should give up."

"What is it, Aunt Lydie?" Miriam strove to hide her tears for the moment.

Aunt Lydie was feverishly untying a bundle. "And what will you say to *this*, my dear—mercy! what a knot—just what I've been wanting so long! —searched everywhere, and at last, at last, my dear, I am rewarded. There!—and George Washington's, too!"

Aunt Lydie was holding up a crumpled pair of trousers. Poor Miriam faintly smiled through her tears. The long trousers were pitifully modern.

"Why, Aunt Lydie, I didn't know that Mr. Washington wore——"

"There!" and Aunt Lydie seated herself abjectly. "If I didn't forget that he wore bicycle pants! The

idea! And that man charged me seven-fifty for them, too! But I'll take them back! I won't be cheated! And I was so happy over this!" Aunt Lydie looked sadly at her purchase. It was a shattering blow. "Isn't it a pity!" Then her eyes wandered to Miriam's face. "Miriam! you have been—my *dear!* what *is* the matter?"

Miriam's lip was quivering. "Viola has gone!"

"Gone?"

It was almost all there was to tell. In the quiet of that night Miriam heard her father pacing the floor of his room. It was a bad night for the Colonel.

The days that followed were dark days in that little group. When Easter came with its lovely spring sunlight a change had crept into the life of Winfield and his daughter. The Colonel and Miriam had painful reminiscent talks together, and had settled back into the old ways that had existed before Viola came back from Newport. A sense of the inevitableness of the thing which had happened, and a feeling of its finality, softened, perhaps, the sting of their grief, but could not remove the consciousness of bereavement. The Colonel's hair, prematurely touched with frost, seemed to take on a deeper white.

It was on Easter Monday evening that Gerard

came in and found Miriam playing soft music at the piano. He had noticed a difference in her since Viola went away.

"What is so pleasant," he said quietly, "as to hear music that one likes played by a person whom one——"

"I'm afraid I'm not playing very well to-night," she said, as if she had not perceived the direction of his remark.

"I have been enjoying that Grieg very much," he said. Then a moment later, his arm resting over the piano, his face near hers: "Do you know, I was thinking this morning——"

But how should I know what he said after that? He was speaking very low, and her answers certainly were not declaimed. And if I did know, is there not a nice question of delicacy as to whether I should tell? Some things should be sacred.

There would be room for speculation in the visible thing that happened. One might guess certain conditions from the movement with which presently he turned away from the piano and strode the length of the room, returning again to find that she had arisen. There was room for guessing in his attitude as he spoke to her across the table

that stood between them. The least imaginative person might have suspected his distress as he walked the length of the room again to turn quickly, at last, and face her on the near side of the table. Her eyes were no enigma as they fell before his. It is extremely doubtful (though this line of speculation is, strictly speaking, excluded by the present condition of decorous silence) whether her lips said a single word. At last when he caught her hand and demanded——

But this surely is violating our delicate terms. Let it suffice that when the Colonel came in there existed definite occasion for that fine self-possession with which he did not appear to notice them.

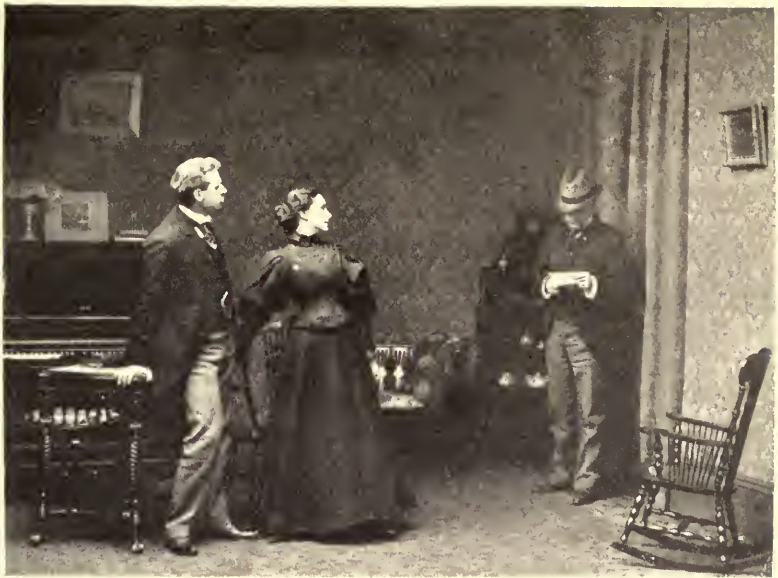
"How are you, Gerard?" he said, rather brusquely, as he went on with his letter.

"We simply won't *dare* say a word to him with his hat on like that," whispered Miriam.

"I suppose not." Gerard studied the absolutely horizontal situation of the Colonel's hat, which Winfield absently continued to wear.

"Now if there should happen to be anything pleasant in that letter from North Pines—there it goes!"

A faint smile was perceptible on Winfield's face



He did not appear to notice them.

and his hand mechanically pushed his hat into an acute angle.

"Do you think it is quite safe now?" demanded Gerard, grimly, and audibly enough, until the Colonel looked up.

"Oh, it's entirely safe now," laughed Miriam.

"Colonel," said Gerard, with an attempt toward the effect of addressing the Chair, that somehow was not so successfully off-hand as he had expected, "we have here a concurrent resolution of which we wish to ask your approval. It is a measure for the consolidation of two lives, and it is entirely non-partisan."

The Colonel had stared at them suspiciously at the first word. He had regained his self-possession before the last word came, though there was a little tremor in his voice as he said, "Well, I suppose there is nothing for me to do but say, 'Bless you, my children,' or something of that sort. And this explains, Gerard, why you have been away from so many of those Committee meetings!"

A peculiar whistling sound came from the hallway. It was not properly the regulation whistle of Randy, but unquestionably the sound was emitted by that eccentric gentleman.

"He was to take the Civil Service examination today," said Miriam. "I wonder how he got along. He'll be awfully broken up if he doesn't pass."

Randy, in the doorway, presented an extraordinary spectacle. His face was bruised and bleeding, though retaining a grotesque composure, and his clothes gave evidence of having been in the presence of an energetic destructive force. His collar remained attached by the back button only.

"Randy!" Miriam and her father had exclaimed in chorus. Gerard suppressed a laugh.

"Colonel," said Randy, solemnly, "I came right here——"

Miriam could not wait to get the details. "You didn't get this at the Civil Service examination, did you?"

"No," returned Randy. "Y' see I just met Meach."

The Colonel struggled with a convulsion of merriment.

"I met Meach—and it was the old, old story, only I think maybe a little more so, this time."

"He must have been very rough with you," said the Colonel, sympathetically.

"He was; and I did my best t' reason with that

man, too. And I want you t' take this thing up, Colonel. That man is dangerous. I don't care for myself, but that man ought to be put away. The first thing you know——"

"You poor fellow!" cried Miriam, "let me attend to your bruises."

"Anyway," muttered Randy, "I'm kinder tired, and I'll sit down a minute if yer don't mind."

"Colonel Winfield!" The shout was accompanied by Mrs. Bannister's gay laugh on the stairs.

"What's happening now?" queried the Colonel, who turned to confront the grotesque phenomenon of Mrs. Bannister dragging Captain Hartley through the hall.

"Here's a good joke, Colonel!" cried Mrs. Bannister, charmingly flushed with her efforts, "I'm going to marry the Captain!"

"No—you don't say!—I never should have suspected it!" grinned the Colonel.

"You old fabricator," snorted the Captain.

"Miriam!"

Aunt Lydie halted in embarrassment at the door on discovering that the room was full of people.

"If one more thing happens," declared Winfield, "I shall believe that the whole affair was arranged."

Aunt Lydie decided to go on: "What do you think, Miriam? I *found* that man again, and he says that he made a mistake, that those trousers were worn by George the Third!"

"Gerard," remarked the Colonel, "I had no idea that so many things not set down in the Congressional programme possibly could happen in this quiet town."

And though he could not explain the thing at the moment, Gerard caught Mrs. Bannister scrutinizing Miriam and himself with a remarkably sagacious expression.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388
Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

MAR 3 0 2004

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 071 300 8