The HOUSE ON THE NORTH SHORE

MARION FOSTER WASHBURNE

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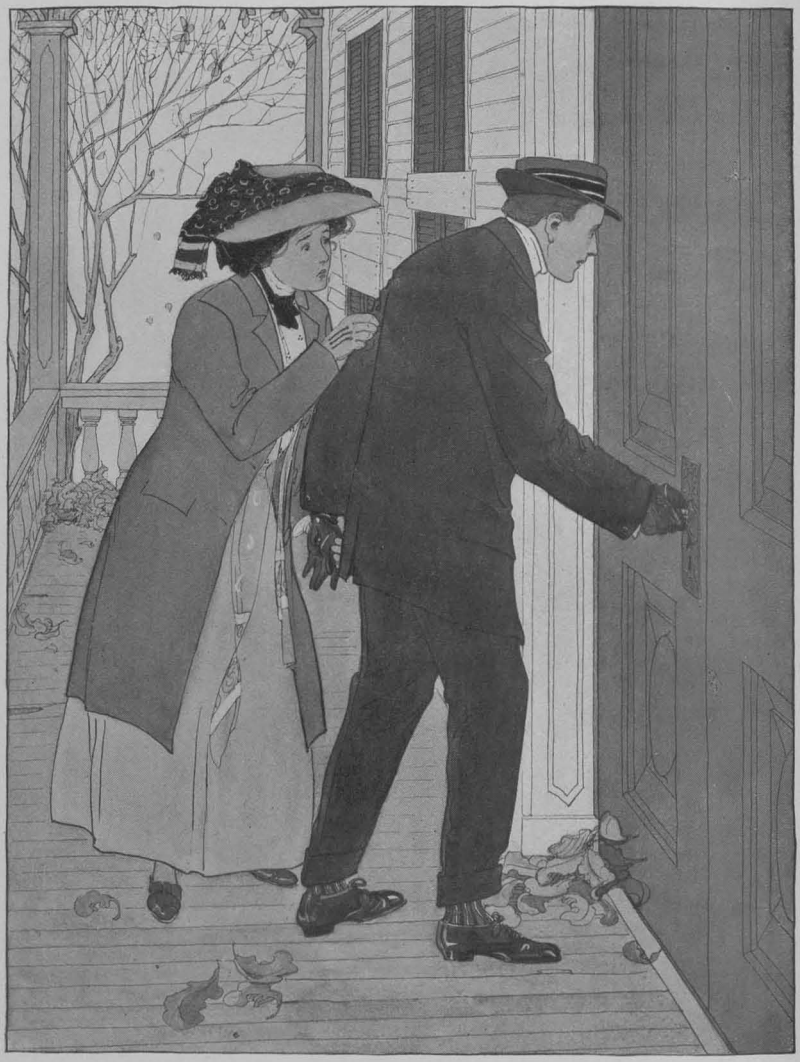

"'Let go!' he commanded, shaking himself free. 'What are you afraid of?'"

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THE HOUSE ON THE NORTH SHORE

BY

MARION FOSTER WASHBURNE

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"FAMILY SECRETS," ETC.

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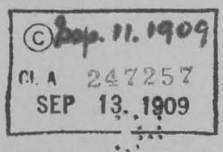

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To LUTHER BURBANK

This house is to be let for life or years;
Her rent is sorrow and her income tears.
Cupid, 't has long stood void: her bills made known,
She must be dearly let, or let alone.

FRANCIS QUARLES, "Emblems."

Every book is a quotation, and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone-quarries, and every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.

EMERSON.

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THE HOUSE ON THE NORTH SHORE

CHAPTER I

THE PARENTS' PROBLEM

SPRING had come at last to the shores of the Great Lakes. Millions of little waves were dancing and laughing in the sun, racing across the blue expanse from far-away horizon to yellow shore. White gulls circled close above the water, or rested upon it, leaning their feathery breasts against the sparkling waves. Calling loudly, they sprang high into the air, and the morning sun flashed on the white under-parts of their wings.

Traffic had opened, and here and there could be seen the sails of lumber schooners setting out for the wooded shores of northern Michigan. Trails of smoke from the funnels of freighters smudged the fair morning sky. To the south lay the dun-colored cloud which brooded always above the great city — that cloud under which

millions of human beings toiled and fought and suffered; made merry, and died; only to have more millions swiftly fill up their vacant places.

Upon one of the wooded bluffs to the north of the city stood a pleasant and homelike house. The morning sun shone full in at its dining-room windows upon two persons seated at the breakfast table. This table was set for four, and it was about the two vacant places that Margaret Warfield was talking. A little frown had gathered between her eyebrows, and her brown eyes, usually so clear and friendly, sparkled now with indignation. Her husband, ensconced behind the morning paper, impatient to be through with the fruits and cereal and to get down to what he called the real business of eating, only growled a little now and then in response to her complaints.

"But, Richard," she protested, "they are getting worse and worse! They seem to have no regard whatever for the family convenience, and especially" — she lowered her voice fearfully and glanced toward the swinging door kitchenwards — "they have no regard for cook. And, you know, it does make the whole day's work drag when breakfast is late. It is n't a little thing, Richard," she went on, her indignation rising as

she gave it expression. "In its essence it is both laziness and selfishness, and those are pretty bad things, you know. I don't think this is merely a housekeeping question; I think it is a question of character-building."

A slight flush had risen in her cheeks with the eagerness of her pleading, and she looked surprisingly young and even beautiful as she sat there at the head of her table. The morning sun touched the big braid of her hair and brought out its reddish lights. A few white hairs glistened over the unmarked temples, but as yet the luxurious mass was uninvaded by time. Forming a background for her full, erect figure, the blue waves of the great lake seemed almost to roll up against the clear window-panes. She was a vivid figure, strong, resourceful, emotional, and most thoroughly feminine, as she sat there, intent on her household duties and on the upbringing of her children.

Her husband's eye dwelt upon her with a satisfaction not unmingled with humor.

"You look mighty sweet, if you do scold," he said, and thereby added a further touch to her irritation.

Just here the dining-room door was pushed

open and in rushed two vehement, struggling figures.

"I got here first!" both the young people shouted in chorus, as they drew out their chairs and dropped into them with a solid force that made the dishes on the table rattle. Richard retired again behind his paper to hide the smiles that struggled with his annoyed frown. But Margaret sat quite unmoved and dignified.

"I think you are both late," she remarked, severely.

Bob and Beth broke into a simultaneous torrent of excuses, each one laying the blame upon the other.

They were tall, well-grown youngsters, looking much too old for their childish manners. Beth was about seventeen, with a sweet young face, showing good bones beneath its curves. She was carefully dressed, though with simplicity. Her two braids were tied at the back of her neck with a great bow of ribbon, and wound up about her head like a wreath. It was the pains she had bestowed upon this head-dress which had made her late — that and the long time she had spent rubbing milk of cucumber into the skin of her large hands, which had

grown beyond the rest of her, like the paws of a Newfoundland pup.

Her brother Robert was a long, lanky lad of nineteen, with clear brown eyes, as full of dreams as hers, but dreams of a different order. He was a senior in the high school, standing well to the front of his class, and rejoicing openly in the exercise of his keen young wits.

Although it was plainly evident that these two were brother and sister, there was, nevertheless, a wide dissimilarity in their appearance. Elizabeth, although so very feminine, resembled her father; the clear-cut lines of his face were reproduced in hers, showing in those good bones of which she was as yet considerably ashamed. She thought her straight nose too large, and the line of her jaw too decided; but in her father's face these characteristics appeared as they would presently appear in hers, as firm lines of unusual delicacy and power.

The boy, on the other hand, repeated, in his rich coloring, in that bright complexion which his sister envied, in his brown eyes and thick mane of reddish hair, the intensity and vividness of his mother. His young slight figure, stretching up to a height even greater than his father's,

as yet gave little promise of her solidity and poise; but his shoulder-bones were already beginning to square themselves and to take on a look of strength.

Pandemonium raged for a while in that dining room. The children were swallowing their food half masticated, between mouthfuls trying to defend themselves from their mother's reproofs. Beth was indignant, reproachful, and self-defensive. Bob assumed airs of easy masculine superiority, and joked aside all his mother said. It was hard to tell which child was more exasperating. At last Margaret turned in desperation to her husband, whose forces, in seasons of domestic warfare, were always brought up as a heavy reserve.

"Now, Richard," she exclaimed, "I think you ought to tell these children seriously what you think of the way they are behaving." By this time the humor of the situation had begun to pall upon the father. The noise was really too uncomfortable. Therefore he laid down his paper and said to his son and daughter with considerable crispness:

"In my opinion, if you are not here in time for meals you ought not to have any."

Margaret gasped. "Oh, my dear, you could never send them to school without anything to eat!" she exclaimed.

"Well, then, let it be nothing but a dish of mush," said the man of the house, emphatically. "That will keep them from starving; and it ought to be a considerable punishment. I know it would be for me."

Beth flew up from her seat and over to her father. She threw her long young arms around his neck and pressed her fresh cheek up against his.

"You know you would never have the heart to cut me down to nothing but mush, daddy dear!" she cried. "You 'd add a little fruit, and some cream — would n't you, now? Especially if it was all Bob's fault?" She gave him another kiss, threw one to her indignant mother, whose lips were beginning to curl upward in spite of herself, and ran out of the room.

"Say, mother," called Robert, precipitately, "I 'm not going to catch that car if I don't get out of this. You fold my napkin, won't you?" He dropped it into her lap, imprinted a hasty kiss on the top of her head, waved his hand to his father, and in a second more slammed the front

door so that the house shook. Father and mother, left alone, looked at each other and laughed helplessly.

"They don't seem to be very much afraid of us, dear," Mr. Warfield remarked.

"No, of course they're not," his wife answered, as she carefully folded her big son's napkin and tucked it away into the little silver ring which had been a present to him on his first birthday. "We don't really want them to be afraid of us, do we?"

"Well, it would undoubtedly be convenient once in a while," he replied. The maid brought in some hot cakes, and he settled down to that deliberate enjoyment of them which always tried Margaret's housewifely soul.

"The maids like to get at the dishes early, dear," she murmured. "But never mind!" catching herself up hastily. "Of course, you can eat all you like, and just as slowly as you like." She poured herself another cup of coffee and sipped it musingly. "For my part," she went on, "I am very much worried about the children. It's funny, of course, the way they act; but haven't you noticed how every morning they sleep later and later? How irritable Beth is?

And how Bob's teasing grows worse every day?"

"Yes, I've noticed it," her husband replied, with unexpected seriousness. "I've noticed that they are both growing nervous, at the same time that they are growing dull. I think we'd better take them out of school before matters get worse." Again Margaret gasped. These masculine measures were so drastic and prompt!

"But, my dear," she remonstrated, "they are doing finely at school. Bob's ambition is at full tilt. He has worked hard to keep his place at the head of the class, and there are two girls that threaten to surpass him. *Girls,* my dear! You can imagine that the boy would never stand that."

"I don't care anything about his ambition," answered Warfield, tersely. "What I'm anxious about is that he should get his growth, and calm down his nerves. I don't like his excitability. He has ambition enough and to spare. We don't need to cherish that."

"Yes, that's true," Margaret answered. The maid brought in another plate of cakes and offered them to her. She waved them away, and with covert anxiety watched their proffer to

her husband, who accepted them with joy. She sighed a little as she realized that at least ten minutes more must elapse before they could leave the table to the impatient maids. "He is talking in his sleep, too," she went on presently, her mind reverting to her son. "When I went in to cover him up last night he was talking Latin, or trying to; and his bed-clothes looked as if a cyclone had struck them. It took me five minutes to get them straightened out."

"Don't you think, my dear," remonstrated her husband, smiling, "that when a young man is old enough to be in high school, and to take young ladies out to parties" — Margaret winced — "his mother might stop going in at night and covering him up as if he were a baby?"

"Well, the wind changed and it grew cold, and I knew he would never wake and cover himself. Anyhow, that isn't what we were talking about. We were talking about his being so nervous. He *is* nervous, and Beth is too. She is getting quick-tempered and hysterical. She isn't herself, and all her faults come out when she's not herself."

"Yes, I have been noticing that and other things lately," Warfield answered, gravely. "I

have noticed an occasional twitchy hunch of her shoulders, and a habit she has of twisting her mouth about. She is restless and uneasy; not at all like the sweet, wholesome girl she is on the Wyoming ranch. That 's the place for them, Margaret — that 's the place for them! They grow up right there, with the rest of the colts."

Margaret's eye, dropping from her husband's, fell upon his plate, where, side by side, his knife and fork rested idle. Her housewifeliness rose within her. "Through, dear?" she asked, briskly, and on the instant tapped the bell. "Yes, Mary, you may clear the table now," she said, and, taking Warfield's arm, marched him off.

Thus drawn safely out of the way, he went on with his translation of an important German work on physiological psychology. On these topics he was already a recognized authority. The great and tragic problem of his life, faced, as he had faced it, with serious courage, had brought him this good: It had showed him where his life's work lay.

He was a man of remarkable personal appearance. Tall and broad-shouldered, he had, nevertheless, the stoop, and, at this season of the year,

the pallor, of the indoor man — the man of books. His broad, full forehead showed the student. His hair, prematurely gray, fine, and rather thin, was thrown back from it, and fell, a little long, over his immaculate linen collar. His eyes were a clear gray, full of light, the eyes of wisdom. When he came upon truths he had been in search of they positively emitted radiance, as if the brain behind them were incandescent. But to balance and give force to these intellectual attributes, he had the large, distinctly cut nose and firm jaw of the man of courage and initiative; to soften them, a curved, tender, sensitive mouth, like a woman's. He was clean-shaved, and the balance of features thus revealed was so admirable that the whole face was, as his wife often insisted, really beautiful.

The room he sat in was an upstairs room, filled with books, and hung about with suggestive and interesting pictures. There were not many, but each one had its tale to tell, each one lent significance to the room. The wide, shallow bay-window was uncurtained. Through it the image of the waters of the lake entered like a visible presence, filling the room with tremulous light.

His large table occupied the centre of the room. On it were a typewriter and a rack of reference books. It, like the rest of the room, was beautifully dustless and orderly. Here was evidence that his wife cared for all he cared for. The piles of manuscript, neatly typewritten, were her work. She knew, as well as he did, what papers he needed to have at hand; and therefore the order in which they were laid was always a convenient order.

He never looked around at this room without a glow of affectionate gratitude. It spoke Margaret and home and comprehending companionship, and he had lived so long without these things, in a bachelor austerity which he had never hoped to ameliorate, that he had not grown so accustomed as to be unappreciative.

The hours rolled by in quiet study. But in the afternoon, even in his seclusion, he noted something unusual about the children's homecoming, and before Margaret called him he was already on his way to see what was the matter. As he looked over the balusters he saw below him in the hall his wife holding fast their young daughter, pushing back her hair from her forehead, and asking quick questions. The tall

young girl, almost as tall as her mother, lay back against the firmer figure with a childlike abandon. He knew at once that she must be suffering some sort of pain, and he plunged down the stairs three steps at a time.

"Beth has been hurt," his wife said as she looked up at him. "See, it 's her temple." Warfield took the young girl into his own arms and drew her into the window of the living-room where the light fell full upon the wounded temple. It was badly swollen and the dark blood had clotted upon it. Margaret hurried at once to bring a basin of warm water and a soft cloth, and when she had washed away the blood she saw that the wound was, after all, not so great a matter. There were two little cuts, each less than a quarter of an inch long, and looking as if they had been made by some blunt instrument. Bob hurriedly offered an explanation.

"It 's a bite," he said.

"A bite!" father and mother exclaimed in chorus. Bob laughed a little, and even Beth smiled faintly.

"Yes, a girl bit her," the boy added.

"How mean you are, Bob!" cried Beth, her indignation rousing her. "She did n't mean to,

you know, father. We were just racing about the school-yard, and I was coming around the corner of the building one way while she came the other way. We did n't either of us know that the other was there. She has sticky-out big front teeth, and they went right into my head. I should think I must almost have knocked them straight." She laughed again a little hysterically. "But oh, you ought to have seen the other fellow! Her upper lip swelled out till it was a perfect sight. The teacher let her go home at once, she looked so much worse than I did; but she kept me till school was out. And oh, I felt so sick!" She leaned against her father more heavily and shut her eyes, as a reminiscent wave of faintness passed over her.

"Is n't my girl rather big to be racing around the school-yard like that?" Margaret asked, but not very sternly.

"Well — I was n't exactly racing. I was afraid I'd be late for the afternoon session."

"Afraid you 'd be late at noon, when you don't come home? How could that be?" Margaret asked further.

Boy and girl exchanged glances of embarrassment. Margaret saw at once that they wished

to conceal something from her. She pressed for an answer.

"I — well, I — took a little walk at the noon hour," Beth answered slowly. "Bob did too."

"Aw, cut it out!" muttered that young gentleman, disgusted. "What good is it to pull me into this? *I* didn't hurt your head, did I?"

"No; but you did make me late, — sneak!" cried Beth, with spirit.

"Made you late, did I?" he was beginning, when his mother cut him short.

"Where did you go, and why?" she demanded.

"Well — ah — we went round by the Haunted House," Beth answered. "Bob wanted to see it." The boy snorted in derision at this, but his father put up a hand that commanded silence. Upon Warfield's forehead a frown began to darken.

"What do you mean by the Haunted House?" he asked.

"Oh, that strange old house by the lake shore — all grown over with vines, and hidden behind hedges, and lonely, and creepy," Beth explained eagerly. "Some say it's haunted, and some say

that a madman lives there with a ghost for a wife."

Warfield and his wife had grown strangely quiet. They drew together and their eyes dwelt upon their daughter with the same sombre inquiry in brown depths and gray.

"I guess it's a madman all right," the girl went on, laughing uneasily, "for I saw him."

"You saw him?" The words sprang simultaneously to the lips of both father and mother.

"Yes," the girl nodded. "He was walking in the grounds, I suppose. Anyway, I saw him in an opening in the hedge — a dark man, very handsome, with a white face, a black beard, and wild eyes. He called out to me, and I tell you I ran — I ran all the way to school — or until I plunked into Lillie Norris's teeth."

"Oh, well! It's just a little thing!" her father answered, after a pause, with determined cheerfulness. "You'll soon be all right again."

"I need not go to school to-morrow, need I?" Beth asked, looking up at her mother.

"Oh, no, of course not!" sneered Bob. "You'll stay at home, I suppose, and play the lady invalid now for the rest of the week! Say,

mother, if she does stay, don't you let her read any. She 'll get well lots quicker if you take away her story-book."

Beth scorned to reply, but kept her eyes fixed pleadingly upon her mother.

"Yes, dear, you may stay at home," said Margaret, promptly, "and you may read too, if you feel like it; or I 'll read to you part of the time."

"Who would n't get bitten?" growled Bob. "Gee! I guess I 'll go out and hire one of the fellows to dig his teeth into me."

In spite of his teasing, however, Robert had been as tender as possible to his sister while she was in need of help. It was only when she was safely sheltered at home in the care of mother and father that he permitted himself the usual licenses of brotherhood.

Margaret presently touched her husband on the arm and they went aside into the adjoining room. Here they held a short consultation. Beth, whose keen young senses were all alert, perceived at once that they were a good deal troubled about her; but she had all her life been watched with such careful tenderness that this did not surprise so much as it gratified her.

While they were talking together the door-bell

rang. Robert, always in haste to taste of any new sensation, rushed to open the door, without waiting for the slower services of the maid. As he opened it he saw before him a woman of late middle life whom he had never seen before.

"Your mother in?" she asked abruptly. "Tell her L. M. Tatezel is here and would like to see her." Her manner was that of a person sure of her ground. She walked directly past the surprised boy and on into the living-room. She paused at the sight of Beth lying back pale and still in the Morris chair with a little pad of wet cotton over her wounded temple.

"What's the matter?" the woman asked directly, something of agitation showing itself in her manner. "Are you hurt? Where is your mother?" At the sound of her voice Warfield and his wife hurried forward from the library.

"Why, Mrs. Tatezel!" Margaret exclaimed. Beth, looking out at her from beneath languid lids, thought that her face expressed something like dismay. "You here? Is there anything wrong?"

"No'm, not very. Nothing very extra. But you seem to be in trouble yourself." She pointed to the girl lying back in the big dark chair.

"She has hurt her temple," Warfield said, speaking in a brisk, everyday voice, as if to cut through the cloud of uneasiness that hung over the little party. "It's nothing. She'll be all right in a day or two."

"Her temple?" asked Mrs. Tatezel. She went over and lifted the bit of cotton. "Looks like a bite," she said. "And it's turning black."

"It is a bite," said Margaret, and went on to explain the queer accident. Warfield was gently feeling about the bruised place with his long fingers. Then, without further speech, he went into the library and Beth heard him call up Dr. Avery. Meanwhile, L. M. Tatezel had swiftly drawn off her gloves and coat, had hurried into the kitchen and returned with a kettle of hot water and a tin cup. She set the kettle down upon the radiator, and in a few minutes was deftly putting one hot cloth after another upon the girl's face. She went about like one perfectly at home, and the young people noted with astonishment that she seemed to know their mother well, and that they worked together like old friends, or like old soldiers accustomed to fight side by side against a common foe.

Now, Bob was at this time full of the detective spirit. He had been reading Conan Doyle till his greatest ambition, next to standing well at school, was to be a Sherlock Holmes. The coming of this woman was indeed a strange thing, because she was so evidently at home in the house and sure of her welcome; and yet a perfect stranger to him, who had always supposed that he knew his father's and mother's every secret. Therefore he watched her with intensity.

He noted her singular erectness of attitude, like that of a soldier on duty, her low forehead, crowned with rippling bands of iron-gray hair, a small mourning bonnet set atop. He noted also the short chin, the firmly closed mouth, the high arched nose, and especially the green eyes like pale lamps lighting her dark face. He could not make up his inexperienced mind, which saw everything in clear blacks and whites, whether she was good or evil. Certainly, she did not at all conform to that model by which as yet he judged all women — his strong, sweet mother. This woman was not like her. She was not pleasant. She did not smile. Yet he could not get over the evidence of those eyes. They had

a light in them that was not fire, but rather devotion.

"There 's something queer about her," he decided to himself, "and she 'll bear watching."

Presently there came another ring at the door-bell.

"It is the doctor," said Warfield. He waved Bob aside and opened the door himself.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF MYSTERY

DR. AVERY had been the family physician for many years, and the preliminary consultation in the wide hall was a brief one. He and Mr. Warfield came together into the room, where the little group awaited them in grave decorum.

Beth herself was surprised at the attention paid to her slight hurt. The doctor took her temperature, considered a moment, and said she had better go to bed for a while.

It was so long since she had in any way played the invalid that she entered at once with considerable zest into the full possibilities of the part. She moved languidly, and as gracefully as her long legs and arms would permit. She was also silent and indifferent. Only once did she rouse herself, and that was when they were about to robe her in a somewhat faded flannelette nightgown.

"Give me my pretty new summer one," she insisted; "the one with the lace and ribbons."

"But, my dear," protested her mother, "that is too thin for you yet. I am afraid you will take cold."

"I can wear your new white shawl, mother," Beth answered, closing her eyes wearily. Her mother smiled.

"Yes, I suppose you can, little daughter of Eve," she replied. After all, she herself really enjoyed making the girl pretty, wrapping her in the soft fleecy folds of the white shawl, and drawing down her long braids, one on either side of her face. She tied each of them with a bow of white ribbon, and stooped to kiss her big baby.

"There now, my dear, you are all cosey. You must get well as soon as you can." Beth moaned a little.

"You are very sweet, mother. But my head really hurts." And so it did. The ugly black swelling had spread. It seemed strange that the teeth of an apparently sane and sound human being should be capable of making so ugly a mark. But perhaps the fault lay rather in Beth's constitution. Perhaps there was a latent weakness in her; some failure of the recuperative forces. Perhaps her nervous activity was not so much, after all, a sign of strength and health as

it was of some original weakness. When an eye rolls in too far under the nose it is not because the inner muscle pulling it toward the other eye is too strong, but that the opposing muscle which ought to draw it outward is not strong enough. And so in Beth's case; perhaps her apparent strength of nerve and brain was not so much real strength as an absence of the forces that should normally oppose and balance these.

So at least her father and mother thought. They felt that these consequences were out of proportion to the immediate predisposing cause, and that they pointed back to some deficiency in their young daughter's constitution. Therefore they watched her with the closest care and attention. They kept her in bed day after day, much to her disgust. At first she was willing enough, but presently the confinement grew irksome, and she begged each morning to be allowed to get up and dress. The doctor took her temperature and shook his head.

"Wait till this little instrument says 'normal,' my dear," he said. "Until then, bed 's the safest place." Beth looked vindictively at the thermometer, so unfeeling, so mechanical, so unreachable by any of her wiles!

Her fever, although never very high, nevertheless made her a little delirious. She was quite aware, herself, that the various images which haunted her were unreal, but she enjoyed playing with them. One day she imagined that every bit of furniture in her room was covered with a meringue. Tables, chairs, bureaus, all seemed to her like fantastic cookies, and the room in which she lay an oven in which they were to be baked. Her bed was a pie, and the bed-clothes the meringue with which the pie was covered. As the oven grew hotter the meringue grew browner. L. M. Tatezel seemed to be the cook. Beth knew that she was not in the room; but then, why should the cook be inside the oven? She was outside, of course, piling up the fire and making it hotter and hotter.

"Mother! For goodness' sake, make Mrs. Tatezel turn down the gas or this meringue is going to burn," Beth cried out. Her mother came and gave her a dose of fever medicine, took off some of the covers, and sat down to fan her.

"I know it 's absurd, mother," the girl assured her. "But at the same time it seems real. And I can't get rid of Mrs. Tatezel. She bothers me all the time."

"But why, my dear? What is the matter with poor Mrs. Tatezel? I am sure she was very kind to you when you were hurt."

"Yes, she was kind, but she's queer, too. Who is she, mother? I feel as if she walked in a black cloud, and as if she brought trouble with her." Beth felt her mother's hand, holding hers, tremble a little.

"You are not very just to her, dearie," Margaret answered firmly. "She is a kind old friend of the family. And she would n't hurt one of us for the world."

"But there 's something strange about her," cried Beth, excitedly. She sat up higher against her pillows and tried to push the bandage back from her eye, that she might look the more convincingly at her mother. "There 's something black and dreadful about her. I know she brings trouble. I can *smell* it." She was much excited, and Margaret shivered a little.

Nevertheless, she rose with a laugh and said, "Well, my dear, we will try to find something better for you to smell, then. Here 's my bottle of sal volatile. Now play you are a ladye of ye olden times, and sniff at it elegantly." Well the mother understood this histrionic young person,

who lived over for her again so much of her own girlhood! "I will bathe your fevered brow, too," she went on, with a little laugh. "We 'll have some sunshine, and fresh air, and cologne water, and songs, and forget all the bugbears."

So she quieted her, half playfully. But for all that, she held long and anxious consultation with the doctor just outside in the hall. Warfield joined her there, and Elizabeth, her keen young senses intensified by fever, caught one word somewhat ominously spoken; a word which passed from lip to lip in varying tones of question and encouragement. It was the word "heredity."

It fastened itself into her brain, like one of those flying seeds equipped with little hooks for anchoring them in the place where they are to grow. The hot brain furnished a forcing bed, and the word expanded into a mighty suggestion, filling her with evil fears. The nights, especially, so echoed with vague threatenings that she could not be left alone. Margaret slept beside her, and Beth held her hand fast, as she used to do when a little child. She had always had a fear of the dark. Her vivid imagination created against its gloomy background all sorts of living, moving figures. Why they were always dreadful, or why,

having begun innocently enough, they should always turn dreadful, was a puzzle she and Bob, in their metaphysical moments, tried in vain to solve.

Whatever her father and mother thought about these fears, they acted with tenderness and consideration. They never rebuked her, much less punished her. Nor did they try to "harden" her. She had always a light at night, the door between her room and her parents' was always open. When she was ill or disturbed, as now, her mother came and slept in her room. Robert, who would have relished the same indulgence, called this "babying," and hid his envy under scoffs.

For some strange reason, this word "heredity" associated itself, during her illness, with the other image that haunted her, the image of Mrs. Tatezel. All the stories she had read of young scions of a noble house overshadowed by some curse recurred to her, and gave form and color to her wanderings.

"There is a curse upon our house," she whispered over and over again to herself. Her mother, hearing her, turned white. Beth's murmurings continued: "And she, that strange woman, will work out the curse upon me. Oh,

mother, mother, save me!" Warfield, standing at the other side of her bed, spoke up with emphasis:

"That 's all nonsense, Elizabeth," he said, a little roughly. "You 've been reading too many novels. Margaret, I think we shall have to be more careful with her reading. I can't have her filling her head with such things." The strong, sensible words roused the girl. Besides, she liked novels and did not wish to be deprived of them. So she laughed a little and said, "Oh, I 'm only sort of dreaming, father! But they are very bad dreams, and I don't seem to be able to help them, somehow."

"No, my dear," Warfield answered. "You can't altogether help them, I know. But you can help them a little. See, now I will read to you." He sat down and began reading aloud that exquisitely simple and wholesome story, "Heide." As he read Beth felt herself transported to the high Alps, and she lay there seeing the pet goats and visiting the "Alm-Uncle," almost as vividly as if she were acting a part in a drama, the stage set with every realistic accessory. Her fever was quieting, and her temple was less swollen.

In the next room the telephone extension called loudly. Margaret hastened to answer it.

"Yes, this is 1721 Highland. I am Mrs. Warfield. Who is talking? Oh, Mrs. Tatezel! Wait till I shut the door."

Beth heard no more. But what she heard was significant enough. Her father went on reading, but neither his mind nor hers was now upon the Alps. She was struggling again with her sense of dread — her feeling that Mrs. Tatezel and trouble were one and the same. And he was trying to read so that the steady boom of his deep voice should blur the sounds of the one-sided conversation in the next room.

Presently Margaret came to the connecting door, opened it, and said to her husband in a noticeably calm and even voice:

"Richard, dear, I should like to speak to you for a moment."

He went out of the room and shut the door behind him.

Beth felt the lonely interval that followed to be uncommonly long and disagreeable. She had to take her own medicine, and get herself a drink of water; finally, from lack of anything better to do, she fell asleep. When she awoke the

setting sun was already throwing long level beams in at her western window. Robert sat there reading. He must have come in very quietly for fear of waking her.

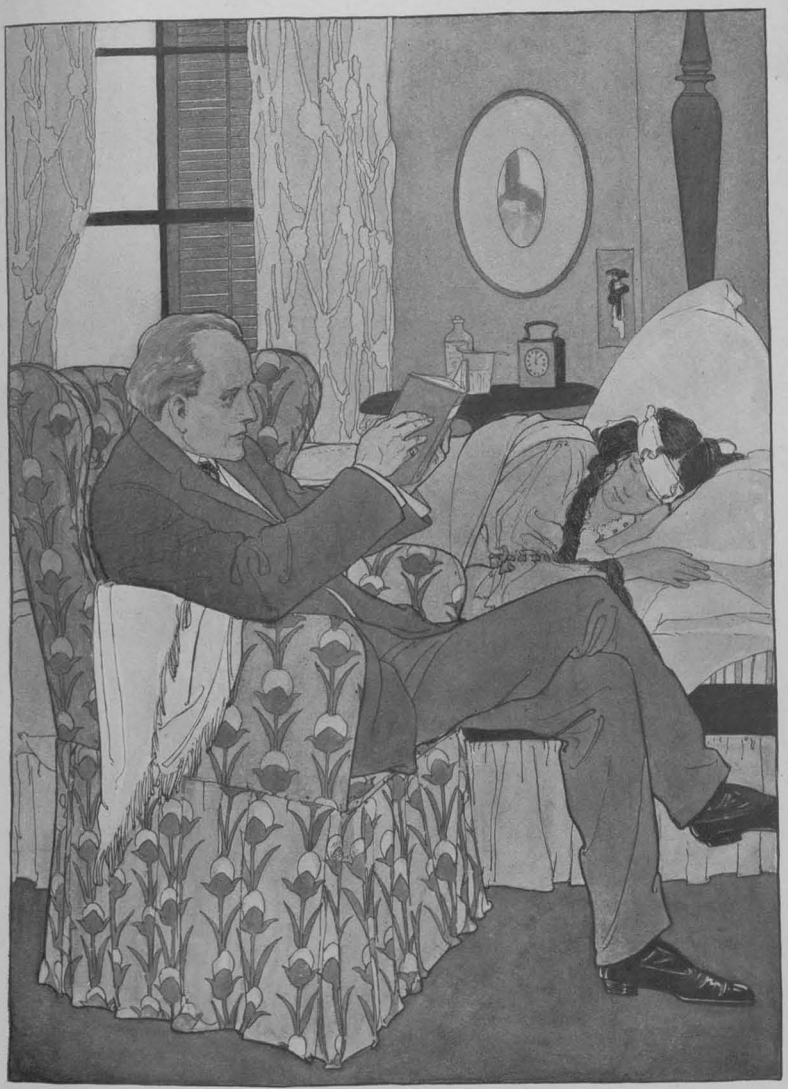
"Where is mother, Bob?" she asked quickly. "I want mother."

"Well, you 'll have to take me just now, I guess," he answered. "Mother 's gone out with father and she asked me to take care of you for a while."

"They 've both gone out?" Beth wailed, "leaving me here sick and alone?" This was indeed an unheard-of thing.

"Well, I fill up some room, I guess," her brother answered. "What do you want, anyway? Can't I do it?" Beth set him a half-dozen little tasks just to see whether he would rise to the occasion; and the big boy, clumsily but good-naturedly, performed them all. He even pushed his sister's hair back with his ball-calloused hand, and kissed her flushed cheek.

"Bob," said she, thus encouraged, "I have an awful feeling that there 's trouble hovering over us. There 's a mystery somewhere — I know there is. And that Mrs. Tatezel is in the middle of it. It was she who called mother up on the



"Her father went on reading, but neither his mind nor hers was now upon the Alps"

long-distance telephone, and it 's she that 's made her and father go away and leave me, now that I 'm sick. I see things when I lie here, Bob; and I see something black around that woman whenever I think of her. I 'm sure there 's trouble coming to us." Bob sat down on the edge of the bed, his brown eyes alight with zeal for the unusual.

"I believe for once you are right, Beth!" he exclaimed. "That woman gives me the creeps too. And father and mother were certainly sharp in their manner when they went off. They were in a hurry. And it was plain to see that they were excited. I say, look here, Sis! You get well, and we 'll ferret this thing out together."

As twilight began to fill the room, the two young people, their imaginations roused by the sense of impending calamity, amused themselves, in a gloomy sort of way, by the most extravagant guesses as to what secret could lie behind this queer woman, who seemed to have so much power over their father and mother. The family life had been so unusually open, and frank, and friendly, that there had been little room for mystery in it. The two children knew all the family friends — or had supposed so until now. Yet

here, all of a sudden, was a woman who seemed to be perfectly at home in their house; who had an extraordinary influence over the actions, and even, as they astutely perceived, over the hidden emotions of their parents. And the very name of this person had been unknown to them until a few days ago!

"There 's something queer," Elizabeth insisted.

"And we 'll find out what it is," answered Robert. Here at last, he told himself, was his chance to play Sherlock Holmes.

During the next two or three days Beth's curiosity rose and rose until it fairly overmastered her interest in her own invalidism. Her fever, too, was almost gone, and her temple was steadily healing. Nevertheless, she felt it a grievance that she had to spend so many hours alone; for her mother, while not neglecting her in any essential, was clearly distraught. No longer did father and mother spend long hours in her room, tender, comforting, playful, and altogether delightful. No! On each of their dear faces rested now a palpable shadow. They performed the full measure of their duties; but the moment these were done they took themselves away. Sometimes Beth heard them in long murmured con-

versation in their own room next to hers. At other times she knew that they went out of the house altogether, leaving her to the care of the maids, or, when school hours were over, to the care of her brother. He and she puzzled in vain over the situation. They could come to only one definite conclusion: that whatever the mystery might be, L. M. Tatezel was at the heart of it. Beth was impatient to get well, and rejoiced that every day saw an improvement.

"If I ever see that woman again," Robert declared, "I 'll follow her when she goes away. And I bet I 'll find out something." But he little guessed under what queer circumstances he was to see her that next time.

CHAPTER III

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

THAT next time proved to be a darkling raw spring day a week or so later. It was a Saturday afternoon and Bob Warfield found himself far out on the North Shore. He had been to see a baseball game, and now, coming home, had gone out of his way to look again upon that Haunted House which had so impressed his own and his sister's imagination.

The day suggested something of gloomy adventure. The air, although mild, was shot through with little spurts of cold wind, reminders that winter was not yet overthrown. The bare trees, their buds swelling like lacy knots upon the brown branches, one moment made as if to thrust forth the green tips of hope; but the next shivered and hesitated, afraid to trust the uncertain warmth. Overhead the gray-blue sky was full of hurrying clouds, all various shades of dull and lighter gray, none of them shining white. The leaf-strewn sand still held the frost

and crackled sharply beneath the boy's advancing feet. The lake, heaving, gray, sullen, spread itself far into the dim distance. Piled up in grinding cakes, granulated, dirty-looking ice marred the shore-line.

The boy was in rather a downcast mood, though, with the unconquerable zest of life belonging to his age, he took considerable satisfaction in these unaccustomed but interesting melancholy sensations. He had little cause for them except the weather, and the fact that his own particular baseball team had been badly defeated, and that the chum with whom he had expected to go home had instead gone off with some other boys, not giving a thought in his direction. He was an imaginative and sympathetic youngster, though he would have died rather than admit it, and he fully appreciated the romance of being alone in the late afternoon in rather a gloomy scene and on a gloomy errand, the external conditions so nicely fitting his own mood of defeat and desertion.

As he walked along, not too briskly, with a meditative, Hamlet-like air, he thought over the stories he had heard concerning the house he was approaching. Living in the suburbs of a

great city, he did not, of course, hear as full and circumstantial accounts of this strange domicile as he would have heard had he lived in a village, where gossip takes permanent and distinct forms. But his interest in the house itself — an interest which had lain dormant in his mind ever since early childhood, now and then rousing itself to an active curiosity — led him to remember such scraps of gossip as came to his ear. Almost unconsciously he pieced them together into a more or less coherent tale.

Years before, ran the story, this house had been bright and gay, the centre of social life, the home of a family noted for miles about. They were rich people, generous, and brilliant. Perhaps the head of the family sometimes drank a little too much, but so did many gentlemen of his day. When he was thus exhilarated he did at times strange and startling things at which the countryside wondered. But his unfailing kindness to people in distress, his generosity, and his general good will, made them overlook these aberrations.

One day a lovely young woman appeared among them as the bride of the younger son. There had been a runaway marriage. It was

said that the girl's people did not approve, and every one wondered why. She was an orphan and her own mistress, and no one, after all, had any real power to coerce her. Her relatives showed their disapproval after her marriage chiefly by letting her alone.

For a time all seemed to go well. She rode about the country on horseback with her handsome young husband, both of them gay and full of bright youth and happiness. But some cloud presently overspread their sunshine. She paled and drooped. So did he. Finally, they ceased to ride together. Both of them dropped from view, except that now and then she drove out alone, swiftly, almost recklessly, and those who saw her wondered at the expression on her face.

Then one day word went about that she was dead. There were ugly rumors of suicide. It was said that she had thrown herself off the pier, that private pier which still thrust its rotting piles out into the lake from before the gate of the Haunted House. No one knew why she had done this. There were, of course, all sorts of surmises, but not one had any show of probability.

From the moment when her drowned body was

dragged out of the lake and brought home for burial, there was no merriment in the house on the North Shore. The older people, who had long been growing frail, died within two or three months of each other. There were wild tales of the last days of the old gentleman's life. The young husband never recovered from the shock of his wife's death so soon followed by the loss of his father and mother. He shut himself utterly away from the rest of the world, and during certain days when the moon was full he walked, and walked in his garden, not pausing to eat or sleep.

It was in the full moon that she drowned herself. A party of gay young people, out rowing on the lake, were attracted by the shine of the moonlight on her upturned white face, and so brought her floating body ashore. And every month, at the full of the moon, her bereft young husband kept his vigil, walking in his garden overlooking the lake which had taken her away from him.

Some said that she walked with him at these times. Those who sometimes came home late at night along the lake shore said that you could hear her crying out; hear him pleading with her.

When storms arose, the neighbors heard these cries and saw lights dancing about in the garden and in the rooms of the house.

All these stories Robert held in his mind as he climbed a sand dune to get a better look at the house. The dune was covered, on the side toward the mainland, with a scant growth of dwarfed and struggling trees, but it was open on the lakeward side, where it was drifted over with fine sand blown so constantly about by the lake winds that no seeds could take root in it and grow. Robert stood on the top and looked down upon the Haunted House which lay almost at its feet. The height of the dune gave him an opportunity to overlook the high hedge which surrounded the garden and effectually screened it from those who passed by on the shore below.

The house itself stood in the midst of the overgrown, cheerless grounds, a forlorn though not at all ruinous reminder of bygone days of hospitality. It was built on a generous scale, and its many windows, gray and dull under the leaden skies, gave evidence that within were many well-lighted rooms. It was built in the ample but nondescript style of the early days of the Middle West. A cupola, pointed window-cornices, an

unexpected bay-window here and there, showed that those who built the house aspired to something of beauty and originality. It all looked unoccupied except two or three rooms, where curtains at the windows gave evidence of life within.

The grounds were well planted with trees now grown to a considerable size, and with clumps of ornamental shrubbery, whose young twigs were turning faintly green and yellow with the advancing tide of spring. Walks of broken asphalt twisted about among flower beds and shrubbery. In front of the house was an old fountain in the form of a naked boy and girl, their arms about each other, clinging together under a superfluous umbrella. Its basin was cracked and dry, except where a little pool of dingy water left by melting snows lingered in its deepest recesses. The ground was covered with dry leaves, sodden from long pressure of the winter snows.

At first, as Robert looked, this garden was apparently uninhabited. The stillness all about him was intense. Even when the puffs of cold wind blew in from the lake there was no responsive rustle, for the trees stood leafless, and the dead leaves upon the ground were too

weighted with the wreckage of the recent winter to move at the cold wind's bidding. As the boy peered and listened, it seemed to him that he could feel his ears stretch to catch any sound, even as his eyeballs strained to catch the sight of a moving image. Below him he heard the grinding of the ice-cakes on the shore — nothing else.

But hark! What was that? Something stirred in the dead leaves, something set them moving and rubbing against each other down there on the other side of the silent house. The sound was repeated, and then repeated, and yet again. It came at slow, regular intervals, like recurrent steps shuffling slowly along. And presently, sure enough, around the corner of the house moved the figure of a man.

Robert's heart beat so loudly and so filled his brain with hurrying blood that for a moment he could not clearly see what was before him. But in a moment more he had steadied himself to a boy's acute observation.

The man who was walking there was thin and bent, with long black hair streaked slightly with gray. He wore no hat, and the pale streaks showed plainly. He had a long black beard

which the wind parted for him and blew back on either side of his thin face. His hands were clasped behind him and he walked steadily forward, stooping over, examining the ground at his feet, with a sort of slow, dull absorption which struck the watching boy as something more than natural. The walk itself was peculiar. Robert had learned at school that walking was only a manner of falling prevented first by one foot and then by the other. But now, as he watched this man, for the first time he believed the definition. For these thin uncertain legs did not seem to move forward as if by volition or with any spring, but merely to place themselves automatically now on this side, now on that, to prevent the forward fall of the leaning body.

In another few moments the man had passed out of sight around the house, and Robert, watching, wondered whether or not he would come again to view. The wait was so long that he began to think he had caught his only glimpse of him, when the stooping figure reappeared, falling restlessly forward, now to the left, now to the right, on its slow way around the house. Again it disappeared, and again, after a

long wait, reappeared. And Robert, on his sand dune, himself concealed beneath the straggling trees, but looking out down its bare wind-swept front, got a sickening sense of what this repeated slow wandering would mean, carried on hour after hour, day after day, a walk without object, without volition, a mere repeated fall.

What fascination it was that held him there so long, watching this monotonous perambulation, he never could explain. But he stood watching, fascinated, till the chill wind grew chiller, and he found himself shivering. Then he noticed that a certain method marked the circlings of the strange man. Each circumambulation was a little farther out than the one before it. By slow degrees he was approaching the high untrimmed hedge. At length he touched it. He paused a moment, lifted his head with a quick look, searched the house and all about. Robert thought he was about to break through the barrier, and held his breath, wondering what was to happen next. But the man only resumed his slow shuffling walk and passed again out of view.

He was gone not quite so long this time, and when he reappeared there was something of intention in his slightly quickened gait. He came

nearer yet to the hedge, and when he reached it, by one quick dash he ducked under and was through.

It was evident that he had made, at some other time, a break in the hedge and that he knew his way through it. He was now out upon the bleak white sands, moving uncertainly, for a moment straight ahead, then with a waver toward the house, but moving on the whole pretty steadily toward the half-ruined pier. Robert felt that now he was about to be released from the spell that held him, that he would be required to act. But before the feeling had mounted to a definite resolve he was startled to hear a woman's voice, loud and clear, calling his own name:

"Mr. Warfield! Mr. Warfield!" It had a desperate tone, a tone of command, that brought the boy to attention as if he were a soldier to whom his superior had spoken. But before he at all comprehended what it was that he was called upon to do, a woman ran out of the gate and toward the man on the sands.

That man, seeing her, hastened his shambling steps, stumbled almost with rapidity on to the pier, slipped on one of the loose boards, and fell — or did he throw himself? — into the lake.

The woman ran swiftly after him without hesitation. When she reached the pier she dropped flat on the broken floor, and leaned far over toward the water, her arms hanging, her hands groping. She caught the long black hair of the man as his head bobbed up to the surface after his plunge. But although every muscle of her strong body contracted and pulled its best she could not lift him out of the water.

Then, indeed, Robert knew what he had to do. Slipping and sliding, he rushed headlong down the sandy slope of the dune, the last twenty or thirty feet of his run scarcely more than a single leap. He was across the beach and out on the pier in a few seconds. Looking about him with the swift glance of the man born for action he saw near by a post firmer than the rest. About this he put one arm, and, leaning forward, found that he was just able to reach the waist of the prostrate woman with the other. His feet pressed against a wedged board, and he tugged at the woman and her burden with all his young strength. She wore a leather belt, and he gripped it. Fortunately, it held, and he gradually felt her move toward him. But the strain was too severe to be long continued.

"When I count three, *jerk!*" he shouted. Then for a moment he relaxed his grasp and counted one, two, — *three,* slowly. The woman jerked valiantly on the "three," as he pulled, and he saw to his relief that they had gained several inches.

"Wait till I get a better hold," she gasped. And with a shock of surprise he recognized that there was something familiar in the voice. "There now, I've got him under the shoulders. Count!" she called.

"One, two, — *three!*" Robert shouted, and again they heaved together.

So at length, little by little, they dragged the man out of the water. When he lay upon the pier unconscious but still living, Robert looked for the first time at the woman whom he had been so valiantly assisting. He saw, not entirely to his surprise, for the voice had given him warning, that it was Mrs. Tatezel. She, too, saw for the first time who he was, and her face, deep crimson with her exertions, paled perceptibly. However, this was no time for explanations. Without a word they stooped and lifted the unconscious man between them. He was pitifully emaciated and light of weight, and the

boy and the woman carried him with little difficulty into the house.

Even in his absorption in the task before him Robert noticed that the hall through which they passed was warm and comfortable and bore the look of a well-cared-for home. This was not what he had expected of the Haunted House. They laid the man upon a wide bed in what was, Robert later concluded, Mrs. Tatezel's own room, for there were the appurtenances of feminine occupation all about.

The woman's skill and certainty of performance roused the boy's admiration. He worked under her directions without question. In the shortest possible time they had off the man's wet clothes and were rolling him to and fro in dry blankets. Mrs. Tatezel, as if she knew exactly what to do, kneaded and bent him until such water as had found his lungs came pouring forth again from between his lips. She handled him vigorously, irreverently, although his pallid face, staring eyes, and open mouth gave him the look of a corpse. Robert, aware of an instinctive shrinking from contact with him, was ashamed to yield to it and grasped him as energetically as Mrs. Tatezel herself. She left the boy pres-

ently to continue the rolling and bending while she went to get brandy. And for the few moments of her absence he was subconsciously aware of the terror of his position, bending and kneading an emaciated man there in the Haunted House — the madman himself, almost dead by his own act.

Mrs. Tatezel's return with the brandy prevented him from finishing the thought. She fed the prostrate man swiftly yet gently, and in a few moments color began to return to his pale lips and he sucked in his breath in labored but spontaneous gasps.

She sighed with relief. "There now, Robert," said she, quite as if she had known the boy from his babyhood, "go and call the doctor. The telephone is in the next room."

"What doctor?" Robert asked.

"Why, Dr. Avery, of course," Mrs. Tatezel answered, briskly. "Who else?" Her tone was so perfectly matter of fact that the astonishing events of the afternoon almost felt homelike because of it.

When Dr. Avery heard who it was that was talking and what had happened, there was evident even in the physician's trained and carefully noncommittal voice considerable excitement.

"Who did you say this was?" he asked, over the telephone. "Robert Warfield! How the Dickens did you get out there? — Well, never mind, I 'm coming right over. I 'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Bob went back to Mrs. Tatezel and she asked him to light the fire which lay ready in the old-fashioned fireplace. Together they dragged the bed up closer to the heat. The man upon it now breathed stertorously but regularly. His lips had gone from white to a dull purple. His eyes were closed but sunken deep beneath the black brows.

Again Mrs. Tatezel left the boy alone while she hastened to the kitchen to fill hot-water bottles. And he, feeding the fire before him, was fairly afraid to look around at that tortured face upon the bed.

When Mrs. Tatezel had returned and put the hot bottles around the patient there was an awkward pause. Nothing more was to be done now but wait for the doctor.

"What did he say?" Mrs. Tatezel asked finally.

"That he would be here in fifteen minutes," the boy answered. He had told her so immediately on his return from the telephone, but both

of them felt that this was a safe topic upon which to converse.

But Mrs. Tatezel was not very good at evasion.

"Robert," she burst forth, suddenly, "I want you to promise not to say one word about this to your father and mother."

The boy was startled. Inwardly he had for some time been thinking what a tale he would have to tell at home, and wondering what his father and mother would say to it. He had always been in the habit of talking over every important event with them. Never had he kept a secret of any moment from them in his life; and now, just when the most exciting thing through which he had ever lived had occurred, he was asked to keep still about it! Suspicion and reluctance both dictated his reply.

"I don't see why not," he said. "I think they ought to know every word of it."

"Not now, not now!" Mrs. Tatezel cried out, and there was something so beseeching in her voice that the boy stood staring at her, moved out of his unfriendly suspicion.

"Why don't you want me to tell?" he asked. But to this question Mrs. Tatezel found no answer.

"I can't tell you why," she said. "But oh, trust me a little! You certainly ought n't to tell them about it just now. There are reasons. There are very good reasons!"

Just here the door-bell rang, and Robert started to answer it. But he met Dr. Avery striding toward him. The doctor had rung merely to announce his coming, and had not waited for the door to be opened but had pushed right in. He gave Bob one keen look and a distinct frown as he passed him, but no other greeting. He hurried swiftly to his patient, who for the next half-hour absorbed all his attention. Bob stood about a little awkwardly, very ready to run errands or help in any way, but not knowing what to do. When at last the sick man was as comfortable as he could hope to be, Mrs. Tatezel, to Robert's great surprise, claimed the doctor as her ally.

"Dr. Avery," she said suddenly, "I want to speak to you about something. I have asked Robert here not to let his father and mother know about this afternoon's doings. I have asked him to promise me, but he seems to think he ought n't to. You tell him, Doctor. He 'll believe in you."

The doctor turned slowly around toward the

boy. The sun had gone down by this time; the room was full of shadows, and lighted only by the fire. Through the dimness Robert felt that this old family friend was regarding him steadfastly and without approval.

"How did you come here?" the doctor asked.

"I was walking home from the baseball grounds," Robert answered, "and I went around by the lake shore."

"Long way home," growled the doctor. "About two miles out of your way, I should say."

"Yes. I wanted to come around by the lake shore," said the boy. He paused a moment and then thrust up his chin with defiance. "To tell the truth, I wanted to get a better look at this house. I had heard so many stories about it."

Mrs. Tatezel took a step nearer the doctor. She put out her hand and grasped his arm. Robert could feel the intensity of the silence in which they both listened for further explanation.

"So I stood upon the sand dune there —" he nodded out of the window to where the scrub-set hill bulked against the evening sky. "And as I was looking down I saw a man run out on to

the pier and fall into the water. Then I heard Mrs. Tatezel call me — "

"What?" exclaimed she, at this.

"Yes," said Robert, innocently looking around at her, "you called me by name twice. 'Mr. Warfield! Mr. Warfield!' you said."

"Go on," said the doctor.

"So I ran to help, and that 's all," the boy concluded.

"And you helped splendidly," cried Mrs. Tatezel. ("I should think it was about time," Robert indignantly told himself.) "Doctor, he saved Mr. Clifford's life if ever any one did."

"So did you," cried Robert, not to be outdone in generosity. "Gee! But you 're strong."

In this exchange of admirations a friendlier feeling sprang up, so that it was with more tolerance that Robert listened to what Dr. Avery had to say:

"I don't doubt you both did nobly; and Robert, I think you had better heed what Mrs. Tatezel says and not speak about this to your father and mother. I know it 's an extraordinary request," he went on, noticing the boy's open-mouthed astonishment. "But there are reasons why neither your father nor your mother should

be unnecessarily troubled just now. And I am afraid that this would trouble them." He stopped himself as if wondering whether he had gone too far; and Robert wondered why it should trouble them so much.

"You see, you have been in a good deal of danger yourself," the doctor answered his unspoken question. "It is all an adventure and not just what they would choose for you, I fancy. Anyway — er — just keep still for a while. Perhaps after a time, when your father is feeling better, I may find reason to let you off your promise. But just now I wish you would give it."

"My promise!" the boy exclaimed, for his word was a very sacred thing with him. He had almost a superstitious awe of it. From his earliest childhood it had been held by both his parents to be something sacred, so that a promise once spoken was to him so binding that it was as if he could not escape from it; as if it were actual shackles upon his freedom. Consequently, he dreaded very much to give a promise upon any occasion.

"Yes, your promise," said Dr. Avery, firmly.

"Your promise," echoed Mrs. Tatezel, sol-

emnly. The flickering fire upon the hearth leapt up and lighted their serious faces, their two pairs of eyes bent compellingly upon the reluctant boy. Behind them, the sick man stirred a little and moaned. Out of the shadows that filled the Haunted House presences seemed to draw near, tragic presences, intent on atonement. Their thoughts and feelings vibrated toward him, touching his heart as if with delicate appealing fingers, releasing the innermost springs of conduct. He wetted his dry lips.

"I promise," he managed to stammer at last.

CHAPTER IV

THE ATTIC'S SECRETS

UNDER ordinary conditions Bob would have at once reported this adventure, all confusing and exciting as it was, not only to Beth but to his father and mother. He would have bombarded them with insistent questions, not so very subtle to be sure, but so direct and unscrupulous that they were not to be evaded. For a Grand Inquisitor commend me to your bull-headed boy! You breathlessly yield him his point very soon after he gets to work on you, and you are glad to escape with your life.

But this time he was uncomfortably hampered by his promise. He was afraid to ask questions, lest he might betray himself and be questioned in turn. He did n't mind Beth; but he hesitated to put himself within reach of his parents' keen minds.

He comforted himself with the reflection that such questioning would, after all, be too short a

cut to the solution of the mystery he was stalking. It would be rather a tame procedure. Just now the world was delightfully full of mystery and creeps — should he break its charm by direct questioning? More than once he had forced from his father and mother explanations altogether too tamely satisfactory. Up to the time of those explanations the world of his consciousness had been like a brilliantly colored toy balloon, light and bouncy and free, untrammelled by gravitation and other earthly laws; afterwards, it had been like a collapsed balloon, a single puncturing fact chaining it to earth, helpless and unlovely. After many experiences he had grown wary, and now kept his toy balloon well inflated with the gas of imagination, and as far as possible beyond the reach of facts. He felt this a wise course to pursue even now when he had hold of what looked like a genuinely exciting secret.

However, none of these reflections kept him from tormenting Beth, now quite herself again, with hints of incommunicable and highly desirable knowledge which he possessed but could not share with her.

"I 'd like to tell you, Sis, honest I would," he would protest; "but I can't. I 'm under oath.

If you could have known the conditions under which I took that oath! It was dark. The dying man — oh, I did n't mean to say that! I 've done wrong to give you such hints. Promise me you will not betray me!"

"Oh, go on with you!" Beth would exclaim, pushing him away as he rushed toward her with hands clasped in melodramatic pleading. "Dying man, indeed! Think you can take me in with such talk? I don't believe you have any secret at all! You 're just showing off!"

"No, I 'm not," he assured her, in so earnest a tone that she believed him. "It 's a really truly secret; worth knowing, too! My, but you 'd be interested!"

"Then why don't you tell me, Bob? Please do!" she pleaded.

"You could n't keep it," Bob said slowly, as if tempted to yield. "Gee! I 'd love to tell you, though!" And this, being true, sounded true.

"Come along! Tell! Here 's my ear," Beth coaxed. Bob approached it on tiptoe, with exaggerated caution. He stooped to whisper in it. Beth held her breath to listen. For a minute he stood pouring uneven pantings into it, so near

her ear-drum that he sounded, as she told him, like a disarranged steam engine. But now she endured patiently.

"I — I — can't," he gasped out at last.

"Why not?"

"I promised." And at this the memory of that scene in the Haunted House rushed over him, and he looked so really solemn and intense, so much as if he were in truth guarding an awful mystery, that Beth was fairly frantic with baffled curiosity. By enacting this scene with variations he took off the edge of his own intense desire to communicate, and managed to endure his enforced reticence with something approaching enjoyment.

Another circumstance contributed to make it easier for him to keep this secret from his father and mother; for they had lately become rather unapproachable. His father, particularly, seemed wrapped in gloom. He was not very well. His appetite steadily failed, although Mrs. Warfield coaxed it by giving him special dishes. When she served the rest of the family to chicken, she gave him a slice of broiled ham, all to himself. When they had ham, he had half a spring chicken. Every night he got his favorite dessert, an indi-

vidual apple-pie, with Swiss cheese. Yet still he did not eat well. Occasionally the children had seen him before in a mood something like this; but never in so black a one.

Had they been subtle observers they would have noticed that, at those other times, as now, their mother had eyes and ears for no one but her husband. Her masterfulness always rose to such occasions, and she ordered all her household as a general orders his army when preparing for imminent battle. Her children, usually the first of her care, accustomed to gentleness and consideration, suddenly found themselves under almost military discipline, obliged to obey short, terse orders, without explanation. They rebelled, of course, and stormy seasons followed. Thereupon something radical was sure to happen; for Margaret was none of your half-way women. And then all grew serene again.

In such a mood as this, Bob well knew, his mother would never submit to be questioned. She was capable of crisply bidding him hold his tongue; and, if he persisted, of ordering him from the room, or quitting it herself in a dignified but chilling silence. He could not even succeed in getting an answer to those first innocent-

sounding questions by which he usually entrapped her kindly unsuspicion.

But although the children were thus weather-wise to their parents' moods, and knew now that the danger signal was flying, they had never observed the cause and effect of these moods sufficiently to know that something was sure to happen. Therefore their rage and amazement were great when they were suddenly told, without adequate explanation, that they were not to go back to school at the end of the spring vacation but were to go out to Wyoming a full six weeks ahead of the usual time.

It was n't that they preferred school to the ranch — far from it. But they were affected by the home weather conditions and were fractious and contrary. Besides, they were really distressed at the way their school work was broken into, and always had been. They were ambitious youngsters, clever and capable. Give them time, and they were sure to head their classes. Beth was a social leader; Bob was good at straight hard work and at games. But no sooner did they find themselves forging to the front in the school world, than they were taken out and set to living an unintellectual, outdoorish life, in which, gradu-

ally, their strained young nerves and brains quivered into quiet again. They always rebelled at this, for they both liked to win, and even liked the excitement and exhilaration of working on their nerves. They *liked* to be keyed-up — think of it! But that was because they had never yet been suffered to feel the consequences of reaction.

Their teachers' attitude intensified this rebellion. Naturally they did not like these absences, accounted for only on the vaguest general grounds as necessitated by the state of health of the sturdiest youngsters in the class. Not being able to get at Mr. and Mrs. Warfield themselves, they vented their sarcastic remonstrances on Beth and Bob, till both of them fairly dreaded going back to school after one of these apparently uncalled-for absences.

And now here was another one of them, and the longest absence of all. The two young people fumed and fussed and stormed. But their mother cut them short, and sent them up into the attic to sort out their summer paraphernalia, and put everything there into order. It was one of her annoying rules that the town house must always be left in perfect order, from garret to cellar, before the Western trip was undertaken.

So to-day Bob and Beth were up close under the roof pulling over boxes and trunks, and making a very long job of it. They wondered, rather, that their efficient mother did not put in an appearance, stop their fooling, and send them right about face to the serious business of cleaning and packing. She was downstairs helping her husband to make out lists of articles required at the ranch, and endeavoring, with the whole force of her buoyant nature, to bring something of cheerfulness to his set face.

He, for his part, performed the tasks she found for him with a grim sort of endurance, determined to do his best even in distasteful details. A smile of half tender amusement touched now and then the corners of his lips as he watched his wife keeping him busy.

"You need n't think you fool me, Margaret," he said suddenly. "I see through you. But it 's all right, and I 'll do my best to second your efforts."

Margaret blushed to the roots of the brown hair which was just beginning to turn gray, then she hid her face against him and clung there tight.

"I know I 'm very silly, dear, and I never could

hide things from you. Oh, if we were only out in the country! There would be plenty of work; big, interesting work; heavy work such as men love; work that would prove to you how good and strong your muscles are, and send you to bed at night ready to sleep for ten hours at a stretch!"

"We're getting there, my dear, as fast as your housekeeping will let us. Give me a little time on the ranch and I'll be all right again." From his pocket he took a big black cigar and began to smoke it. His wife looked at it anxiously, started to speak, but closed her lips against the eager words. After a minute's silence she began to talk again, but on another subject.

"I am worried about Bob, dear. He doesn't look right to me, or act right either. He is still talking in his sleep, and he twitches his shoulders suddenly, something as Beth did when we thought she might be going to have St. Vitus's Dance. He doesn't like to kiss me, either, as he used to do, and once or twice I have detected the smell of tobacco. Do you suppose he can be smoking?"

"Oh, I daresay," said Warfield, indifferently. He was looking over a catalogue of a farmer's supply house.

"Bob and Beth were up close under the roof pulling over boxes and trunks, and making a very long job of it"

"Richard! How can you speak of it so lightly? You know he ought not to smoke. You know it 's bad for him."

"Well, my dear, lots of better men than Bob have learned to smoke." He took up his pen and began to fill out the order-blank which came with the catalogue.

"But, Richard," Margaret began impetuously, "Bob is n't like other men, you know — " she caught her breath suddenly as if she had said too much, then hurried on. "He is too nervous, too high-strung, too fine-fibred to do such a thing with impunity. Bob, as you know, dear, has just got to be better than other men, or — or — " She did not finish, but in her heart she said "he will be worse."

Now ordinarily Warfield would have completed for her that which she had left unsaid. It was their custom to face together with open eyes this fear that haunted their hearts; but to-day he did not — perhaps he could not — rouse himself. He went on writing his orders. Margaret watched him for a few moments, her throat swelling. She dreaded this self-absorption, but she could not put her dread into words. This was one thing that she must fight alone. Here she missed the com-

panionship, the unfailing help of her husband. Characteristically, she sought refuge in action.

"Well, I must go upstairs and see how those children are getting on in the attic," she said, in a few moments. "I daresay they are just dressing up in their ranch clothes, and fussing, and dawdling, and getting nothing done at all. I do wish they would take a little responsibility." She lingered to see whether her husband would accept this bait and join with her in one of their family discussions as to the training of the children. But he did not seem to hear, and with a sigh she left him and mounted to the attic.

As she came into the big dim room, shadowy under its sloping roof, she thought she detected something furtive and startled in the children's attitude. They had been sorting over a box of old photographs, and piles of old newspapers and magazines showed what other boxes they had been going through.

"Now, what on earth," she began, in her tone of housewifely generalship, "made you begin with these old things? I should think you might see that they could be left till the larger things were done. That box of papers was in order anyway. It needed only dusting and to be set

back under the eaves. Pick up the papers at once, Bob, and put them back. We have just got to get this attic into some sort of shape to-day or we shall never get off."

Bob, stooping to his task with a growl about "the way women exaggerated," dropped from the inside pocket of his coat a package of cigarettes. His mother was upon it in a moment and held it accusingly before his startled eyes.

"Robert," she said solemnly, and dilated until she seemed to touch the roof in the highest part of the attic, "do you mean to tell me that you have been smoking? And worst of all, that you have been concealing it from me?" There was something of so much deeper feeling in her voice than he felt justified by the occasion, that Bob resented it.

"What a fuss to make about a few cigarettes!" he growled. "Why, all the fellows smoke them, and I only smoke two a day."

"Two a day!" His mother's voice was deep and tragic. "And how long has this been going on, Robert?"

"Oh, only a few weeks."

"And for a few weeks," she said, "you have been doing twice a day what you knew I would

not approve, and keeping it a secret from me; and yet every night receiving my blessing and letting me go to sleep feeling sure of the loyalty and faith of my only son." She spoke slowly, with an inward voice, as if she counted out with the words a pain which she was just learning to measure.

"Well," flung out the boy, "I knew if I told you you 'd make me stop, and I did n't want to stop. You are always interfering with a fellow! You 'd say you 'd let me alone, of course, but mighty well I know you 'd never let up till you got me to stop. Telling you things is just like quitting 'em, and I 'm not ready to quit. I 'm not going to, either. I guess I 've got a few rights!"

Margaret stood silent, pressing her hand to her heart. Tears sprang to her eyes and she turned away to conceal them.

"That will do, Robert," she said presently, in an unexpectedly gentle voice. "I see you are in no mood to discuss it now. Some other time we will talk this over. I know that you cannot always feel as you feel now. Sometime you will have to be again my good and trustworthy son." Her voice was very low; it was evident that she put great control upon herself; and Bob, sulkily

picking up the papers, felt within him the unwelcome conviction that presently she would control him too.

Then Beth spoke up. These two usually acted in concert, though their actions were never quite alike.

"I have got something to say too, mother, about some of my rights," she began. "I don't think it 's fair of you to put us at house-cleaning all this week when you know perfectly well that we can afford to hire help enough to do the work."

"This," said Margaret, looking around the attic, "this is not the sort of thing that we can hire out. Here are the records of our personal lives," — Bob and Beth exchanged quick glances, — "and I would n't have any stranger look into those records even if we were a hundred times as rich as we are."

"But where do we come in?" cried Beth, energetically; and began a time-honored remonstrance. Her mother looked badgered and worried, as well as impatient, as she stood, not so much listening as enduring. All of a sudden her brave cheerfulness and determination seemed to collapse.

"Oh, Beth," she cried out, "don't! Don't

bother me this morning! You can't know how many things have gone wrong, nor what lies heavy on my heart."

Beth was secretly touched by this cry, but she could not so suddenly abandon her abused attitude.

"Well, whose fault is it?" she said roughly. "You plunged into all this house-cleaning without waiting to plan it or to engage a man, or anything. I should think you *would* be bothered! But I don't think it 's fair."

Here Margaret turned upon them, her patience gone.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," she burst forth. "Such pampered children as you are! Just because your father happens to have a little money — such dearly bought money!" — she added below her breath, "are you to consider yourselves lifted above the necessity of work, elected from all the toilers of the earth to have your own way in everything? Whom do you think yourselves that you should suppose this world made only to fit your idle moods? Oh, if I believed that this little money would tend to make you idle and self-indulgent, shirking work, and counting your desires as rights, I

would destroy every cent of it!" She paused and leaned to peer into the faces of her children, who sat, abashed for the moment, upon boxes of papers and photographs. Her voice, when she spoke next, had that strange inward sound which they had learned to dread.

"I wonder if it is so," she said. "It is written, 'A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.' If it is so; if, after all, we are living in too much luxury and too much idleness, I know what I have to do." She went away out of the attic, leaving behind her the silence of dismay. Beth was the first to recover herself.

"My gracious! When mother takes to feeling things and talking out we have n't any show at all!" she exclaimed.

"Well, she can't boss me," said Bob, doggedly. His jaw took a set like that of his father's; but his great love for his mother tugged at his heart. An oppressive silence reigned in the attic. Beth sat musing upon her woes; Bob went on picking up the papers. Suddenly a recollection came to him.

"Say, Beth, where is that article we were reading?" he said. "We did n't finish it."

Beth had been sitting on it. Glad of the relief,

she jumped up and held forth the yellowed paper marked with blue pencil. The paragraph so designated was under the head of "Casualties," and it read as follows:

"The body of a young woman was discovered floating in the lake yesterday by a party of young people, who turned it over to Officer James McQuinn. It had evidently been in the water for some days, and was carried at once to Murdstone's morgue. It was that of a young woman not more than 18 or 20 years old, slight, and with very long dark hair. The underclothes were marked with the initials L. M. T. and furnished the only clue to the identity of the wearer. The body will be held for several days at the morgue awaiting identification."

"Now, this is a mighty curious thing," mused Bob. "'L. M. T.' — Those are the initials of that queer woman who lives — " he checked himself suddenly. "But she is n't dead," he went on. "Or, if she is, she is the most life-like ghost I ever saw." He laughed a little uncertainly, trying to bravado out his heartache.

"They are the initials of L. M. Tatezel," cried his sister. "Who do you suppose she is, anyway? Ever since she came here that day, father and mother have acted queer."

"Yes, poor old daddy does n't seem to be able to scare up a smile from anywhere. I have n't seen anything about the mater, though, until to-day, when she got so uncommon stirred up about nothing at all."

"And then they were away so long on Sunday; gone the whole afternoon, while we were sent over to call on Rosalie Barnard. I believe, on my soul, they sent us there on purpose, Bob — to have us out of the way! I thought it was a little queer at the time, but I wanted to see Rosalie so bad I did n't care. And after they came back they would n't tell us a single thing about where they had been. They came home in a hired carriage, too. I don't think it 's fair they should treat us so," complained Beth. "They used to tell us all sorts of things, even when we were little, and now that we are grown up and old enough to be trusted they won't let us know anything at all."

Bob viciously kicked over the box of photographs. The pictures flew out all over the floor, and among them was one which left both of the young folks staring. It was without doubt a picture of the mysterious house upon the lake front. It had been taken, evidently, in the days of its prosperity, for lace curtains adorned the

windows, and flowers and vines diversified the front. Upon the steps was seated a little group of people, apparently father, mother, and two sons. And one of these sons, as the young people both recognized, was their own father. This house, then, had been the family home. But why had this fact been concealed from them?

Curiosity stirred in them almost to the stifling of conscience. For a long time they sat arguing and guessing. But all their efforts to find a solution that would fit the facts were unavailing. Beth grew tired first; and her heart had a chance to be heard.

"Bob," she said, after a few minutes' reflection, "I don't believe we've been very nice to mother. This secret, whatever it is, can't be a very happy one. And she must be troubled about it."

"She said so," admitted Bob.

"Then let's get to work and clean the attic up as well as we can, to prove that we really do love her. We ought n't to add to the weight of her sorrows!" And moved by this noble reflection they set resolutely to work.

That night the moon looked in upon the big shadowy attic, keeping its secrets in a dignified

order and quiet. The marked paper and the old photograph had again, as on the occasion of so many other spring cleanings, been restored to their old places, when they might better have been destroyed.

CHAPTER V

EN ROUTE FOR WYOMING

IN spite of their rebellion Bob and Beth could not but feel the exhilaration of their start for Wyoming. That vast, sparsely peopled State represented to them the land of freedom and adventure. For some years now they had owned a ranch there far up on the Shoshone River on the edge of the National Forest Reserve. Every summer they stopped school before the other children and went into the wilderness, to remain until October. But this was the first time they had started off so early and had shown such a reckless disregard of school requirements.

The real reason for this procedure — a reason quite unsuspected by the children, and even by himself — was Warfield's preoccupation and self-absorption. Even during the bustle of preparation he had not been quite up to the mark. He had, indeed, performed all the tasks that naturally fell to him as the masculine head of the family,

but in them he had shown neither enthusiasm nor initiative. His wife set him the task and prodded him to the performance of it. Now and then he even rebelled at what he termed her exactions; and then she would be very meek, and quiescent, and troubled. Nothing seemed so to dismay her and to dishearten her as these sudden bursts of irritability upon the part of a husband who was usually kindness itself. But in the general hurly-burly these more subtle indications passed unnoticed by both the younger people.

One fact, however, loomed so large and significant that even in the midst of their activities they paused to speculate upon it. Mrs. Tatezel — actually L. M. Tatezel! — was going with them.

"It 's mighty queer," said Bob as he folded up a thick blue flannel shirt, ready to lay in his trunk.

"It 's mighty horrid!" exclaimed Beth. She was folding a new short divided skirt made of khaki, a garment full of suggestions of coming good times on horseback. "How do you suppose she 'll fit in out on the ranch? She was probably never west of the Mississippi River. And we all live so close together in that log

cabin, Bob, that we can never escape her. She 'll hear all our secrets."

"Well, perhaps," Bob urged as a consolation, "we 'll hear hers."

"There 's something in that," acknowledged Beth. She pulled on her new felt hat before the mirror, punched its crown into four little dents, and tightened the scarlet strap that bound it. "Say, Bob, I don't believe any of the millinery hats I wear in town are half as becoming as this." Bob glanced at her for a second, taking a brotherly pride in her growing good looks.

"You 're all right," he said, "but you need n't spend all your time before the looking-glass. Better get busy with your packing or you 'll never get done."

The next day they were all aboard the train, speeding out from under the great vaulted depot, through the grimy environs of the city, on and on into the Far West. By degrees they left behind them the green populous lowlands of the Mississippi Valley, and on the second day out began to rise into the dry plains which formed the first sloping approach to the Rocky Mountains. Towns were less frequent; fields less cultivated; trees rarer. Along the banks of streams

they still grew, and under them grass and little, juicy, green plants waved and flourished. But for mile after mile the high plains stood bare and brown and treeless. Cattle grazed over them, though it was not apparent to those who looked out from the windows of the Pullman on what they were feeding. Whatever it was, it was not grass; and it looked so brown and dry that it seemed impossible that these cattle should ever give milk. Nor, indeed, were they raised for that purpose. Unlike the lowland cattle, whose udders hung full of nourishment, these thin, active creatures were raised wholly for beef. The Pullman rolled smoothly past long freight trains, sidetracked to let it pass, headed for Chicago and Kansas City; trains crowded with lowing cattle whose wild eyes looked out through the bars of that prison from which they would escape only to death. The hot suffocating smell of their packed bodies came in through the double windows of the Pullman, and made the women cough and turn away their heads.

For untold miles the train sped over these great plains. The eyes of the passengers grew weary as they watched the gray sage-brush, globular in form; the brown and white earth;

and presently the red rocks beginning to crop up and foretelling the mountains. The land, as if agitated by some slow primeval passion, began to rise into abrupt hills, which, strange-shaped, sliced, and terraced, rose beetling from the sage-brush. At more and more infrequent intervals the train crossed a stream, which carried with it always instantaneous greenery.

As the country changed, so also did the passengers in the car. At first they were well-dressed, reserved people, intent each one upon his own affairs, and ignoring with polite indifference all the other passengers; but as the train got farther west the passengers became fewer, and those who remained grew more friendly with each other. Women especially dropped off from the speeding train at all the little towns along the way. In imagination one saw them busy in the freshly painted, comfortable houses set along beside the new streets. But as the houses became rougher and the towns newer, the living in every way less luxurious, the women became scarcer. Was it because they scorned to live in these pioneer places? Or was it because, if they had lived in them, the places themselves would have changed their aspect? At any rate, it happened,

on the third day out, that Mrs. Warfield, Mrs. Tatezel, and Beth were the only women in their car.

From the beginning Beth had attracted considerable attention. She was undeniably pretty; and somehow, as the train sped farther west, her good looks took on an added value. Something about her youth and freshness; something, too, about her strong young frame, seemed to match this vast sun-filled expanse. The men who came and went from town to town accorded her a hearty, frank, and yet chivalrous admiration. And she herself bore these attentions with entire equanimity. Any observer less keen-sighted than her own mother would have said that she was quite unconscious of it.

However, it seemed to make Mrs. Tatezel distinctly uneasy. Beth could not shake herself free from that woman's determined espionage. Whenever the girl went out on the observation platform or got off to walk up and down at some station where the engine stopped for water, there was Mrs. Tatezel beside her. Angry rebellion filled the girl's heart. Never before had she been watched like this, and she resented it intensely. She appealed to her mother; but Mar-

garet, amused, only shook her head and patted her daughter's hand.

"Never mind, dear," she said, "we shall be there in a little while. Then you can have all the freedom you want. After all, Mrs. Tatezel means no harm." She paused a moment, as if reflecting how much she ought to say on the subject. Then she went on. "If you knew her story as well as I do you would be very gentle with her, and help her to enjoy this journey as much as possible, even at some sacrifice of yourself."

"What is her story?" Beth asked, seizing the opportunity. But her mother shook her head.

"Not just now, I think, dear. Some day you will know it, and I should be glad if you could so far win Mrs. Tatezel's confidence and friendship that she would tell you something of it herself. I am afraid she would greatly resent my speaking of it to you. But take my word for her good intentions, and be a little patient with her."

Even the journey did not wholly rouse Richard Warfield from that abstraction which had come to be with him almost a permanent mood. His wife watched him anxiously and coaxed him to be interested in all the varied aspects of the jour-

ney, but almost in vain. Bob and Beth, accustomed to the most cordial comradeship with him, insisted on pulling him out of the train every now and then, when it stopped; walking him briskly up and down the platform; and pestering him with questions. He submitted, but he was plainly bored, and much oftener than ever before he escaped from them all into the smoking car, where occasionally Bob followed him. But although he sat here beside his father, and felt of the cigarettes in his own pocket, he did not quite venture to smoke them in his presence.

Beth was easily queen of every gathering on the observation platform. For her the men gathered wild flowers, handing up to her from beside the track bunches of Indian paint-brushes, of wild parsley, bluebells, and Michaelmas daisies. In their zeal to get for her the best the prairies afforded they once or twice ran the risk of being left by the train. They ran and scrambled on to the platform, standing on the coupling iron and clinging to the high railing. Beth herself gave them a hand to help them over.

They vied with each other, these men, young, old, middle-aged, ranchers, miners, and commercial travellers, in telling stories which should elicit

her frank girlish laugh. One of them was a bishop, his diocese extending over several hundred miles of sparsely peopled territory. He wore his clerical robes with dignity, and without consciousness, and seemed to be even more of a man than a priest. Beth took a great liking to him, and Mrs. Tatezel's vigilance relaxed when he was present. He told tale after tale of his experience among these Western people. Ninety-five per cent, he said, of the inhabitants of the ranches and little towns had fled to the West from mistakes and disasters, and sometimes even from crimes committed in the East. It was the part of courtesy to ask no questions about the place a man came from, or his reasons for leaving.

"When you strike Wyoming," said the bishop, "you leave the past behind you. Everybody is ready to give you a welcome and a chance. What you may have done before you came to them they are willing to disregard. Most of them have occasion to ask a like courtesy at your hands. But for all that, they expect you to prove yourself square according to their own standards. Perhaps their standards may look a little queer to people who belong in a more conventional civilization; but there is a good deal of sense in

them after all. A good deal of sense," he repeated, as if his own conviction were still growing upon him. "And they live up to these standards in the most surprising way. I should say that eighty-five per cent of them at least turn out to be law-abiding, decent, self-respecting citizens."

The bishop, being an idealist, and a lover of his kind, was fond of bolstering up his enthusiastic estimates by a display of what he fondly hoped would pass as mathematical accuracy.

"There are some things, of course," he went on, "that I don't like, and that I can't change. I keep on trying to change them just the same, and once in a while I get into trouble about them. But while most of my people think I am a little over-particular in my objections to saloons, and gambling, and indiscriminate shooting, yet they allow me considerable freedom of opinion after all. So long as it remains *opinion*, I am fairly safe." Everybody laughed at this, but the bishop, looking mildly surprised, put up a hand of protest.

"Well, it 's not so easy as you might think," he said. "Opinions, even as opinions, have a certain moral force and may bring a man into trouble. For instance: One day I was preaching

a sermon in a schoolhouse out near Basin. I had just been saying that a lot of the trouble in this country came from drinking and shooting; and I warmed up to my subject and told them what I thought of it in good strong language, without any frills. I told them they had no business to carry firearms about with them, especially when they were in the habit of putting themselves into a state where they might shoot their best friend, or even a woman. Now, in the audience there was a notorious character, called Highpockets. He had already made several trips to the saloon on his way to the schoolhouse, and he took such exception to my remarks about shooting women, that he rose and drew out his pistol and aimed it at me. Fortunately for me, the girls who sat near him knocked up his arm, so spoiling his aim that the bullet went through the ceiling. Then the men came to their aid and they wrenched the pistol out of his hand and hustled him out of the room.

"The next morning one of the men in town came to me and warned me that I had better stay indoors that day; that Highpockets had sworn to have my life. While I was yet meditating on this unwelcome intelligence another man came

and told me to go out and act just as if nothing had happened. 'If Highpockets tries any of his nonsense on you,' he said, 'we 've got our eye on him, and we 'll hang him to the nearest post.' Now this advice was considerably more to my liking than the other one, even though I am opposed to lynching — on general principles, you know — there may be special occasions — well, anyhow, I went out. Sure enough, I ran into the man almost the first thing. I could see my friends drawing near to the doors of the saloons, peering out from the blacksmith shop, and otherwise getting ready to protect me. But I thought I 'd try another tack.

"'Hello, Highpockets!' I said easily, 'how 's the wife this morning? And is the little girl coming down with mumps on the other side too?' Well, that settled him. He told me all about his wife and went home with me to get some medicine for his little girl."

At the next station a new family came on board. It consisted of an old-time gold-miner, his daughter, and the daughter's child. On the man's face were to be seen the plain marks of the strenuous days he had lived through. He was full of humor and thrilling stories of ad-

venture; yet he was so well preserved, so active, and so instinct with vitality, that Beth for one thought him rather the husband than the father of the sweet-faced young woman. He knew life in the States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Gulf of Mexico to Behring Sea, and he had in consequence a wide tolerance for men and varying customs.

But the daughter knew scarcely more than the life of the home ranch, and of the town to which they had moved when she became a young woman. She was devout and narrow, knowing but one way of righteousness, and holding her clean, scant skirts closely about her that they might not spread over its borders.

The little girl was evidently the pride and joy of her grandfather's life. He loaded her with candy, bananas, and cookies at every lunch station, and submitted sweetly to be interrupted in the midst of his choicest yarns by demands for a drink of water.

A little before sunset the Warfields' sleeper was dropped from the main train, which went on across the country to Oregon. The one car bound for Cody waited behind on the side track for the coming of another engine and train which

would pull it into the further fastnesses of Wyoming. This other train was late, and for long hours the car lay silent, out on the bosom of the swelling plain. The sense of space was tremendous. From the car windows one looked forth over uncounted miles of treeless, heaving, gray-brown earth rising to snow-covered peaks in the west. Forty or fifty miles the eye took in at a glance. The commercial traveller said that he had learned to estimate distance out here chiefly by multiplication. You took a given point, say that red rock over there, made up your mind that it was about ten miles away, multiplied your idea by five and probably hit it. You might fall short a few miles, but you would be near enough for a tenderfoot guess.

The silence, after three or four days of the steady rumble and rattle, puff and shriek, of the moving train, was almost equally impressive. It fairly beat upon the ears of the travellers when they went outside the car and sat for a while apart. They came back together gladly, just to hear the car's small space filled with the chatter of human voices.

When nightfall came, Beth and Bob, the commercial traveller, and the bishop sat down to a

game of cards. That the bishop with his clerical collar and high vest should indulge in such a worldly pastime confirmed the gold-miner's daughter in her opinion of the church which he represented. She felt that the two young people were in dangerous company, and wondered that their father and mother, comfortably reading across the aisle, could permit them to enter upon a path which led so briefly to perdition. But the four played on quite unconscious. Mrs. Tatezel sat opposite watching the game with a sort of dry interest. She seemed to be wondering what it was that these four could find to laugh over in the fall of the cards.

The porter made up the berth for the little girl, and presently from behind its drawn curtains came the sound of her childish voice raised in prayer. The card-players laid down their cards reverently, and the commercial traveller removed from between his lips his unlighted cigar.

"Now I lay me down to sleep,"

the sweet little voice murmured, every word distinct in the encompassing silence.

"I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Beth's eyes happened to rest on Mrs. Tatezel's face. She was amazed at what she saw there. The light green eyes, behind their black lashes, were slowly filling with tears, which brimmed over and ran down her cheeks quite unheeded. Such love and such yearning sorrow as were depicted there startled the young girl, and gave her a glimpse of the hidden wells of tenderness which lay beneath this woman's grim exterior.

As the little voice ceased Beth turned away her eyes and took up her cards again. But thereafter, for the rest of the journey, she was patient and gentle with Mrs. Tatezel. Nor did she even resent the constant watchfulness that followed her.

"Perhaps she had a child once," Beth said to herself, "and perhaps I remind her of that child." And in this, the guess of her romantic young heart, she was very near the truth.

CHAPTER VI

THE RANCH HOME

THE Warfield ranch, lying as it did on the edge of the National Forest, had trees to shelter it and lend it grace. The house was a long, rambling, one-story structure, made up of many log-cabins joined together at unexpected angles. Behind it the Shoshone River rushed noisily down its rocky bed, sending out irrigating ditches to make the ranch green and beautiful. One little stream wandered through the land about the house, turning all the yard-like spaces in the angles into gardens. Then it passed, cool and quiet, through the milk-house, and out through the kitchen garden and big alfalfa field, to join the river again. Just before the house stretched the road to the Yellowstone Park, beyond that the Rocky Mountains, height above height, tree-clad, and then snow-clad. Behind the house, beyond the green alfalfa and the rushing river, they rose again, snow-capped and majestic. To the west the Yellowstone Road entered

the silent, vast, untouched forest, full of wild creatures unafraid of man. Here, and over the far hills, the Warfield cattle ranged.

In a valley as it was, the ranch yet lay more than five thousand feet above sea-level. The air was clear and rarefied. To breathe it was to live a new life of energy and joy. Here, in this vast region, democracy held sway. The petty differences of man with man sank into insignificance before the immovable severity of the mountains. Here was force so mighty, so stupendous and overwhelming, that one felt it almost to the crushing of consciousness. All living creatures drew together for comfort. The brown ranch-house, set in its green fields, beside the mountain torrent, spelled home and refuge, and dear littleness, to man and domesticated animal alike. It called the cattle from their ranges on the far hills. The chickens, the horses, the turkeys, the dogs, all loved it, and, uncoerced, stayed near it.

The very sight of it put new life into Richard Warfield. Almost before the members of his family were fairly on their feet after alighting from the stage that had brought them over from Cody, he had gone off to inspect barn, corral, and bunk-house. He greeted the foreman by his

first name, and that free and independent young man returned the greeting as equal to equal. The new men, who had come in for dinner, were introduced to him. Only one or two of last summer's men had stayed over. Always, here, the wide spaces called to adventure, as soon as one had rested a little; and the ranch laborers came and went.

Meanwhile, Margaret was trying to get into the house, but it was too well locked up. Unwilling to interrupt her husband, who, between jokes, was asking after every living thing on the place, she went over to the foreman, Jeff Stanton, and stood behind him, watching her chance. He turned at last, and, recognizing the situation with the quick sympathy that flourishes in the wilderness, slipped away from his employer and went to let her in.

His spurs clanking, he went about in the darkened house, opening windows and blinds, making everything as comfortable as possible, moving his big bulk gently and noiselessly.

"Sorry I've got no wife to make you welcome," he said. "But what sort of a chance at a wedding has a fellow got up here in the Winter, I'd like to know?"

"Well, it will soon be Summer," Margaret encouraged him. "You 'd better get ready. You want to make love while the sun shines, you know."

"Give me half a chance and I sure will," he answered. Then his eye fell on Beth, grown tall, and young-womanly, and he lapsed suddenly into shy silence.

Jeff was twenty-seven years old, yet in many essentials only a boy. He was the child of the wilderness, which had cradled him from early babyhood, when, orphaned of both father and mother, he had found himself cast on the world with his own way to earn. He had had little schooling, merely enough to know how to read, write, and figure; yet he gave the impression of being a trained man. And so he was, trained in the hard school of experience, trained to bear heat and cold, storm and sunshine, to do long without food, to work fiercely when he must, calmly and steadily when he chose, to know the ways of Nature in her secret moods, and her open, gigantic resolves; to know animals, tame and wild. He was polished as a stone is polished, by the attrition of primeval forces. He had patience, dignity, and great simplicity. He was a boy at

his play, a man at his work, a hero in emergencies.

As for looks, he stood over six feet in his tall, tan-colored boots, with the bright, sharp spurs at their heels. His naturally straight legs were slightly bowed with much clasping of the rounded sides of horses. His tightly buckled belt carried a pistol, and was barely able to hold his clothing from slipping over his slender hips. The lines of his strong supple back and square shoulders showed plainly through the clinging flannel of his gray shirt. His full throat, broad and muscular, permanently tanned, rose, free from obstruction, from the handkerchief of rich crimson silk knotted about it. Between this, and his broad-brimmed hat, of the best make and the most expensive felt, one saw his frank, sunburned face, with its firm jaw, its sensitive, laughing mouth, and its blue eyes, whose usual look was innocent as a baby's, but which could flash and pierce like steel.

Beth knew what he thought — trust the modern girl for that! — and she blushed and felt awkward herself. Yet he was only Jeff Stanton, a cowboy, her father's foreman, whom she had seen every Summer since she was a child. She

told herself it was the newness of things that bothered her and it would soon wear off. She went into the quaint bedroom she called hers to take off her wraps and get on a gingham apron ready for work.

On the ranch every one worked, as a matter of course. The work was done for comfort only, not to conform to any standard or to meet any extraneous demand. The air was so bracing and stimulating that exercise was a necessity. And so the work here showed itself for what work really is, one of the greatest blessings in the world.

The room Beth stood in was hung, as to the walls, with a yellow-sprigged calico that looked as if sprinkled with sunshine. Overhead were great brown beams; underfoot a brown board floor, with rag rugs over it. Beside the bed was a grizzly bearskin. The bed was also of brown wood, plainly of home manufacture. It had a patchwork quilt upon it, of a daisy pattern, each daisy with a yellow heart. The bureau and the washstand were glorified boxes, covered with white muslin over yellow. The closet was a shelf across the corner, whence hung curtains of yellow-flowered chintz. There were no pictures

except those framed by the two square windows — one a picture of the road, with the great mountains looming beyond; the other a picture of forest vistas — tree stepping behind tree.

Although the room had been unused for six months, there was no dust in it. All was as fresh as she had left it. There was her dark-blue calico work dress and her apron. In a few minutes she came forth ready to help her mother to get dinner.

"Oh, is n't it good to be here?" she cried. "I 'm glad I 'm alive. And I 'm hungry! Jeff, what have you got for us?" In that brief while she had adjusted herself to the foreman's new admiration and determined to get the best out of it.

"They 's bacon," said Jeff. "And potatoes, I reckon. They must be enough down to the mess-house — "

"No, no! We 'll cook it ourselves! Only get it quick. And some bread, and molasses. I 'll go hunt eggs."

Jeff had already lighted the gasoline cook-stove and the kettle was boiling. Mrs. Tatezel and Margaret appeared duly aproned and ready for work. Bob had gone off to join his father.

Presently they all sat down to an abundant and appetizing if simple repast. The table was spread in the large kitchen. On its brown surface were little oases of woven straw mats, bright-tinted, smacking of Japan; on these again blue and white china. Against the walls more china shone in masses of strong, clear color. Copper and brass utensils, telling of old-fashioned fireplaces, hung around the convenient, ugly, modern gasoline stove. Here, too, was the same lack of convention, the same free use of whatever struck anybody as good, as was evident in all the house. England, the Colonies, Japan, China, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, all were levied upon to produce this cosey interior, which, finally, was American, comfortable, and, in its own free way, beautiful.

Warfield came in late, demanding coffee. His wife gave it to him without a word of remonstrance, and watched his satisfaction as he drank it, and the big cigar he lighted later, without the usual shadow of anxiety on her face. Out here all these little worries seemed so truly *little!*

As the days went on it became increasingly apparent that he was in his element. In his knickerbockers and gaiters, his flannel shirt and

broad-brimmed hat, he showed stronger and more rugged than in the city. His pale face soon burned a wholesome if uncomfortable red. His white hands calloused. He spent hours in the saddle, although, being out of practice, he limped about a great deal at first and sat down gingerly for some days — to his huge disgust.

"Shows how soft a man gets," he growled. "I tell you, Margaret, the city's no place for a man. It turns him into a drudge, or a money-making machine, or a set of brain and nerves, with a digestive attachment, but no muscles. Here I discover that I have lungs, and legs, and arms! Don't you feel good?" He swung her off her feet in a bear-hug.

"Indeed, I do," she answered heartily, as soon as she caught her breath. "I love it as much as you do. But I doubt if we'd love it as much as we do if we didn't have the life of the city to complete this —" She stopped. It was not the time to remind him that every Fall he sang the praises of the city — of its intellectual opportunities, its power of quickening all the higher faculties — as eagerly as in the Spring he chanted the praises of the wilderness. She would be silent. Let him drink his fill from the bountiful

breasts of Mother Nature. He needed her good nursing.

One day, some two weeks after their arrival, she watched him as he swung into his high cowboy saddle, Bob and Stanton beside him. They were all well mounted on small, strong, Western horses. Holding their long bridles loosely, guiding their horses by the touch of the rein upon the side of the neck, they loped off, not along any road but straight up the broad flank of the facing mountains. If there was any trail to guide them it was invisible from where Margaret stood.

"The unfenced wilderness," she murmured. "It is good even to think of it." As anxiety rolled from her heart, strength and youth mounted in her.

"After all, we're going to win out!" she cried, and threw a confident kiss to the mighty mountain, rising majestic in the sun. "The Power that made You, and keeps You, and covers You with sunlight and beauty, works now and always for me and mine."

Behind the house Beth and Mrs. Tatezel were ironing. The gasoline stove had been lifted out of doors, its pale flames barely visible in the brilliant sunlight. The ironed clothes hung warm-

ing and bleaching on the clothes-horse in the glare, but the workers stood at their white-covered table in the shade of a cottonwood tree.

Mrs. Tatezel was an efficient worker, and her impatience with Beth, who was n't, was ill concealed.

"Here comes your ma," she said with relief, as Margaret came around the corner — such a radiant, smiling woman, looking equal to any task! "Now you give her your place and we 'll get something done."

"I 'm sure I 'm willing," cried Beth, with a toss of her head. She dropped into the hammock that swung between the tree and the corner of the house, and in an instant was lost in "Lorna Doone."

The two women worked away in silence. Margaret was less skilful than Mrs. Tatezel, but she was full of devices for lessening the work. Undershirts and stockings straightened out like magic in her strong fingers; she folded them, clamped the iron down on them for a second, then hung them on the bars with the rest.

"Leave me all these things," she said to Mrs. Tatezel. "You take the fine starched clothes. You have more patience and skill than I have;

but I know just how to slight these without hurting them a speck. Now, you 'd be just as careful with Bob's socks as with his collars and cuffs."

"What 's worth doing at all is worth doing well, *I* say," said Mrs. Tatezel, shutting her thin lips firmly. This was an old bone of contention.

"There 's such a thing as well enough," said Margaret. "And there 's one thing you never learned to do well — and that is to apportion things. You take everything hard right along. Poor dear!" she added, in a minute, "after a while this big solitude will teach you that *everything* does n't depend upon you. God can do pretty well without assistance from any of us. There 's the record of it." Her hand, with the iron-holder in it, swept over the broad panorama of forest, river, and mountain. "*That* would be here if you and I never ironed a shirt!" She folded a sheet in two, stretching out her strong white arms to their fullest reach. "We 've worked this ranch for ten years now, and what have we done? Got a little spot of green and a brown box to live in! And we 're as proud, as important over it as if we 'd made *those!*" Again she looked lovingly at the mountains — big, still, wrapped in faint purple under the golden sun.

Mrs. Tatezel's glance softened a little as it rested on Margaret. No wonder! Sweetness and strength dwelt together in that womanly face, flushed now with exertion and enthusiasm. But presently she looked over at Beth, lazily swinging and reading, and again she stiffened with disapproval.

The mother guessed what she thought, but held her peace. Well she knew Mrs. Tatezel's limitations; well she knew also the truth and loyalty in her innermost heart. Being wise, she remembered the limitations only as a guide to her own conduct; while the deeper truth she held steadily as her mental image of the real Mrs. Tatezel. By some magic of communication, some subtle suggestion of tone, look, and gesture, this fact reached the very heart of the grim, silent woman, and set it throbbing and swelling. For years, — such years! — while her own unbending rectitude had held her steadfast, this faith and understanding had made life tolerable. But so long had she been rigid under her load that she could not at once unbend. Her moral muscles had all stiffened.

Therefore she found it difficult to adjust herself to Beth, and that in spite of the fact that

her tenderest and most loving memories centred about a young girl of whom Beth continually reminded her. Nothing made her realize so fully the years that had gone — gone in one monotonous, tense day after another; gone without noticeable break or change; until suddenly the bond that held her snapped, and she was set free, free as to her body, but in fetters yet as to her mind; nothing, I say, so brought this home to her as the fact that, yearn toward Beth as she might, she could not adjust herself to her young flexibility.

Beth, on her part, wished to be kind to Mrs. Tatezel, and found it a difficult task. She wished to be kind to her because she was a gentle, affectionate young person who could not endure to be unkind to a living creature. But, also, she was continually aware of the stir of unsatisfied curiosity. She was guiltily conscious that she watched the elderly woman's every movement and drew conclusions from her most trivial speech. She knew that this was not a friendly attitude, and she endeavored in every little way in her power to atone for it.

Margaret, in turn, was anxious that Beth in some way should make up to Mrs. Tatezel for all that that grim woman had suffered and fore-

gone. She made all sorts of little plans for throwing them together, and if she had not had large patience and toleration for the weaknesses of others she would have been distinctly discouraged by the way in which her plans failed, just as now about the ironing. When Mrs. Tatezel and Beth had this or any other piece of work to do together, the difference between the efficient, concentrated worker, her whole mind bent upon the task before her, and the dreamy, inattentive girl, longing for vague and beautiful things in the distant future and oblivious of the significance of little things in the near present, was emphasized to the exclusion of the profounder human sympathies. However, since Margaret and Beth and Mrs. Tatezel were all bent upon a common end, it followed that this trial of propinquity was made again and again.

The very next day, for instance, Beth, aware that she had paid no attention whatever to Mrs. Tatezel during the whole long afternoon, roused herself from her story-book and went and tapped upon her door. Within, in the long, level shafts of sunlight sent by the late afternoon sun, the woman she sought sat knitting. It was one of her favorite occupations, and when she was en-

gaged in it she was more peaceful than usual. Her trunk stood on one side of the room covered with a neat calico cover, a turkey-red sofa pillow leaning against the wall at its back. All about, on walls, bureau, and table, were the signs of her unpacking. She had evidently settled down to make herself at home.

"Oh, you 're quite fixed up here!" cried Beth, gayly, as she looked about her. "You 've made everything very cosey. I suppose that 's the reason why you stay indoors while all Nature is calling to you to come out."

"I like four walls," said Mrs. Tatezel, rather shortly. "I 'm used to 'em. It always seems to me like sort of a picnic or holiday to go out of doors."

"And you think you 're over-indulging yourself if you do it every day?" asked Beth. "Well, dear me! you 'll surely get over that after you 've been here a while. Why, we never stay indoors unless we have to — when we are working, or when it rains outrageously."

"Yes, I 've noticed it," Mrs. Tatezel replied, "and maybe I 'll get used to it after a while." Beth recognized her effort to present no angle of contradiction. She rose to the occasion and made

to the woman sitting in the flood of yellow sunlight.

"I did n't mean my own baby when I said my girl. My baby died, and to save the little home my husband had left me, mortgaged, I went out as a wet-nurse. I always called my nursling my girl. Her name was Helen." Her words came with such evident difficulty that Beth felt embarrassed as well as excited.

"Is that her picture?" she asked. She pointed to an old-fashioned photograph which hung upon the wall in an oval frame. The photograph was indeed old-fashioned, but it was clearly the portrait of a lovely young creature. Her youthful charm showed indestructible against the photographer's painted background. Her youthful grace triumphed over the rigid clamps holding her head. There was something very appealing about the face. The eyes were large, full of sentiment and enthusiasm; the mouth curved and kissable, with a pathetic droop at the corners; the chin small; the curling hair lying over the forehead almost hid it. The whole head was set upon a long slender throat, and that again upon a delicately fashioned body.

"Yes, that 's a picture of my Helen," said

Mrs. Tatezel. "It does n't do her any justice at all. You can't see how quick and sweet all her movements were. You can't hear her voice. It was a beautiful voice, not like any other — low and soft, with a tremble in it when she felt tender. Often I hear that voice now, and her laugh. Such a sweet laugh!" Mrs. Tatezel's face glowed with the reminiscence. She looked more warmly on Beth, for the picture awakened in her the remembrance of the time when she had sympathized with all a young girl's thoughts and emotions. Beth went up to the picture to examine it more closely.

"She was very lovely," she said. "How old was she when this was taken?"

"Only eighteen," Mrs. Tatezel answered. "She thought she was quite grown up and capable of managing her own affairs. Oh, she looks gentle, but she had a strong will of her own and a way with her that no one could resist."

"Where is she now?" Beth asked.

"She is dead, my dear," said Mrs. Tatezel, solemnly.

"Was she much older when she died?" Beth went on, embarrassed, as we all are, by the in-

trusion of this solemn, inevitable fact into cheerful conversation.

"No," Mrs. Tatezel answered, "she was only nineteen. Yet she had lived through more than most women who live a long life."

"Why?" asked Beth. "Was it a love affair?"

"Yes, a love affair and — a marriage. She had no mother, my dear, no mother except me. Oh, if I could only have held her back, as a real mother might have done! It would never have happened!" This was an involuntary cry — the habitual thought of her soul.

"What would never have happened, her marriage or her death?"

"Neither," said Mrs. Tatezel. She had dropped her knitting and sat looking out at the darkening forest. The sun was just setting behind the trees, whose pointed tops stood out sharp and clear against the yellow sky. Their trunks and lower branches were lost in gloom. "She would not have married," said Mrs. Tatezel, slowly and firmly, as if from a final conviction. "And if she had not married she would not have died."

A question struggled in Beth's throat. She blushed, looked at the picture, hesitated, uncer-

tain how Mrs. Tatezel's conventional strictness might take her inquiry. But at length she said in a low tone:

"Did she have a little baby?"

Mrs. Tatezel started.

"No, no," she cried out sharply, "she was spared that. No thanks to God, either. She spared herself. And I should think He would be proud of her. There are times when a woman has a right — and she purchased her right at a terrible price."

Her eyes came back from the darkening woods and she looked at Beth with a sudden recognition of the fact that her memories had betrayed her into speech too full for those young ears.

"Let me show you my watch," she said hastily, as if Beth were a little child. "She gave it to me the Christmas before she was married. It's a very good watch; it keeps perfect time. Never have I forgotten to wind it for a single night since she died."

Beth was longing to ask more questions, but she knew that Mrs. Tatezel had been hurried into further speech than she intended. With her quick sympathies she felt that the right thing to do was to ignore the disclosure just made, to

take it quietly, and wait until some future opportunity should let her know more of this young girl in whose history she felt a curious interest. Somehow, she was sure that this girl's life bore upon her mother's life. Else, how account for Mrs. Tatezel's deep devotion to both of them?

She chatted a little while longer about the older woman's various belongings until it was time to get supper.

It was not until that meal was over and she was walking down through the alfalfa field in the early twilight that she fully seized upon a recollection that had been haunting her ever since Mrs. Tatezel had begun to talk about "her girl." When it finally came upon her she stood stock still in the middle of the field, lifting her awed young face toward the serene heights of the opposite mountains. Her romantic imagination gave her at once the realization of what had happened. Under the force of it she spoke aloud.

"That was the young girl whose body was found floating in the lake. That was why she died so young. She had on Mrs. Tatezel's clothes. They were marked 'L. M. T.' Did she kill herself? And if she did, why did Mrs. Tate-

zel think that God ought to be proud of her for doing it?"

A chill breath of approaching night blew upon her from the mountain depths. The last of the tender sunset colors faded from the sky, and darkness dropped upon the world. Pursued by a fear that the life which was coming to her, which she was advancing upon so eagerly, might not, after all, prove to be the life of her heart's desire, she turned and hurried back to the house. The sound of the rushing river pursued her like some gusty oracle proclaiming fate. The plaintive chirp of the night songsters made a trembling chorus to her crowding fears.

She was glad when, on throwing open the door of the ranch-house, she saw her father and mother sitting there before the fireplace, comfortable, calm, housed, and sufficient. She threw herself on the rug at their feet, touching them both.

"Oh, you darling things!" she cried out. "I 'm so glad to have you here where I can come to you when I need you. I don't see how any one lives without a mother and father!"

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT RIDE

THE Irma Hotel in Cody is quite a remarkable structure. Not that it is beautiful — quite the contrary. Built of ugly concrete, without the first pretensions to architectural impressiveness, it turns its back upon the splendid mountains and looks forth with a brazen and commanding interest upon the main street of Cody. Perhaps, after all, it is natural that its guests, sitting upon its long wide verandas, should be more interested in the lively and changing spectacle presented by this street than they would be by the more solemn splendors of the mountains. At any rate, here they sit through the long hours of the day, drinking various little concoctions served from the large and imposing bar-room, which is one of the striking features of the place, and looking with amused eyes upon the cowboys and sheep-herders charging up and down the short little street upon their half-wild ponies.

The street itself is not more than four or five

blocks long, stopping at the Irma Hotel at one end and trailing off into the formless void of the arid plains at the other. But these few blocks comprise much of varied and picturesque activity. The stores are for the most part low wooden structures with wooden awnings that extend out over the board sidewalks. But here and there a more pretentious modern structure of three-story brick or concrete shows what the town is ambitious of becoming. Every other store is a saloon or a gambling place, and above one pretentious store, rich in plate glass, with varnished Grand Rapids furniture displayed luxuriously within, is a dancing-school where two or three evenings a week young people and even a good many people not very young gather and learn the elements of good deportment, and incidentally have a glorious good time, spinning round and round to music.

Just aside from the main street, the one handsome house in town, surrounded by a green, well-watered lawn, bids the riotous, money-spending, unmated young men welcome to coarser joys. This house dominates one end of the town as the Irma Hotel does the other. The two places seem to wink at each other at night from their

brightly lighted windows, the respectable smiling across at the disreputable over the cluttered activities of the striving town. Vice here in Cody holds its head up unashamed. It knows itself for what it is, and hypocrisy is the one fault that finds no chance to grow.

Yet so great a virtue is this one virtue, the virtue of openness and sincerity, that, after all, the whole expression of the town is one of vigorous upward striving. You cannot escape knowledge of the frailties of men, loudly proclaiming themselves on every side; but you plainly perceive that the men themselves are bigger than their frailties and will presently live them down. Evil is here somehow less evil than the slimy, intriguing, covered vice of older civilizations. It is as if here Nature had simply not yet been made the servant of self-control, of the triumphant human spirit, but asserted herself still in open defiance. Man is in process of learning to ride his animal body; it is half-broken, like the Western horse, and every now and then escapes from control. But meanwhile he does some splendid riding, such as they who bestride flat pancake saddles, and pace sedately down polite boulevards, never know.

By some unformulated perception of the advantages of such a confessed struggle parents and guardians every now and then send their wild youngsters out here to get civilized, to find themselves, to face their faults and overcome them. Confession is indeed the first act of repentance, and here the sinner must confess; for so long as he pretends to virtue all men are against him, while so soon as he acknowledges his weakness every one is ready to bear with him, to confess a fellow-feeling for him, and to help him up when he is well ready to rise.

On this account Leonard Raymond had come to spend the summer in Cody. He was a young actor, brilliant, unstable, the victim of an inherited craving for drink which threatened to destroy his career in its beginning. Those who knew him and loved him pleaded with him in vain while he lived in New York. The temptations about him were too subtle and insidious. They reached him in all sorts of guises which his young romantic soul failed to suspect, perhaps did not wish to suspect. But he had an element of refinement in him, a fastidiousness which made him comparatively immune to the grosser solicitations of acknowledged vice.

So here in Cody he was for the most part turning into a pattern of virtue. Once in a while, to be sure, the good cheer of the bar-room caught and held him a little too long, but the very bar-tenders were solicitous to warn him and to keep him fairly sober, because they understood his trouble and knew that he was trying to overcome it.

On this morning of early June he was feeling particularly gay and bright. He had been strictly sober for nearly two weeks, and rejoiced to find his appetite for breakfast coming back to him. He was just telling one of his neighbors about it, how he had eaten two eggs and two pieces of toast with gusto, and that he felt no particular craving for his cup of coffee, when the clatter of hurrying horses' feet made him lift his eyes and glance down the side street that led up from the river.

The vision he saw there brought him to his feet with genuine admiration. There were two young people, racing neck and neck up the steep incline from the river. One was a tall, handsome, slender boy with brown eyes, his broad gray hat-brim blown back from his flushed face. He wore chaps of long-haired silky white An-

gora. Beneath them his feet, in the cowboy stirrups, looked absurdly small. Bright spurs clattered at his heels.

But it was the girl on the other horse who challenged Raymond's attention. She was riding a gray pony, her high-pommelled saddle, just like the boy's, set upon a scarlet Navajo saddle-blanket. Her short riding-skirt was divided and she rode astride, silver spurs at the heels of her high tan boots. Her hat was like her brother's except that it had a bright red strap about it. Her gray flannel shirt was like his also. A red silk scarf was knotted at her throat. She rode splendidly, seeming to be a part of the animal she bestrode.

The ponies, with nostrils red, wide eyes flashing, and hoofs clattering, rushed up the street toward the Irma Hotel. On its verandas every one now stood looking, and indeed these two young people were worth looking at. Just as they reached the bank that stood on the opposite corner they cast loose their bridle reins, and the ponies, quivering, came to a theatrical stop. Disdaining help, Beth dismounted as lightly and swiftly as her brother and passed with him into the bank. She knew exactly how favorable an

impression she had created upon the gazers on the hotel veranda. But she was not yet aware of Leonard Raymond.

Now, the bank at Cody deserves some description. It stood on the corner of the main street, opposite the hotel, looking like some armored war vessel, oddly stranded upon the knees of the Rocky Mountains. Built, like the hotel, of gray concrete, it was also heavily armored. Its windows were barred with conspicuous steel bars, and closed at night with heavy iron shutters. Its doors were solid iron. The partition enclosing the counter of the cashier, the teller, and other clerks was iron from floor to ceiling, set here and there with little grated windows. The paying teller, as he worked, looked out through his small barred opening, his pistol lying conspicuously ready at his right hand.

All this was because, only a few months before, in full view of the loungers on the veranda, in bright daylight, the bank had been looted. The cashier, then unprotected by armor, and alone in the bank at the noon hour, was violently hauled forth into the open space made by the intersection of the two streets, and there, the whole town looking on, was shot to death.

Yet those who did this deed were only two men, masked, of course, and so far as any reliable evidence could be obtained, unknown to the townspeople. Some men had started to the rescue, but one of the two looters made a safe circle around the other man and the struggling cashier by swinging slowly around and shooting his revolver at the toes of those who came too near. In the same way, after the cashier was safely dead, he held the crowd at bay while his working partner openly brought forth from the bank bags of gold. Still unmolested, they rode out of town and were lost in the fastnesses of the Big Horn Mountains.

This is not fiction, but history, as any one may know who chooses to inquire. One wonders at the comparative lethargy of so wild a frontier town; but the truth is that even so much of civilization and store-keeping suppress a man's readiness for a fight to the death.

Beth and Bob presented their checks to the paying teller through the little opening in the window, and, seeing who it was, he raised one of his defences and allowed himself a moment's pleasant chat. But in the very midst of his inquiries about the Forest Ranch the outer door

swung open and three sheep-herders, dressed in hairy garments, rough and forbidding, entered, and the cashier's little portcullis slammed in Beth's surprised face. She stepped aside and waited till the men had been served through the smaller aperture, then she went back.

"What was the matter with those men?" she asked. "Were you afraid?"

"Well, they were strangers," said the paying teller, "and I 'm not taking any chances."

The two young people passed out again into the broad, sun-filled street. "Gee!" said Bob, "I would n't be paying teller in that bank for anything! Think what it must be to be afraid of every stranger who strikes town and looks tough! He must be scared every other minute."

Opposite them, as they came out, there sat a forest ranger on his pony. He was dressed much like Bob except that he wore no chaps, but high gaiters buckled to his knee. He was a handsome, athletic young fellow, and he leaned forward talking to a young woman of about his own age. She was dressed as nearly like him as woman could be. The same gray flannel shirt, a khaki skirt instead of khaki trousers, tall gaiters, and gauntletted gloves.

"That's Percy Johnson," said Bob, sweeping off his hat because of the lady.

"And the girl?" asked Beth. "She looks like his twin sister. Is she his sweetheart?"

"I'll go find out," said Bob. "Come over here on the Irma veranda till I look over the register. And don't you want a lemonade?"

"Yes, thank you; I'm awfully thirsty after my long ride." She mounted the veranda steps, clapping her leather quirt against her skirts, her spurs jingling musically. Leonard Raymond's eyes had never left her trim young figure. And by this time she was quite aware that among the people on the veranda there was one uncommonly handsome young Easterner.

Bob disappeared into the big office of the hotel. It was hung around with large and expensive oil paintings. Among them was one very large picture of the Bow-leg Range. In front of it a group of men stood talking. One of them was a pompous, well-set-up man in the late fifties, who had all the careful enunciation and the unctuous phrasing of the accomplished story-teller. He was in the midst of some tale of the picture.

"'Yes, gentlemen,' Buffalo Bill told 'em, 'I

paid five thousand dollars for that oil painting.' You see what power it has over the imagination. What a splendid sweep of space is enclosed in those few feet of canvas! You can tell that it would take you many long and weary hours to climb those mountain heights. You can feel the sweep of the cold air of the high spaces. And do you know, gentlemen, by what magic the artist has wrought this impression of vast space? Yes, there are the mountain forms, and the colors, and the cloud shadows; but the most significant thing of all, gentlemen, is that eagle poised high there in mid-air, a mere speck of a bird, but telling its message of immeasurable altitude! My friends," the elderly raconteur bent a quizzical glance upon those surrounding him, "do you see the eagle to which Colonel Cody, better known to you, perhaps, as Buffalo Bill, referred? It is there, that dark speck in the blue sky." He pointed with his cane.

The listening group leaned forward and peered at the indicated spot with imaginations all afire. Bob, indeed, quite clearly discerned the eagle with outspread wings; but one literal-minded sheep-herder in the crowd, looking with keen eyes, sharpened by the distances over which they ha-

bitually gazed, spat suddenly and emphatically upon the tiled floor.

"Hell!" he said, "that ain't no bird. That's a hole in the canvas!"

And it was! The disillusioned group broke up in laughter, all scurrying in the general direction of the bar-room, Bob with them.

This room was the pride of Cody. Its walls were hung with expensive oil paintings, about which their owner had many swelling yarns to tell. Its two large windows, built like the show windows of a store, were filled with stuffed buffalo and deer. Mountain goats, coyotes, and other wild creatures, stuffed and mounted, stood about the room and gave it a certain picturesque suggestiveness. The counters were of mahogany, the fittings of plate glass and nickel. So great was the pride of the town in this ornate place for the dispensing of liquors that even ladies were brought in here to admire its glories. On the appearance of a party of them conducted by some proud clerk the men drinking before the bar swept off their broad hats and stood silent, pictures of respectful attention.

Here Bob ordered Beth's lemonade and drank a glass of beer. He lighted a cigarette and went

out, feeling that now he was indeed a man. As the door swung to behind him he met one of the young clerks, with whom he stopped to chat a moment and ask about the girl with the forest ranger. To his surprise he learned that she was Lady Angela Graham, of Castle McLeod in Scotland — herself a famous hunter of big game.

"Say, what do you think?" asked the voluble clerk. "She's been hunting up here in the mountains with a lord or two and Percy Johnson for guide, and somehow or other she lost the saddle-bags that held her extra clothes. So she blew in here last night in her hunting-togs — you know, breeches and gaiters, a man's togs. All the girls wear 'em when they're hunting.

"Well, I don't see no harm in it. But when she went into the dining-room in that rig, the thermometer dropped so low you could hear it crack; every woman there was tryin' to freeze her out. After supper they held an indignation meeting in the parlor, called in the Old Man and read him the riot act. Said they would n't eat in the same room with a woman who wore men's clothes. Gee!

"The Old Man did his best with 'em; but I

notice that to-day Lady Angela 's wearing Mrs. Old Man's new riding skirt.

" Well, anyhow, I suppose she 's found out that we 're civilized here. That 's the point the ladies did n't want her to miss."

Leonard Raymond, casting about in his fertile mind for some chance to be introduced to the stunning girl whom he had seen riding up with Bob, noticed him as he chatted with the clerk and came briskly forward with a reminder.

" The mail 's just come," he said to the clerk. " I should like to have mine as soon as you are at liberty, and a crowd of men are clamoring now at the desk. You will pardon me," he turned to Bob, " but you know how anxious one gets for news from home."

The boy felt flattered by this implied recognition of him as a man not native to these wilds, but with interesting connections in the East.

" Don't mention it," he said. " I am looking out for mail myself. Sometimes it 's sent to the hotel. We were here a few days on the way to the ranch." They went together over to the clerk's desk.

Here indeed a crowd of anxious men and women stood with outstretched hands eagerly

waiting for their letters. Seldom did mail repose in the boxes of the desk. It was caught up at once. Outside the hotel stood the tall, lumbering, strongly built stage with its six horses. It had brought the mail and three passengers. But even these new arrivals had to wait until the letters were sorted.

While they stood at the desk Bob and Leonard chatted about the country side. It was not long before Bob learned that his companion was from New York, — magic name! — and presently that he was connected with one of the leading theatres there.

At once the boy's heart went out in worship. The theatre to him at this time spelled all there was of magic. Generous soul that he was, he thought quickly that he would share this joy with Beth; but a second reflection bade him be a little cautious. After all, his sister was growing up and she was in his care.

So when he finally got his package of mail he turned a hesitating cold shoulder toward Leonard Raymond and moved away across the wide office. But Leonard, knowing his game, was not to be so lightly shaken off. He walked briskly along beside the boy, talking brightly

and eagerly, and followed him out on the veranda.

As Bob said afterward, what was he to do? He could not say plainly to him, "I don't want to introduce you to my sister. I don't know anything about you." And being a boy, he knew of none of the subtler arts by which this end might be less bluntly achieved. Therefore, in a few minutes he found himself awkwardly introducing the young actor to Beth.

Beth, for her part, was not at all unwilling. She was, if anything, more stage-struck than her brother. New York was to her a name full of suggestions of polish, of culture, of metropolitan experience, and when to that was added the word "theatre" and the presence of a distinctly handsome and admiring young man there was no reluctance left in her. She turned him a flushed and sparkling face, and talked eagerly and fast. In fifteen minutes any one seeing the three upon the veranda would have supposed them old friends.

Thus Jeff Stanton found them. He had ridden over from the ranch the day before to see about the purchase of a bunch of sheep for the new sheep-ranch. He came up now, walking along

in his half bow-legged horsemanlike fashion, with a young girl beside him. She was the daughter of a neighboring rancher. In consequence, during the by-gone summer she and Beth had seen each other occasionally and a tentative friendship had sprung up between them. In the West a "neighboring" ranch means one within about twenty miles of another. Beth looked at her now with surprise.

"Why, Alice," she cried, "how did you come here? I 'm very glad to see you." In her heart she wondered, a little uncomfortably, whether she had come there with Jeff. The two girls kissed one another. Then Beth held out her hand to Jeff with a trace of awkwardness. "How do you do, Mr. Stanton?" she said. "I thought you were going to get back to-day." Then she blushed because her speech seemed to her unfortunate. It was as if she were reminding him of a neglected duty.

"The sheep-man was delayed," Jeff said. "So, naturally, I was delayed." He was quite unaware of anything wrong with her remark.

"Oh, yes, of course," Beth cried, hurriedly. "Perhaps you can go back with us and that will be awfully nice." Now, in her embarrassment,

she had rushed to the other extreme of over-cordiality. She was angry with herself. She turned swiftly, and found Bob introducing Alice Harmon to Mr. Raymond. When the same office had been performed for Jeff Stanton the five young people stood for a moment uncertain what to do. In the silence the voice of the stage-driver, speaking from his seat far above his horses' backs to a little group of men on the sidewalk, came to their ears.

"Yes, Colonel Cody 's presented that obstinate old buffalo of his to his dear friend, Major Whittle, over near Basin. They 're going to try to load him up to-night, and I expect there 'll be great sights down to the Cody Barn."

"That 's so," said Jeff, turning to Bob. "Buffalo Bill 's given that loco creature to his best friend — Lord knows what he 'll do with it! Lord knows, too, how anybody will ever move him out of this town to any place he does n't want to go to."

"I understood," Raymond said, "that buffalo were not so very vicious and hard to manage. I thought they were rather cow-like creatures."

"So they are," answered Jeff, "in their native state. But this fellow has lived long enough

with the Wild West Show to know that nobody 's going to kill him, and since he 's found that out there 's no doing anything with him. He 's got some sort of an idea of his own money value, I reckon. Two or three times he 's broken loose and held up this whole town."

" Think of it!" Beth cried out, with a burst of laughter, " Buffalo Bill's own town held up by one half-civilized buffalo!"

" Well, he 's no joke when he gets to racing round," Jeff assured her. " Nobody dares to shoot him. They 's nothing to do but lasso him. And last time when he raged around there was n't a single man in shape to rope him. Those who were good throwers had come to town without a rope, and those who had ropes did n't know how to throw 'em. It 's the new men, you know, Mr. Raymond, that ride to church and to market with a rope around their saddle-horns. So that the fellows who knew enough to have roped him if they 'd had the rope stood around and dodged into the stores, watching the other fellows try to throw. I tell you, they was mighty nervous about it. Every few minutes one of 'em would toss out the rope in a ladylike way, and then tear down the street for all he was worth, the rope

whipping up the dust behind him. It was a great sight! Worth more 'n a nickel."

"But what are they going to do now?" Beth asked.

"Well, they 're planning to coax Mr. Buffalo into a covered wagon — a thing they 've rigged up for the occasion, mighty strong, with heavy lumber on the floor and a good stout fence all around. It 'll take eight horses to pull it. And that way they intend to get him over to Major Whittle's place. Four of the boys are going along to guard him. It 'll be quite a procession. But what I don't see is how they 're going to get him into the wagon."

They talked a while longer and then at last decided that at seven o'clock that evening they would meet at the Cody Barn and watch the attempt to load the buffalo. Meanwhile, they separated, the two girls going together on the various shopping errands which had been intrusted to them by their parents. Leonard Raymond would certainly have gone along had Beth been alone, but the capable young ranch girl made too efficient a chaperon.

As the two girls went down the main street they came upon a pitiful little group which showed

the other side of the gay, irresponsible life of the town. It consisted of a young woman, still somewhat pretty, with a heavy baby hung over one sagging shoulder. In front of her stood her burly husband, swaying unsteadily, his hat drawn down over blood-shot, bleary eyes. She held him by the lapel of the coat, alternately coaxing and scolding him. Beside her was an open buggy with a team of impatient horses, the buggy in which they had ridden in from their distant ranch for a day's shopping and a sight of the world. The box of the buggy was filled with packages, the fruit of the wife's careful buying. But now her problem was to get the man into the buggy and safely home out of the way of temptation. He pushed off her detaining hand now and then with a sort of slow irritation, as one absorbed in profound thought brushes away a fly.

"You go 'long home if you want to," he was saying. "I won't interfere with your freedom, and don't you interfere with mine. Go right along home now if you feel like it and I 'll stay here."

"But you have no horse, Bill," she coaxed him. "How would you get 'way out there without any horse?"

"Oh, you leave me to manage that. I ain't so damfool I look. I 'll get there all right, all right." He wagged his head in solemn reassurance.

"I 'll tell you, Bill," she said suddenly. "You take me out as fur as through the canyon. I 'm afraid to drive these horses that fur. You know that 's an awful steep, bad road. You take me up through the canyon and then come back if you want to. I 'm sure scared, and you 'd never let me go up that lonely, narrow road, so steep down and so steep up, with the baby here and no man to help me?"

"Sure, sure, that 's all right," Bill said, smiling fatuously. He saw the two girls, who had stopped to listen, full of sympathy, ready to help out the poor young woman. "I would n't inconvenience a lady for the world," he said, "much lesh my own wife, — best wife a man ever had," he told the girls.

"That 's right," Beth spoke up with the freedom of a true Westerner. "You take care of her. When a man 's got a woman like that he wants to protect her."

"Well, I 'm the fellow that 'll do it," Bill answered. "She don't come to no harm while

I 'm here. I ain't so damfool I look," he repeated. With great difficulty he fell into the buggy and gathered up the reins. The woman moved to unhitch the horses, but Beth sprang ahead of her.

" You get up there beside him," she said. " I 'll untie them. You 've got the baby." The woman did as she was bid, with a word of thanks.

" You let me drive for a while," she said to her husband. " I want to learn to drive as well as you do. You just show me and I 'll take the reins. When we come to bad places you can have them." Holding the baby firmly between her knees she caught the reins in her nervous hands and started off up the street, her husband sagging over heavily against her.

" My soul! " said Beth. " Do you suppose they 'll ever pass that canyon road without an accident? "

" She said she was afraid," said Alice, " and I should think she might be. But she 's the bravest ever. It 's an awful place. Let the horses swerve two feet and they 'll be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. She 's got those horses to manage, and that heavy man, and the baby. But I bet she does it just the same."

"It may be fun for the man," said Beth, "but it's death for the woman. I won't marry a man who drinks, no matter how fine he is every other way."

"I wonder if any one ever tried to follow the river through that canyon," she added, as they went on. "One reads such stories about shooting the rapids, and there are certainly rapids enough there for any one to shoot."

"Yes," answered Alice, "there was one person shot those rapids, and it was a woman, too. She came clear through the whole canyon and out at this end."

"My!" Beth exclaimed, breathless with admiration. "There's nothing a woman can't do these days, is there? How did she look? Did you see her?"

"Yes, I saw her," Alice answered. "She was dead. She was dead when she started. No live woman would be such a fool as to try that trip!"

"Oh, you mean thing!" Beth cried. "I suppose now I'll have to treat to soda-water." They went into a funny little store on the corner, where from a white oilclothed space on the wall there protruded a single soda-water faucet. On the shelf below stood various bottles of syrup, and

beneath the shelf an ice-cream can. But the drink, although the mechanism of its manufacture was thus made apparent, was entirely satisfying to these uncritical young palates.

After supper, which was quite an Eastern, hotel-like meal, well served by black-clad, white-aproned, big-pompadoured waitresses in the Irma dining-room, the five young persons — for Leonard Raymond was on hand — went down to the Cody Barn to see the buffalo. Because the two girls smiled so sweetly the proprietor of the barn led them into the harness room immediately adjoining the big box stall wherein the buffalo had lived for the last eight months. Here was a small window about a foot square which opened into the darkness of the stall. Through it came puffs of warm, animal-like air, and the sound of a creature stirring and munching. Just outside of the barn a covered wagon was backed up to the door of the stall. It was a problem which occupied most of the male inhabitants of Cody, assembled outside, how to get that door open. One or two brave souls volunteered to go right down on the ground and shove her up. But a chorus of remonstrance rose from the rest of the crowd.

"What would you do?" they inquired, "if the

old bull should charge out at you?" The volunteers sputtered and protested their indifference to fate, but yielded to the pressure of their friends. At length Jim Kehoe, the owner of the barn, figured out a way. The door being safely shut down between him and the sniffing, suspicious creature within, he nailed a couple of ropes to it. Then he mounted to the roof of the barn and slowly pulled up the door. It slid in grooves like a window sash.

As it went up a flood of light poured into the buffalo's quarters, and Beth, peering through the little window, plainly saw his great shaggy bulk. His legs were planted far apart, his nostrils wide, his eyes glaring. He was the picture of suspicion, defiance, and savagery. Beth fell back from the window with a little cry. All her childish nightmares of being pursued by a shapeless wild beast came back to her, and she was glad to feel the solid bulk of Jeff Stanton behind her.

"I — I — don't like the way he smells," she quavered in explanation.

"He does look pretty fierce," Jeff Stanton answered her thought. Then for a long, tense hour everybody waited, taking turns at the peephole. Once or twice the animal turned and

tossed his great horned head at the faces peering in at him. Then every one, man as well as woman, hastily withdrew. The men sounded the partition dividing the harness-room from the stall, and muttered to each other that it would not stand many hard rushes. It was Bob who pointed out that the beast's manger, on the stall side of the partition, would prevent him from making any effective attack.

Presently some one, taking his courage in both hands, climbed into the front of the wagon and deposited a large armful of hay just where it would tempt the hungry creature. He climbed down again precipitately when the buffalo gave a short roar and made as if to charge at him.

It was agreed that as soon as the beast should step into the wagon in quest of food, Kehoe, on the roof, should lower the door of the wagon. This also had ropes attached to it, and he held them fast as he lay prone.

The minutes sped by. It grew dark. The young people at intervals put their heads through the window to watch the buffalo and drew them quickly back when he turned toward them, talking with each other meanwhile in undertones, joking and laughing.

The animal was plainly growing hungry, and curiosity was getting the better of suspicion. Again and again he advanced toward the wagon and part way up the inclined plane that led to the body of it. But some one in the crowd outside was sure to call attention to this fact, in loud tones, and he would precipitately retreat. At length, however, he stood there in the wagon peacefully munching hay.

Now was the golden moment! Kehoe ought to drop the door and hold him fast! But he did nothing of the sort.

The watching crowd grew restless. Calls of "Kehoe! Kehoe! Hi there!" in rough stage whispers went up. The clamor increased. At length some one mounted the roof. There, lying face downward and holding the ropes, Jim Kehoe peacefully slumbered!

By the time the irate crowd had awakened him the buffalo had finished all the hay and retired to his stall. It was five o'clock the next morning before his hunger mounted again to the point of inducing him to enter the suspicious wagon.

Meanwhile, the young people, tired of watching and suddenly and guiltily aware of the lateness of the hour, had gone forth to find their

ponies. By this time Leonard Raymond wore the guise of an old and familiar friend, and it seemed nothing unnatural for Bob to invite him to come along and see the ranch. So he, too, got a pony from the barn and, mounting it, rode beside them.

As they clattered through the canyon along the narrow ledge of road they looked out fearfully for traces of any accident, remembering the young woman, who, with her young husband and her baby, had passed that way in the morning. But they saw nothing. So they hoped she had made the passage safely.

Far below, the Shoshone River rushed tumultuously along, swirling over great bowlders, cutting into the sides of the mountain. Far above them the rocky walls rose a thousand and two thousand feet. The full moon looked in on them now and then, casting gigantic black shadows from side to side of the rocky cleft. Between the patches of moonlight the road was so dark that no rider could see a foot ahead. Death waited for any slip. Yet still the young people, exhilarated with youth and the sense of adventure, sang their rollicking songs and heard the mighty rocks echo back their foolish words.

Half-way through the canyon they passed the camp of the men who were building the government irrigation dam. They were all asleep, but the young people did their best to break those slumbers. At the other end of the canyon they came upon a little group of cabins surrounding a road-house where liquor was sold, and where every night card-play ran high. But now so late was it that even this nocturnal settlement lay asleep.

On and on they went, their horses galloping steadily, unguided, knowing their way home. Again and again they forded the Shoshone River as the road wound from side to side of the narrow valley, seeking a level space for a foothold. The gallant little horses swam in the deeper parts and kept their footing on the slippery rolling stones. The girls drew their feet up under them to escape the wet, but they were no more afraid than were the young men. All were carried along by a fine keen sense of adventure. Life was worth living. It was full of mysterious possibilities. Their hearts beat high, the blood sang in their veins. They were young, and free, and out of doors among the splendors of the world.

As they cantered on, deeper into the mountain fastnesses, the solemnity of the scene gradually weighed upon and oppressed even their effervescent spirits. Leonard Raymond, sensitive, quick to respond, lost his gayety, ceased his quick-spoken, slangy jokes, grew pensive. His very appearance changed, so much of an actor was he. In his own imagination he was Prince Charlie, the dispossessed; he was a love-stricken knight in the Scottish Highlands meditating on his sad estate, following his lady-love; he was a hundred heroes of romance. He looked the part, too — with his slender body, and his delicately featured face, shining white in the moonlight.

The only thing was, as Beth could not help noticing, his legs stuck out too straight.

Jeff, on the contrary, was one with the animal he bestrode. His legs conformed themselves to its sides till they seemed only part of its harness. The muscles of his flat, strong back rippled and swelled as he easily swayed to the pony's motion. He caught off his broad-brimmed hat, tucked it into his belt, and rode bareheaded, the wind of his forward rush lifting his heavy dark hair and showing a white streak of untanned flesh above

his brown forehead. His deep-set eyes glowed. He was alive from head to foot with a splendid, vigorous life, so full of sensation he was content neither to think nor to imagine. He looked like a boy — but yet like a man.

His eyes, bright and frank and determined, roamed the road ahead, scaled the sharp flanks of the mountains, revelled in the dark blue depths of the moonlighted sky; but always they came back to rest upon Beth with a look of satisfaction. He felt himself a part of the summer night, of the glorious world of mountain and sky. His heart sang as the river sang, rushing along beside them. But Beth was the heart of this beautiful world — Beth, young and lissome and innocent, gay and sweet as the mountain flowers. He had known her always, and yet now she was suddenly and freshly revealed to him. On the day when she came to the ranch she had lifted her veil for him — that veil woven of custom and expectedness; but it had dropped again. Yet now, as she rode, she showed herself to his eager eyes as that one woman for whom he was waiting. He spurred his horse up beside her where she rode beside pensive Raymond, both silent under the spell of the night; both full of

youthful, romantic dreams, very content with their silence.

Jeff flicked her pony across the flank with his quirt, and the animal, used to his voice and mastery, instantly doubled its speed.

"Come, ride with me!" he called. "A race! A race!"

Forgetting Leonard, whom she swiftly left behind, Beth gripped her horse more closely, sat light but firm, and loosed her reins. Away they flew, boy and girl, horse and human, through the night. The soft wind tore at her hat, and, without stopping her horse's stride, she pulled it off, and, like Jeff, thrust it in her belt. Not yet had she learned to wear it tight. Her loosened hair worked free of its ribbons and pins and streamed out behind her, catching the moonlight in its tossing waves. Her face glowed with the zest of life; her eyes shone like stars.

At length their ponies ran side by side, nipping at each other now and then, and squealing in the eagerness of their striving. Jeff's leg, hard and stiff in its high boot, struck hers and hurt; but she did not care. Oh, it was fine to be alive and young and free, speeding through the night on horses fleet as wind, sound and

tireless! The procession of the mountains stepped statelily aside to give them room; the moon hung a lamp in the sky to light their way; all the world was aware of them, kind to them, glad of their youth and joy.

At length, after some timeless centuries of this full life, Jeff laid a hand on her rein, at the same time pulling in his own pony.

"They 've got to ford it in a few minutes," he said. "Better let 'em cool off a little."

She nodded, and at once, as they paused, the rioting world paused too; as their horses breathed fast, the world sighed about them. Tree whispered to tree, low dry herbs rustled, the sagebrush, heaving softly, exhaled spicy aromas. Unabashed, the river chattered loudly among its stones.

"Oh, Jeff!" cried Beth, leaning toward him, looking up into his familiar face with eyes shining with feelings beyond speech. "Oh, Jeff!" She thought she could speak out what filled her heart, but she could not. However, he answered her. His eyes, too, were shining.

"Yes, dear, I know," he said, and she was content. Only long afterward did she remember to wonder a little at that "dear." Was it

only a survival from her childhood, when he had often taken her on long rides, when he had first taught her the joy of racing?

Behind them, Alice, Bob, and Raymond were coming along at a fair pace. At a rise in the road they saw them, then they dipped down again out of sight. But Beth had noticed Alice with two cavaliers, while she had only one, and that one Jeff — familiar, unromantic old Jeff! For a moment her vain girlish heart rose in rebellion and she tossed her head pettishly. "I don't care!" she told herself. Then she looked again at the man before her, and something, from depths as yet unstirred in her, rose and did homage to his strength and manhood. For a moment she, too, discerned beneath the disguise of custom, a moving reality.

She and Jeff plunged at last, still without speaking, each one busy with feelings that had not yet become thoughts, into the waters of the ford. The river tore at them, the ponies' hoofs slipped on the wet uncertain stones, splashing cool drops into their faces. They were in mid-stream, and the horses were beginning to swim, when the others rode down to the bank. Beth, looking back, saw that this time Leonard urged

his horse into the water carelessly, without trace of that conquered fear which had made him jerk the reins and confuse the horse at the other fordings. His eyes were fixed on Jeff. There was a scowl on his white forehead, and Beth, observing, was filled with exultation.

"I am! I am!" she whispered to herself, feeling sure the words would be lost in the shout of the river. "I am really, truly growing to be a woman!"

It was just dawn when they reached the borders of the forest ranch and met Richard Warfield, stern-faced and white in the pale light, riding toward them. He said very little, but Beth surmised from his set jaw that this was because he was afraid of saying too much. She broke at once into a voluble and enthusiastic description of their adventures, calling on Bob and Alice to confirm her account. In spite of himself, her father relaxed his severity, and condescended so far as to laugh at the account of the buffalo who had held up Buffalo Bill's home town.

At the door of the ranch-house Margaret stood waiting. Beth threw kisses to her and Bob pulled off his hat and waved it. They all shouted greet-

ings, and so they came gayly toward her, the bright ripples of the river splashing high about the horses' legs.

Beth dropped from her saddle at the house-door and, slapping her pony on the flank, sent him off to the barn while she herself ran up and caught her mother in her strong young arms.

"Why, mother," she exclaimed, "how pale you look! You darling, darling mother! Have you been worrying about us? We've been very thoughtless, but just wait till I tell you what kept us. It was n't an everyday thing, you can be sure of that." Here Bob broke in, his long arms folding both mother and sister in one great bear-hug.

"You don't need to worry about Beth when she is with me," he assured Margaret. "You might know she would be all right. You've not been worrying, have you?"

"Well, a little," said truthful Margaret. "I tried not to." Bob saw her pale face and the dark circles under her eyes.

"Did you sleep?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes, I slept," she answered. "It was your voices that wakened me."

"But she did n't go to bed," Warfield joined

in, "until after one o'clock. I think you young people had better have your mother a little more on your mind the next time you go off for a fling. It 's rather hard for her to stay at home, having none of the fun, wondering if the goblins have got her precious children."

"Poor mamma!" Beth said, conscience-stricken, lapsing into her baby name for her mother. "You come right in and go to bed. Papa and I will get breakfast." But Margaret shook her head.

"Of course not, my dear," she said. "We have company for breakfast, have we not?"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Beth. Then she whispered in her mother's ear; "I declare, I clear forgot him, thinking about you." And in that sentence was balm for Margaret's woes. When a girl can forget a handsome young man in anxiety for her mother, that mother has reason to be proud and satisfied.

Therefore was it, perhaps, that Margaret was especially gracious in her acknowledgment of the introduction to Leonard Raymond. Alice she had long known and liked, and Jeff, of course, was a part of the family.

Now Mrs. Tatezel had come to the door in

the very beginning of this scene. She stood there grim, severe, forbidding, the picture of avenging justice. She wanted to see the "dressing down" that these young people so richly deserved for their night's performance. When instead of this she saw only love on both sides, and gentleness, and finally gayety and good will, she fairly drew back into the comparative darkness of the house to wonder over the situation. Involuntarily there came to her mind a memory of scenes in the past when her high-spirited nursling, as loving a girl as Beth, had come home a little late from some gay doings. She remembered her reception, the reproaches that were heaped upon her, the way in which she was made to feel that she had committed an almost unpardonable sin. She remembered those things, and suddenly it seemed to her that perhaps that which had come upon her girl might not have come had her young riotous life been more sympathetically treated.

She joined Mrs. Warfield in getting the breakfast. Indeed, she had already lighted the stove and set the kettle boiling before coming to the door. Nothing that happened to Mrs. Tatezel ever made her forget her practical duties. But in spite of the enlightening reflections through

which she had just passed she was distinctly stiff when she was presented to Leonard Raymond. Her green eyes rested upon him with a light in them which was almost malevolent.

"I don't like him," she told Margaret flatly, when he had been taken away to Bob's room to freshen himself for the day. "He reminds me of Mr. Clifford."

At this Margaret, if possible, turned a shade paler.

CHAPTER VIII

REBELLION

THERE followed gay times at the Forest Ranch. Leonard Raymond stayed on from day to day, easily winning his welcome. He was master of the arts of persuasion. Some he used consciously; others were the unconscious fruit of his desire to please and to win applause. His manner toward Margaret was deferential and held at times a hint of tenderness. Once or twice he talked with her in the twilight and told her of his mother, who had died when he was a boy of sixteen. Margaret's big heart yearned over him, and she herself encouraged him to stay on at the ranch, out of reach of the liquor that tempted him.

Alice Harmon came over on one errand or another almost every day. Sometimes Beth contrived the errand; but when her invention failed, Alice obligingly helped her out. This was, to her, Society with a capital S. She had read of house parties, and in her conversation at home

she referred to the informal gathering at Beth's home by this high-sounding title.

She rose every morning at preposterously small hours, hurried through her daily chores, gave her hair an unusually thorough dressing, trying to train its thick, straight lengths into a wavy pompadour like Beth's. To accomplish this, she used rags; and to see her at her work, her head decorated with many flying white flags, was to know at once that the most efficient and sensible women have their vanities. She curled her hair with the same thoroughness she used in kneading bread; and in time she achieved a bushy pompadour that stuck out at least three inches all around her head, forming an inconsistent background to her sensible, energetic, little brown face.

Beth watched her progress with awe. When Alice's puff of hair reached the proportions of her own she hugged her with delight, congratulating her on her success. When Alice's pompadour swelled out still further Beth "ratted" her own soft wavy locks in rivalry, until her mother protested.

"Oh, mother! You're too old-fashioned for anything! I suppose you'd like me to part and

braid my hair like yours! Now this is really stylish. It looks just like the waiter-girls at the Irma."

Margaret laughed. "Yes. It does. Exactly."

The two girls spent hours in Beth's little calico-hung bedroom, prinking. Beth showed Alice how to manicure her nails. Alice showed Beth how to cut out a shirt-waist and stitch it on the machine. They made themselves some pretty summer clothes, while the men and boys were off at the round-up.

While they sewed they talked — young-girlish talk, all dreams of the future — of the kind of men they liked; of when they would get married. Beth said she should live in the country. Alice insisted on the city. Beth said sometimes she thought she would n't get married at all, but be an actress, and travel all over the earth, and have "slews" of lovers sending her flowers and candy. Alice blinked at this daring vision; but honestly said she was n't pretty enough for that, and anyhow she preferred staying at home, the wife of a perfectly grand man. She would make him comfortable and feed him well, and cheer him in his conflict with the world. He would be a great man, and he would say it was all owing to her.

Meanwhile Bob and Leonard Raymond, on horseback, were spending long days out in the exhilarating, clean, dry air. Leonard, with his easy adaptability, rode well in the Western style, and Bob, of course, had been accustomed to horses from his childhood. As they rode they both smoked large quantities of cigarettes. Leonard showed himself a master of clever means of importing these luxuries, and he and Bob agreed with each other to keep the habit a secret from Bob's mother.

"This is one of the things, you know, old boy," Leonard told him, "that women are not fitted to deal with justly. Most of them know nothing at all by experience about the noble weed and its soothing effects. They hear papers at women's clubs and read the reports of the Anti-Cigarette League, and take one of their feminine prejudices, and there you are. After that there 's no doing anything with them."

Bob rather squirmed under this. He did not like to have his mother lumped with other women in so disrespectful a fashion. Leonard went on airily:

"Of course, I know that your mother is very different from the rest. You ought to thank

God for her every night, my boy." His manner was emotional, even theatrical. But this touch of insincerity did not reach Bob. It was very subtle, because in the main Leonard meant just what he said.

"But even your mother," he went on, "is a woman, after all, Bob, and there are some things the very finest and noblest of women do not know; some things in which men must be men, choose their own paths in life, and take the consequences." To this fine-sounding sentiment Bob heartily agreed. It is easy to believe in an argument which marches with one's desire. And besides, Bob had not so often been called a man by another man, still less by a man of the world, such as he felt Leonard to be.

Also, he enjoyed the cigarettes. Indeed, he came to crave for them. Sometimes he was startled by the strength of the craving that took possession of him, and by the nervous restlessness which consumed him when the time between smokes was unduly prolonged.

In the days' rides out in the light-filled air, Leonard quite turned his mind inside out, sure of the admiration or at least of the astonishment and interest of the younger boy. Now, this may

have been a very good thing for Leonard, who seldom had such opportunities for clean and wholesome confession. But there were many things in his mind which it was not good for Bob to know, or to see at too close range.

The effect would not have been so undermining had Bob been indifferent to the narrator of these tales. But instead of that, he had a hearty admiration and liking for him. He blinked, to be sure, at some of the yarns, because they were so palpably devoid of noble and honorable feeling. But as speedily as possible he turned his mind away and thought of the finer side of Leonard's character. He was an ardent boy, full of warm and loving impulses, at the age of hero-worship. His imagination was vivid and capable of constructing a hero out of poorer stuff than this handsome young actor. Meanwhile, his liking of the man himself made him tolerate that man's acts, and insensibly lowered his standards of conduct.

When, the round-up accomplished, the two boys came riding home with the rest of the men, they found at the ranch-house two charming young creatures awaiting them. Indeed, Bob's quick eye had discerned nearly a mile away the

Pinto pony, with a Rocking S on his flank, which daily carried Alice over from the Rocking S Ranch. So rapidly had he grown to the emotional stature of the man with whom he had been associating all these days that the sight gave him a little romantic thrill.

When he actually saw Alice, with her pompadoured hair, her manicured nails, and fresh white shirt-waist suit, he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Gee! But you do look good," he cried, as he dropped from his pony, flinging the lines over his head. Alice blushed with embarrassment.

"You look brown," she retorted, "and hungry."

"You bet I am," answered Bob, heartily. "The very smoke from the kitchen smells good." He stalked into the kitchen dining-room, his spurs clattering. Margaret stood waiting for him. She would not interfere with the girls' greeting, though her heart was eager. When his long young arms wrapped her about and his young strength lifted her off the floor, she rejoiced in him, and rubbed her soft cheek against his.

"Got a good deal of pickle, has n't it, mother? You and Beth have made lots of fun of my shaving, but now you see what happens when I leave

it out. Oh, but home looks good! Almost too luxurious."

Margaret's loving glance ran around the cosy room. She and Mrs. Tatezel alone knew the many changes which combined to produce this effect. All the time the men had been gone on the round-up these two devoted women had been preparing for their home-coming, and now the low-ceiled room shone with rubbings and polishings, with freshly laundered curtains, new tablecloths, and flowers everywhere.

Leonard Raymond, who had been longer out of sight of women than ever before in his life, found Beth a bewildering delight. She was in truth very dainty and pretty, her eyes shining with the excitement of welcome, her cheeks softly rosy, and flowers tucked behind her ear.

Leonard theatrically bowed over her hand and would have kissed it, but she snatched it away with a blush and a giggle, and a glance around to see who was looking. Near by was Jeff Stanton, but his back was turned ostentatiously. He was already at work unsaddling the ponies and running them into the corral. As much to tease Leonard as to please him, Beth sang out:

"Hello, Jeff! Are n't you glad you 're home?"

"Yep," said Jeff, honestly but shortly. He did not look around.

"Are n't you *very* glad?" pursued Beth. She went over toward him. "You might shake hands, I should think." She held out her own pink and white hand, tipping it slightly so that the polished nails should catch the sunlight.

"I 'm not fit," said Jeff, standing up and facing her, but, to her disappointment, not looking at her hand. He slapped the yellow dust from his chaps, using his long riding gauntlet. But his face had already lost its sulky expression. He could not look at her standing there, sweet, and fresh, and friendly, in the sunlight, and not feel a throb of happiness. Besides, Beth's hair was done up on the top of her head in innumerable little puffs and curls. She looked almost a young woman.

But Leonard Raymond was not to be shaken off so lightly. He sauntered over to the little group, and as soon as he reached them Jeff found an excuse to lead the horses away. He had said almost nothing; he had churlishly refused to shake hands with her; and yet Beth's eyes danced as she looked after him.

"We had better get in to supper," she said,

demurely. "You must be awfully hungry. And we 've got the best supper! Alice has made some of her famous popovers. You have to eat them the moment they come out of the oven. Oh, Jeff!" she called over her shoulder, "Alice's popovers to-night. You want to hurry up. Don't go to the mess-house." Jeff slapped his ponies on the flank, swung to the gate of the corral, and came striding back to her.

"I 'm much obliged to you, Miss Beth," he said. It was the first time he had ever given her the title, and the girl involuntarily straightened to meet the unaccustomed dignity. "But I can't come. It 's the first night home from the round-up, and they 's many things to see to. It 's business first and pleasure after, you know." He looked straight into her eyes with a sober, steadfast look which she liked. Then he turned away.

"I 'm glad I don't have to work," commented Leonard, loud enough so that the other man could easily hear him. "I 'd rather have those popovers than the cornbread in the mess-house any day. Besides, I like to choose my company." He laughed tauntingly.

Later, when the evening festivities were over and all the tired men at the ranch had gone early

to bed, Beth, who ought to have gone to sleep, stayed awake for almost half an hour composing rebukes she ought to have administered to him in Jeff's hearing. But she was too inexperienced, too young, too tenderly afraid of hurting any one's feelings to be quick at repartee.

For two or three days Bob and Leonard stayed about the ranch-house, quite content with homely joys. Beth read "Lorna Doone" aloud to them, while Alice hemstitched bureau covers. After their long days on the bleak hillsides the boys were both glad of this green, peaceful interval. Leonard swung all day in the hammock, and consumed uncounted packages of cigarettes. Bob disappeared frequently. He was still unwilling to smoke before his sister or mother.

"What in the world makes you so restless, Bob?" Beth asked. "I never saw you so nervous."

"I 'm not either," retorted her brother. "It 's all in your eye. Girls have got to have somebody to fuss over, I suppose. But you 'd better choose some easier customer than I am. I won't stand for it." Nevertheless he knew himself that he was nervous and irritable. He could not think what was the matter, and why he was always

hankering for something. The cigarettes he surreptitiously smoked quieted the hankering for a few minutes, but it came back again shortly stronger than ever. He used to go down to the mess-house, and drink big cupfuls of the strong black coffee served there. At home his mother never allowed the coffee-pot to stand on the stove after breakfast; but there at the mess-house it stood and simmered and cooked stronger and stronger all day long.

Now at last Beth was tasting to the full the eagerly desired delights of young-ladyhood. There was little work which it was really necessary for her to do, and that little she frequently shirked.

"Oh, mamma," she would cry, "won't you please make up my bed for me? We 're all going down to the river to fish, and the boys won't wait." And Margaret was quite willing. She liked to see her daughter having a good time. With a glow about her heart, she watched the girlish figure in its pretty blue dress, flitting lightly down through the alfalfa. She enjoyed all Beth's good times. She enjoyed her ripening good looks. She enjoyed the girl's first intoxicating taste of masculine admiration.

But sometimes fears assailed her. She was a woman of vigorous good sense, not given to unnecessary worries. In her young-womanhood she had assumed a burden so great that in order to bear it she had perforce thrown over all those lesser troubles with which other women satisfied their love of martyrdom. As time wore on, however, she did begin to trouble a little about Beth's intimacy with Leonard Raymond. Was this, after all, the sort of man whom she would choose to be the first to wear the colors of romance in her daughter's eyes? She could well imagine just what Beth found attractive in him, for the same qualities appealed to her. She tried now and then to win Beth to some expression of opinion about him, but the girl was evasive in her replies. Margaret watched for a favorable opportunity to have a quiet and serious talk with her.

Sunny day after sunny day went by, but the opportunity failed to arrive. From the moment she awoke in the morning — rather late, it must be confessed — Beth seemed to have not a second for repose or reflection. It was perfectly wonderful the number of things which these four young persons found to fill up their days. They had picnickings, and huntings, and fishings. They

rode over to the Rocking S Ranch and spent the day, though why the day there should be any better or more interesting than the day at the Forest Ranch it would be hard to say. Alice, however, with the punctilious pride of the Western country girl, insisted that they should return her many visits. Once she had them corralled at her house, she devised all sorts of schemes for their amusement. They popped corn, pulled molasses candy, and even sewed rags to make a rag carpet.

Once the entire outfit from the Rocking S and from the Forest Ranch went in one great body over the mountains for twenty-five miles to a barbecue and barn-raising. They spent two or three days there, as did every one else in the country side. For a space of about one hundred miles all the ranch-houses were empty except this one. The people came in flocks, bringing their own provisions with them. They worked all day and danced half the night. The women cooked and gossiped.

When they rode away again, scattering to all points of the horizon, the new barn stood complete behind them, giving evidence to the power of neighborly good will.

At this barbecue Margaret, a woman set apart from the rest by her metropolitan training and manners, though her speech and dress were simple, gained fresh cause for her anxiety about Leonard. His attentions to Beth were so marked that even she heard the gossip it excited. Among the sturdy ranchmen his slight figure was elegance itself, his motions all grace; but at the same time his comparative weakness was evident.

It did not often happen that he and Jeff stood together, but once Margaret saw them so. Their backs were toward her, and she noted the slender elegance of the young New Yorker's figure, and at the same time the sturdy strength of the Western man. She looked at them keenly, comparing them. All her prejudices, her habits of thought, the standards of her class, tended to make her prefer Raymond. But in this woman's mind there were other factors at work. She could think outside of her prejudices. She had well-founded convictions. Her meditation was so profound, that at length, unconsciously, she spoke her conclusion aloud: "Of the two I prefer Jeff," she said, emphatically.

But apparently Beth did not. Her original admiration for Leonard Raymond was now dan-

gerously mingled with compassion. She felt that she was his guardian angel. She was teaching him to be good! For in their playtimes together it had inevitably happened that Leonard, whose thoughts seldom strayed very far away from his own immediate concerns, found himself telling the story of his life to Beth. He had had considerable practice at this sort of thing; though, to be sure, his audience usually consisted of women somewhat older than this young schoolgirl, but he had never told it to a more sympathetic audience. He felt that she listened with her whole soul.

Insensibly he was led on from confidence to confidence, until at length, much to his own surprise, he found himself telling her what trouble it was that had driven him from the theatre and that threatened to wreck his career at the outset.

He could not have chosen a more certain method of appeal. Beth's warm sympathies, her nascent motherliness, rushed out to gather him into the safe shelter of her compassion. After that she, too, like Bob, regarded him as something of a hero, a prince who was struggling with the powers of darkness, a noble and gifted young man, tempted indeed, but resisting tempta-

tion. She prayed over him when she went to bed at night, and even during the day her hands would fall idly into her lap, her sweet eyes lift themselves to the sky, and she would pray for the soul of Leonard Raymond. Yet, strange to say, she did not like to confide this fact, innocent and even admirable as it seemed, to her mother, from whom never before had she kept a secret.

After their return home, the pleasures of the Forest Ranch somewhat palled upon the young New Yorker. He said he must go to town to cash a money order which had recently arrived, and he invited both Beth and Bob to go with him and make another day's expedition of it. Full of eagerness, Beth tore in to ask permission, feeling sure beforehand that it would be granted. Rare indeed were the occasions when Margaret refused her children any reasonable request. But this time, to Beth's vast indignation, Margaret refused, nor did she give what the young girl considered an adequate reason.

"You will remember the last time you and Bob went to town together and how dreadfully anxious your father and I were about you. I should not think you would want to ask me to go through such an ordeal again."

"But it shall not be such an ordeal, mother," the young girl cried, eagerly. "We will promise faithfully to be back by eight o'clock or nine at the furthest. You need not suppose that we would ever treat you like that a second time."

"But that is not all," Margaret went on. "I don't want you to go to town with Leonard Raymond and Bob. You are too young to be shown about town by a young gentleman like that. Cody is a little place and full of gossip, and I can't have my daughter's name bandied about in any manner."

The truth was that Margaret had grown distinctly nervous about Leonard Raymond. Ever since she became convinced that Beth was keeping something in relation to him from her she had felt herself in the presence of an impalpable danger which loomed the larger because she could so dimly discern its outlines.

"Your father and I might go to Cody with you," she ventured at last, "if you will wait until the alfalfa crop is in." But she knew at once by Beth's crestfallen and unresponsive face that this proposition met with no favor. She turned away with a pang at her heart. This was the first time that either of her children had ever

greeted the prospect of her presence with them on one of their junketings with anything less than rapture. Of course, Beth hastened to reassure her.

"I should love to have you come, you know, dear," she cried, "but we just can't wait. Mr. Raymond 's got to have the money. He has to send some of it away, and a few days more might spoil it all for him."

But as far as Margaret was concerned, the die was cast. Never would she allow her daughter to ride sixty miles and spend the day, even under the chaperonage of her brother, with a man whose influence over her could turn her against her own father and mother. From that moment she was deaf to entreaties and arguments, and Beth at length, in a perfect fury of rebellion, gave up the effort to win her consent.

Now this conversation had taken place, as so many of the happenings of the household did, in the large room which was both kitchen and dining-room. Just outside its windows Bob and Leonard had lingered long enough to catch the drift of the vigorous remarks flying about inside. In his day and generation Bob was a wise young gentleman. He knew that in her present mood

his mother would refuse him as promptly as she had refused Beth. He also knew she would do so not for any reason, but from an emotion; and he always distinctly resented any government which rose from such a source. Therefore he beckoned to Leonard and whispered:

"I say, let 's get out of this without saying a word. I guess I 'm big enough to go to Cody without permission, and it 's plain that I 'll never get to go any other way."

When Beth came out of the house a few minutes later, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, wondering how much of her vindictive tirade had been heard by Leonard, all that was to be seen of the boy and the young man were two mounted figures, galloping down the road to Cody.

"Oh, how mean you are! How mean!" the girl cried out. She picked up a handful of loose earth and cast it futilely in their direction. "You 're as mean as dirt," she cried and stamped upon it. Then she burst into a flood of passionate tears.

CHAPTER IX

AS IT WAS WRITTEN

DAWN broke again over the Forest Ranch. Again, as on that day some months past, it shone upon riders returning from Cody. But there were only two this time, and the sound of their voices, while loud and gay, had in it a thickness, a throaty gurgle, which somehow lent uneasiness even to the horses, whose sensitive ears lay back quivering and inquiring. Bob was feeling himself a hundred times a man. He slapped himself on his chest with his gauntletted hand every now and then and called upon Leonard to admire him.

"'F I had n't been 'long, old feller, you 'd 'a been in pretty bad shape this morning," he assured his companion. "Bad thing for kid like you to have 'is pockets lined with money. You would n't 'a had a cent if I had n't pulled you out o' there. Better be glad you got a frien' like me." The drink, heightening his latent sense of manhood and strength, brought out now his true

superiority to the lurching, slighter creature at his side.

"Bes' frien' man ever had, Bob," Leonard murmured, overcome. "Shall never forget, never. Love you for it, frien' of my heart." He tried to embrace the other. Bob pushed him roughly away.

"Say there! Sit up in your saddle if you can. Now we're most home, you don't want to fall off. Bad enough las' time."

And indeed, Leonard's hat and shirt showed unmistakable signs of previous falls. How in the world Bob had ever managed to rescue him and keep the ponies from running away is known only to the Bacchic gods.

Again, as before, they were watched from the house-door. It was Beth and Warfield who stood there this time, anxiously looking down the Cody trail, watching for the return of mother and son. For when they awakened that morning it was to discover from a note, thoughtfully left on the kitchen table, that Mrs. Warfield had been unable to sleep and had gone off for a ride "to quiet her restlessness." She sometimes did this, for being a mortal woman she had nerves; but being a strong one she mastered them. Never-

theless, neither daughter nor husband was deceived. They were very sure that her ride had been in the direction of Cody and that she had gone to look for her rebellious son.

Across the river, as they stood watching, they saw two men coming, maudlin and stupid. Contempt filled the high-spirited, untempted girl almost to the exclusion of her naturally strong affection for her brother, and utterly to the exclusion of her dawning affection for Leonard.

As for Warfield, the sight of his young son's flushed face, and the sound of his sliding, thick speech, rushed home to his heart and waked it to remorse. His mood of self-absorption burst asunder as if some bomb had exploded within him. He came to from the dim and beset regions in which he had lately been wandering, with a shock, as if in a dark room an electric light had been turned on, revealing every fact with pitiless distinctness. He hurried forward to greet and help the two young men, but Bob scornfully refused all offers of assistance.

"Think I don't know how to tend me own horse, Dad?" he asked, swaggering. "Guess I know how better 'n you do. You lemme 'lone."

Leonard Raymond, however, gladly accepted

his assistance. Warfield fairly lifted him from the saddle and set him down upon the bench beneath the cottonwood tree where he promptly lapsed into slumber.

For a moment Warfield stood regarding the helpless, sodden boy, sadness filling his heart. It had never been possible for him to look upon these things as lightly as others did. He knew too much of the dreadful end of the road this young fellow trod so gayly. He knew also, by experience, almost as little as did his wife, of the pleasant, irresponsible seductions which masked, as with flowers, the first few rods of the way. For he had been forewarned and forearmed almost from his cradle. He gazed sadly at the handsome, weak face before him — such a face as women yearn over, with beautiful, delicate lines, encrimsoned now and marred with the slight swelling of debauch, with loose, open mouth. The boy slept and snored, his arms dangling, his mud-encrusted body lopped into an unseemly heap. Warfield looked at him because he could not, just yet, bear to look at his own boy.

But what was that? Another horse? And running? Warfield turned quickly to look again down the trail. For a moment the level rays of

the rising sun blinded him — then his sight cleared. Good God! It was Margaret's horse — riderless!

The saddle was twisted to one side, and that side was covered with mud. The pony limped slightly as he ran. It was plain he had had a fall. But Margaret — Margaret — where was she?

Beth, too, saw the horse and read his riddle. Turning, she hid her face in her father's breast, but he shook her off, and strode out to the barn to saddle his horse and ride forth in search.

"Get whiskey!" he called to the girl. "And tell Mrs. Tatezel. She 'll know what to give you."

Beth hurried to the older woman, who had heard and seen for herself, and was busy packing a saddle-bag with every imaginable restorative — with surgeons' plaster, absorbent cotton, bandages, flannels, a rubber pillow; and, finally, some hot coffee, well wrapped, and some food. Mrs. Tatezel never lost her head — not now, after so many years of keeping it ready for emergencies.

Near the barn Bob was still clumsily trying to unharness his horse, glorifying himself, and sarcastically judging every one else as he pulled at the wrong buckles. Beth ran up to him, caught

hold of him by the shoulders and fairly shook him.

"Listen, Bob!" she cried out. "Mother's lost. Her horse has fallen and come home without her."

"Wha's tha' you say?" Bob asked, leaning heavily on his horse's back and trying to focus his hot eyeballs upon her face. "Mother's lost? How'd that happen? She's too old to do a thing like that. Ought t' know better."

"Her horse came home just a few minutes ago without any rider," the girl repeated. "He has marks of a fall. Didn't you see mother anywhere on the trail, Bob?"

"Damned 'f I did," he replied cheerily. "O' course, I was n't looking for her. All I could do to hold Leonard on his saddle. Awful drunk, that chap." Beth caught his ears and held him steady.

"Bob, look me straight in the eyes and listen to what I'm saying. *Mother's lost!* Do you hear me? *Mother's lost!* She may be hurt. She may be—" a sob choked her voice—"*dead!*" At last the idea penetrated Bob's dulled intelligence.

"You don't say," he murmured, more coher-

ently. "I guess I 'd better sober up." Leaving the pony where he stood, he began to run unevenly down toward the river, shedding his clothes as he ran. Beth, shocked and uncomfortable, tried to stand between him and Leonard that the latter might not see her brother's odd behavior. Leonard had nearly fallen off the bench, and, roused by the effort to save himself, now sat up, blinking.

"Wha 's the matter with my frien' Bob?" he murmured. "Bes' frien' man ever had. Shall never forget it."

"Mother 's lost," said Beth. It seemed to her as if the whole world had narrowed down to this one statement. No other fact was important or significant for her. She felt she was born to communicate it; that it must change the nature of every one who heard it. Yet for the moment it conveyed to her no idea of action. She was too dazed.

"Oh, poor Mish Warfield!" murmured Leonard. "Poor little motherless Beth. Lemme offer you consolation of my undying love. Sweet girl, Beth. Poor, motherless girl." He leaned toward her and reached out his arms; but Beth fled from him, terrified.

Recovering his balance with considerable difficulty he leaned back, weeping. Then presently he lay down upon the hard bench, curled up as comfortably as possible, and, still occasionally sobbing, fell asleep.

Meanwhile, the icy river had done its work on Bob. He came up from its chill embraces sick, but sober. With pangs of self-disgust he picked up his scattered clothing and put it on decently behind a clump of sage-brush. Just as he finished, Warfield rode down to the ford.

Beth ran after him, screaming to him to wait.

"Please, father! Please! I must come. I will! I'll go alone if you won't wait for me."

"No!" said her father, very stern. "You stay here."

"I will not," Beth answered, in flat defiance. "I can't. Oh, father! Just one minute! I'll be so quick."

Warfield, looking into her quivering face, realizing her pain, hesitated. She saw the shadow of relenting and ran back swiftly to the corral.

"Jeff! Jeff!" she called, as she ran. "Saddle my pony, quick, quick! Mother's lost."

Jeff, who had been sleeping soundly in the foreman's house, had just come up, and after a

single glance at the mud-stained pony, with the turned saddle, comprehended, and helped the excited girl without a word. As she sprang into the saddle he put his own hat upon her head — she had forgotten hers — and handed up his quirt.

"I 'll join you by another trail," he said. "Which way did the horse come?"

"From Cody," said Beth. "Oh, hurry, Jeff! Hurry!"

"I 'll be there," said Jeff, tersely.

Warfield, seeing Beth coming, sent his horse into the water.

"Go on! I 'll catch up," called Bob, pulling on his clothes with shaking hands. And so he did, within two miles. He was mounted on a fresh horse. His eyes were still red, and his face looked suddenly aged, as if he had left boyhood behind forever. But he rode straight and steady in his saddle, and was evidently master of himself.

"What 's happened?" he asked, as they rode along.

"We don't know," Warfield answered him. "Your mother was very anxious about you last night. She left a note saying she could n't sleep, and had gone off to ride. You know she sometimes does."

"You are sure, Bob, that you did n't see her when you were coming home?" Beth asked.

"No, I 'm not sure," Bob answered shortly. "I 'm not sure of anything that happened last night. It 's all a bad dream." The thought knocked at his heart that in his intoxicated condition he might have passed his mother or even have hurt her. Leonard Raymond and he might have crowded her over the edge of the canyon. Dreadful images of such possibilities rose in his fevered brain and terrified him. He knew that for some hours he had been a perfectly irresponsible, unmoral creature, as little to be trusted as any madman. What if, in this state, a state which he had supposed to be merely fun, which he had never taken seriously even when he saw it in others, which he was accustomed to laugh at on the stage and in the streets of Cody, what if in this condition he actually had injured his own mother? One thing was plain; he had surely made her suffer. It was because of him that she had been unable to sleep — he knew that without any need of word from his father. It was because of him that she had set forth on that ill-fated ride. Oh, if he could only find her! He promised the mountains and the sky above him,

in his turbulent heart he promised the God he had lately neglected, that he would never again, so long as he lived, be trapped into such voluntary madness.

The hours sped by and at length the little group stood amazed before a barrier which barred entrance to the box canyon. The government of the United States, anxious to protect its laborers from the demoralizing effects of cheap whiskey and gambling excitement, and refusing to be blackmailed by the enterprising gambler who had planted himself here, precisely in order to be bought off, as he unblushingly proclaimed, had placed a stout gate, padlocked and chained, across the canyon roadway, to prevent any communication between the road house and the men who were working upon the government dam.

Bob was totally unaware of how he had himself got around this barrier the night before, but the probabilities are that some one in Cody had set him and his companion upon the right road around the mountain flank, and the horses, then outranking in intelligence their drunken riders, had done the rest.

It was evident enough that Margaret must have turned here and attempted to reach Cody

by another route, but which way had she turned, to the left or right?

After a few moments' consultation, Beth and her father turned to the left, and Bob, alone with his poignant memory, to the right. Beth looked after him longingly. Seeing him repentant, her affection for him began to rise again.

"Do you think you ought to let him go alone?" she asked her father.

"I certainly shall not let you go with him," he replied, shortly.

"But he might suddenly come — upon — something — dreadful," Beth stammered, "and then I don't see how he'd bear it."

"I pray God he may not," said her father, solemnly; "but I will keep you with me."

As they wound around the mountain side along a little-used trail Beth looked back again. Below, on the more level road to the right, she saw Bob galloping along steadily. Presently another horseman joined him. The newcomer had taken the rough short-cut over the mountains. Beth recognized him as Jeff Stanton, and heaved a sigh of relief. She knew at once that out of the whole world she would have chosen Jeff to be with her brother this morning.

CHAPTER X

STORM AND MADNESS

BETH and her father rode on into the mountain desert. The stillness was intense, the sunlight so bright that both riders pulled down their hat-brims to shade their eyes, and even the horses lowered their eyelids. Though far in the east clouds were beginning to gather and to mount the sky, as yet they cast no shadow. The world about them was a world of browns and grays, of bare rocks and barren land, rising and falling for interminable distances, swimming in a sea of splendid sunshine. What scant vegetation appeared was itself dry and dead-looking. The only color breaking the monotonous browns and grays was the occasional rich red of some rocky slope. The only sign of life was the white flicker of a jack-rabbit's tail, as, himself almost invisible because of his browns and grays, he bounded out of their way. Rock shouldering rock, mountain heaving beyond mountain, yellow earth, gray stone, and sun-filled air, these were all they saw.

The atmosphere was so rarefied that, acclimated although she was, Beth got a rather overwhelming sense of being upborne upon the back of a mighty giant, the back of her native continent. She felt suddenly weak and childish, and urged her horse closer to her father's for comfort. Warfield, glancing around as she laid her hand on his arm, met the timid appeal of her young face.

"Poor child!" he exclaimed, "this is hard for you. Never in my worst fears for the future did I dream that you and I would go on a search like this. I have sometimes thought that your mother might search for me."

Beth showed the whites of her eyes in terror.

"What do you mean?" she just managed to gasp.

"Well, your mother has always been so strong, so certain," Warfield answered, "while I have often felt overwhelmed. I expect we have leaned on her too much. She has not seemed like a woman so much as like some sufficient angel."

Tears sprang to Beth's eyes. "Yes, that's true," she said. "And I was hateful to her only yesterday."

"So was I," Warfield murmured.

"Father! You? I can't imagine it. You're always lovely to mother."

"No, I'm not. I was n't yesterday. I thought she was foolish in her fears for Bob. Yet, my God! She was right."

To her amazement Beth saw the strong, reserved man shaken almost beyond his control. Of necessity she steadied herself to meet the occasion, and began to express a reassurance which she was far from feeling.

"It was a dreadful thing, of course, Bob's being — drunk," she managed to say, though the word "drunk" halted at the tip of her tongue and it seemed to her a full minute before she could get it spoken. Never had she expected to speak it in connection with her brother's name. "But then, father, I suppose we must remember that lots of young men fall into that trap. It seems to be very usual in Cody — But it's *horrid*," she cried out, impulsively. "So disgusting, so vulgar!"

"It's much more than that for Bob, my dear," her father answered. "It may mean that an old family sin and shame has cropped out in him." His head hung upon his breast and he spoke more to himself than to her.

Beth felt a cold finger of fear tracing down her spine, from the tingling roots of her hair. Her mind reverted to the delirious days after she had hurt her temple and she remembered her cry: "There 's a curse upon this house, and Mrs. Tatezel has to do with it." She remembered, too, the mystery about that strange woman, about the Haunted House, about the body of the drowned girl. All the mystery whose outlines she had been imaginatively following through the summer began now to assume shape, and she felt herself to be on the verge of a discovery. Yet in her present state of mind the coveted knowledge seemed unimportant.

They rode along in silence, such deep and terrible silence, silence which seemed to hold within it mighty potentialities, to be pregnant with the fate of man. Beth at length broke it.

"But you, father," she said, "you 've no such sin and shame. Bob inherits nothing but good from you and mother."

He turned upon her a tortured face.

"I don't know, my dear," he said, haltingly, "I don't know. It comes upon me in smothered, hidden ways. I have fought all my life, but sometimes the fight absorbs me so that I neglect

my other duties. That 's when I fail to be perfectly loving to your mother. I failed yesterday."

The motherhood that lay behind Beth's virgin breasts arose and spoke: "My dear father, my darling father," she cried, "you shall not reproach yourself. Perhaps sometimes you are a little moody, a little gloomy, but that 's no sin; and I 'm sure mother understands. I 've seen her manage you." The girl's mouth twisted in a reminiscent smile. "She was n't herself yesterday. I suppose I helped to get her all wrought up, and that 's why she took it so to heart. But you 've no right to blame yourself. Why, you 're the best father and the best husband that ever lived! You 're the dearest, preciousest, sweetest man! I wish I could marry you myself. I know I 'll never get a husband half so good."

Warfield could not resist a smile. "Bless your heart!" he cried. "I ought to be ashamed of myself for adding the weight of my troubles to yours. Here I am leaning on you, as so often I lean on your mother, when I really have work to do." He sat more erect in his saddle, his eyes became more keenly observant; he looked out at the world rather than within at himself. He began to note the condition of the trail over which

they were passing, to see whether there were evidences of any recent travelling, and when at length it became clear that their own ponies' hoof-prints were the only prints less than a week or two old, he turned to go back.

The clouds, driven before some wind which did not as yet reach them, had climbed the sky until now they hid the sun, which sent its rays out toward the west, a flood of light whose source was invisible. Beneath it, half the mountain desert lay bright and bare, half, in sharp contrast, covered with shadow. The world thus dualized looked strange to Richard Warfield, who had presumptuously thought himself familiar with this wilderness, wherein recurring vastnesses made for monotony and overpowered the sense of direction. He cast bewildered glances all about, seeking for a landmark. Surely that encrimsoned scar zigzagging down the gray face of the mountain fronting him was the sign above Red Gulch? If so, he must turn — how was it? To the left? Tentatively he turned that way, and Beth, obedient, full of confidence, followed.

As they rode on, the day darkened rapidly. The first cold breath of the coming storm struck them. The clouds had swallowed the sun.

Alarmed, Warfield halted and looked keenly about. Mists held the distance. Sand and dust, lifted by the wind, filled the air and blurred all outlines.

"We shall have to find shelter and wait till the storm blows by," he said to his daughter, who, unafraid because he was there, waited quietly. A low mutter of thunder gave emphasis to his speech. "It looks as if there might be a canyon over there. Ride fast."

The willing horses broke into a canter, a gallop, a swift run. They felt the storm pursuing and fled before it as they did when loose upon the range. Girl and man rode light and free, speeding over the dry, untracked uplands toward that distant gap offering refuge. The bright, huge world about them narrowed now, cowering between walls of dust, crouching in the darkness. As they fled strange forms stepped suddenly into their way — gigantic, grotesque rock-forms, taking all sorts of fantastic shapes, seeming to menace or warn them — which was it? Warfield kept a steady eye on the canyon's mouth, dimly seen ahead; but he did not need to guide the horses — they were making for it of their own accord.

Galloping forward — up, down; up, down;

on — on — on — with the world shutting in ever closer, themselves the moving centre of a swirling dark sphere, whence came strange sounds as of breathings and strugglings, they got a sense as if their own motion were the cause of all the motion about them, as if, in their flight, they dragged the mountains with them — themselves unknowing causes, producing unknown, immeasurable effects.

An electric finger ripped the curtain of the dark and showed for a second a staring world, rigid with amaze. Close beside them a white wraith rose, leaned over them, sprang toward the darkling sky, and vanished in a reek of evil odor. It was like some silent genie of the Arabian Nights. Silent? Hark! What was that bubbling grumble close at their feet? The horses shivered and shied. Something cracked beneath them as they moved, and their swift gallop changed to a timorous dancing trot, as if they were afraid to step firmly. Warfield, leaning down to look closer, saw that the ground beneath their feet was crusted with white, yellow in spots, like a skinned and filmed ulcerous place.

Strange fears rose within him and clamored for recognition. The evil odors that drifted

through the darkness — sulphuric, brimstone-like — roused demonic associations. The sense of danger, of terrors before and at either side, of sin and sorrow in the immediate past, all beset him, and made him cower to one side as his horse again shied, this time at another white wraith that rose, ominously still, hot, and bad-breathed, from his other side. At its foot he caught a gleam of vivid green and purple. His saner judgment asserted itself.

"I know where we are!" he called out to Beth, who, frightened and trembling, nevertheless rested in the knowledge that her father was close at hand. "These are the hot sulphur springs. Kill-bird Cave must be close by. We 'd better dismount. Feel your way and go very carefully or you may step into boiling water."

He dropped from his horse, alighting as gently as possible that he might not break through the formation. A spurt of steam hissed up at his very feet, and the scab-like crust shook beneath him.

"Careful!" he cried to Beth. Feeling his way forward, he came to a firmer place. "Here. Try dismounting here." She slipped from her saddle light as a child, holding her very breath to buoy herself.

Leading their horses, they felt their dangerous way along. The storm was now full upon them. Sometimes the gusts of wind, tearing down the canyon, the mouth of which they had reached, carried away the gases that filled it; sometimes, swirling, they wrapped the wanderers for a moment in horrible vapors, whence they emerged, gasping. Now and then salvos of thunder echoed and reëchoed among the rocks, deafening them with the repeated detonations. Lightning lit up the face of the world for a revealing second, streaking the faces of the fierce fantastic rocks, and gleaming from the tormented surface of the hurrying stream far below. Rain fell in torrents.

"The cave is near by," gasped Warfield, dragging at his unwilling horse, and striking Beth's upon the flank to urge it forward. Almost as he spoke he stumbled on a dead rabbit, soft, rolling jelly-like beneath his foot. The lightning, breaking loose again, showed him several such dead beasts and birds, about the mouth of a cave among rocks.

"Go in!" he cried to Beth. But she shuddered and hesitated at the sight of the dead creatures.

Her father caught the reins from her trembling grasp, and pushed her fiercely forward. "Go in!" he yelled, in a terrible voice.

She, obeying, slipped on a dead bird, and fell upon the smooth sand inside the cave. One hand dropped into the warm water that filled the lowest side of the floor. Shuddering, she drew it out, thinking, for a second, that it was a pool of blood.

Outside, her father fastened the horses to a scrub pine growing beside a ledge of shelving rock; then, drenched with rain and panting heavily, he joined his daughter.

"Is it safe here, father?" she asked, at last. "Won't the gases that killed those poor things out there kill us?"

He did not answer for a full minute. His eyes, could she have seen them, were glaring, wild, not such eyes as a girl would choose to trust.

In truth, within him was raging a wilder storm than that without. The strangest, most horrible thoughts beset him. Vague images of unimaginable evil rose up from secret places, the storerooms of ancestral experience, and clamored for expression. It was with the exertion of an al-

most superhuman strength that he put them down and answered the girl in steady tones. His voice as he spoke seemed to come from some other's mouth; and the very calmness of its tone calmed him who uttered it.

"The gases gush forth only now and then," he said. "And this wind, tearing down the canyon, sucks them forth. While it blows we are safe."

"But oh, father, the smell is so awful!"

"Only sulphur and other harmless gases," he said. Yes; said it with certainty and assurance, though within him creeping, insidious suggestions of mad deeds to match the evil odors were waking at their call. All the wickedness his forebears had ever done stirred within the inherited structure of his brain and infected the springs of action, as this spring at his feet, quietly bubbling to itself, was infected with the gases that came creeping out of the innermost depths of the mountains.

"Father!" Beth said again, whispering and creeping closer. "I don't think it 's only sulphur. I think the dead things smell."

"Well, what of it?" Warfield cried, roughly. "Let me alone! *I* can't help it, can I?" He

must give all his attention, all his strength, toward fighting these horrible thoughts within. He could not be interrupted. Beth must fight her own fight. It was, after all, nothing compared to his. The crash of thunder, breaking into the cave, smiting its responsive rocks, threw the girl, who had risen to her knees, down upon her face. There she clasped her father's feet.

"Oh, father! Oh, father!" she sobbed, "don't speak to me like that! Don't forsake me! Father! I'm so frightened!"

He heard the cry as if from a distance. For a moment the crowding demons of his imagination faded before the uprising of his love.

"There, there! Father's girl!" he heard himself saying. And again the sound of his own voice soothed him, as it soothed her.

Now indeed was the battle joined between the evils he had all his life held under and the virtues he had all his life emphasized by practice. The evils were strengthened by the conditions about him — the wild noises, the insensate terror that held all the world, the dead creatures about the mouth of the cave, his anxiety about his wife, his reproachful conscience about his boy; perhaps, even more than all of these, the insidious, dis-

gusting odors, with their devilish power of stifling all high resolve, with their degrading and loathsome associations — these things, met together here and to-day as they had never met before, as they could hardly meet again — strengthened those proclivities within him which had never yet been able to force expression and so had never attained to a real existence.

Exactly what dreadful deed he wanted to do he did not know. Most of all he wanted to give way before the surging passions within — to break restraint, to rage, to howl and devastate as that fierce wind was doing without. He wanted to feel the tremendous force of those powers within him let loose — to revel in a Walpurgis Night of fiendish joy. Yes, joy! It would be joy to let go — as he had never in his life let go. The bonds of custom, of flat, stale peace, of working days, and quiet nights, now seemed intolerably cramping. He had never had his fling — let him have it now — have it and know vast freedom and stinging, fierce, tremendous rapture. Let him live to the very full once — just once, before he died.

"Father, oh, father, don't forget me!" Beth moaned. "You know, you said you forgot

mother sometimes, and you were sorry. I 'm afraid, father, and I 've no one but you!"

The reference to his wife, to his own recent deep emotions, roused him, as Beth, instinct with the wisdom of loving womanhood, meant they should do.

"My poor child!" he groaned aloud. And again the tones of his own voice, full of burdened and battling love, strengthened his resistance. Beth crept up into his arms, and lay there, trembling and crying softly on his breast.

"Oh, father! Most beloved of fathers! I could n't bear it if you were not here. I should go mad."

"No, my dear, no!" his trembling lips spoke the words as if of themselves — those lips trained to tenderness, unused to violence. His arm encircled her; never had it moved against her ungently. The habit of his life stood firm.

As his child lay against him, sweet and soft and warm, clinging to him for protection, the vile thoughts cowered back to their dens like night beasts abashed by the light of day. He breathed more quietly. The air of the cave was less rank. Outside, the violence of the storm

was broken. The wind no longer tore down the canyon, ricochetting from wall to wall.

Within, a more insidious foe was creeping upon them. Not now sucked forth and dispersed upon wide spaces by the blowing wind, the still, odorless gas of death welled up noiselessly, giving no sign, and slowly filled the cavern. Warfield, growing drowsy, exhausted by his terrible struggle, shifted the girl in his arms to an easier position, and prepared to lean back against the wall behind him. — But what was this? Her head fell limp. Her face, in the growing light, looked white. Could it be? Was she dead?

A cry tore from his laboring breast. Not knowing what he did, wholly the automaton of warring emotions, he struggled to rise. His head whirled, his breath labored — for beneath consciousness he struggled not to breathe in poison — staggering, even falling, yet rising again, blind save for bright colors that danced before his straining eyes and bewildered him, he nevertheless managed to drag her out into the clearing day.

. . . . . .

The storm was over. He had fought his fight. Love for another, interest in another, had led

him out of the self-absorption which is the central fact in all insanity. Though he did not know it, he had passed, successfully, through the supreme crisis of his life. No future test could rival this in searching intensity.

For a space he lay exhausted outside the cave, just beyond reach of its deadly emanations, his unconscious child in his arms. The sweet winds of the wilderness blew over them. The wet ground on which they lay sent up faint fragrances of pine needles and drink-fed earth. The horses near by nibbled at the scant moist grass. The sun rolled forth again, triumphant, omnipotent.

Warfield lapsed into a trance-like peace and inactivity. Presently Beth, having revived, stirred in his arms and roused him. Putting her from him, he rose and went at once to untether the horses. He did not even look about him; but clear in his head was the sense of direction. Instinct, a residue from the primeval depths, had waked in him in that profound struggle, and he knew his way home as a homing animal knows it.

CHAPTER XI

THE SOUL'S SPRINGTIDE

WITHOUT returning to the Cody trail he led Beth over height after height until at length they looked down upon their home ranch.

The day was drawing to an end, and the sun was setting in a burst of golden glory, beneath which the thick-crowding trees of the National Forest looked like a plantation of green moss. The river, a stream of molten gold, welled out of it. The ranch-houses lay close against the brown and green earth, like the nest of some groundling creature. One saw from this height how diminutive are the affairs of men. These buildings, the little crawling cattle and horses, the patches of bright green alfalfa, might well be the work of some human ant colony, intelligently working out its own comfort.

As they rode down from the mountain, feeling somehow that the clamorous grief tugging at their hearts was an impertinence in the face of the mighty calm, the immovable brooding serenity

of Nature, they saw a strange procession advancing up the Cody road. It was Bob and Jeff Stanton. They looked in vain for a third figure. It was not until they drew nearer that they discerned between the slow-moving ponies a rough-woven trailing litter, such as Indians make, and upon it a motionless bundle.

"Oh, is she dead? Is she dead?" The thought tore at the hearts of both. But not a word did either of them speak, rendered stoic as they were by their long day amid the immensities.

When they reached the ranch-house Margaret had already been carried indoors and laid upon her own bed. Efficient Mrs. Tatezel had all day been ready for just such a home-coming, and she was quick now to get her undressed and to apply such restoratives as were at hand. She saw at once that the heart was still beating, and that Margaret, although desperately hurt and unconscious, was yet living; and so she told Warfield when he reached the house.

"Thank God!" was all he said, and went on to the room.

Once he had assured himself that his wife was alive and in no immediate danger of death he sent Jeff, on yet another horse, for the nearest

doctor. There was one staying, he heard, at a lumber camp half-way to Cody.

Then he himself felt for the wound on Margaret's head and found it clotted with blood beneath the thick hair. When Mrs. Tatezel and Beth undid the hair and cleansed away the blood he perceived that it was, after all, not much more than a flesh wound. That which made her unconscious must have been the shock of the fall.

With quick and skilful fingers he cut the hair away all about the injured place, Beth crying out as he did so that her mother would not like to lose such a lot of her pretty hair. But Warfield bent upon her a still look of authority and she realized the situation was grave beyond the claims of vanity.

"Fetch hot water. Her feet are cold," he commanded; and Beth hastened out into the kitchen.

There for the first time she noticed Alice Harmon, who, in her quiet, capable way, had been steadily preparing supper ever since the return of the wanderers. She had already a kettle of hot water, which Beth promptly lifted to carry to the bedroom.

"Oh, let me help!" Leonard Raymond cried,

starting up. He was pale, and sick-looking, and still shaky. As he took the kettle from Beth's hand he let some of the hot water spill upon her foot, and she drew it back with a little cry.

"Oh, did I hurt you?" he exclaimed, dismayed. His hand shook still more with the stress of his emotion, and he would undoubtedly have scalded the girl seriously had she not, with an exclamation of impatience, caught the kettle from him and carried it off to her mother's bedroom.

"I 'm no earthly good," he moaned, sinking down upon a seat near the window and hiding his face in his arms. "I can't even carry a kettle for a girl when she 's in trouble." Alice's eyes, bright with resentment, dwelt upon him for a moment, but she did not condescend to comfort him.

The hours rolled on, and, as they passed, it was plain to be seen that Margaret was improving. Alice, in the kitchen, summoned one after another of the exhausted, care-ridden watchers and fed them. Beth went, because her father said he would not go until she had eaten. Bob went, because his father commanded him to do so, while Beth told him crisply that the least he could do was to mind. Warfield went, because his son and daughter took him by either

arm and haled him forth with tender force. Mrs. Tatezel went, because her common sense never forsook her, and she had lived too often through scenes of sadness not to maintain in the midst of them the regularity of daily life.

Leonard Raymond would touch nothing but coffee. It is doubtful if he would have had even this proffered him had he been left wholly to the tender mercies of Alice Harmon. She was quite willing he should be sick, helpless, and sorry. She knew enough of the story of the past day and night — for they have wireless telegraphy without apparatus in these mountains — to think that not half bad enough for him. But Beth, out of the depths that were stirred within her, offered him mercy and compassion. She herself poured and sweetened his coffee and gave it into his shaking hand. As she did so, her mingled pity and scorn showed that she now saw him as he was in reality, a weak, brilliant, pitiful boy. With the coming of clear sight, the glamour he had had for her fled away forever.

Bob, on the contrary, showed a different fibre. Just as his young, untainted constitution more readily recovered from the effects of the night's debauch, so his stronger and more manly nature

rose up and asserted itself at this, its first challenge by the forces of the world of evil. In the sickroom he was as quiet and self-sustained as his father. His abounding tenderness, the filial love that filled him like a passion, conquered even the clumsiness native to his few years and great height. His touch, as he waited upon his mother, was gentle as a woman's.

Beth, seeing him quiet, and hearing from him no tragic words of grief and remorse, felt inclined to resent his apparent indifference. But had she been older the set of his jaw and the steady glow of his eyes would have told her that he had settled with full determination to the business of conquering himself and doing his duty. Even if his mother should die as the result of his act, Bob would rise up to live a man's full life, undeterred by the weight of sorrow and remorse which he must bear.

Richard Warfield, looking at his son in wonder, perceived something of this new quality in the hitherto thoughtless, hot-headed boy. Such silence, such tense control, had never before been natural to him, but now they seemed nature itself. With lifted heart he saw that his boy was about to become a man indeed.

Thus they all worked through the quiet hours, broken only now and then by the rapid, feverish murmurings of the stricken woman. At last the doctor came.

Breathlessly they listened for his verdict. It was concussion of the brain. Time, he assured them, and careful nursing would in all probability bring Mrs. Warfield around again. They must be careful that nothing shocked or excited her, and for some weeks they might find her unlike her usual self; but he thought they need not be alarmed about the final result.

Through the weeks of illness that followed, no human being could have asked for more devoted nursing than Margaret received. Not only was every necessary act performed with a despatch that showed willing and even eager hearts, but every possible occasion was seized upon to express the tenderness of those who surrounded her. She was even driven to award the duties of the sickroom as precious privileges. Beth and Mrs. Tatezel warmly contended about the brushing and braiding of her hair until it was at length decided that Beth should do it one day and Mrs. Tatezel the other. Then they rivalled each other in the gentleness with which they did it. Beth

maintained it was she who made her mother look prettiest, who pulled the soft tendrils faintly mixed with gray over her white forehead in the most becoming manner. Mrs. Tatezel, on the other hand, maintained that the braids stayed smooth longest when she did them because she divided the strands evenly, braided them tightly, and tied them fast.

The room was bright with flowers which all the young people of the neighborhood brought her — wild parsley, great masses of rich-colored bluebells, and Michaelmas daisies.

For food she had every conceivable delicacy. On the Forest Ranch, for a wonder, they milked some of their cows, being unwilling to put up with condensed milk as most of the Westerners did. The rich cream from this milk was saved for Margaret, who declared that she needed a knife and fork to eat it with. Bob and Leonard ranged far over the mountains and through the forest in search of game for her, and whipped the mountain brooks for trout. All these things Mrs. Tatezel cooked exquisitely; but Bob set himself the penance of skinning and cleaning them. This job the boy heartily disliked, but he had gone now into a rigid course of self-discipline

that was to continue through many years to come, and transform his abounding, joyous, rule-defying nature into a strong manhood, every faculty under control. He was convinced to the very bottom of his soul that the gain of such power over himself was the first lesson he had to learn.

On their hunting expeditions Leonard sometimes smoked; Bob never did.

"Quit, have you?" asked Leonard at last. It requires strength to keep silence about a thing like this.

"Yes, I've quit," said Bob, soberly and shortly. "I'm driving myself with a tight rein. I'm not well enough broke in yet to stand still when the reins are thrown over my head."

"Aren't you afraid you'll break loose some day if you hold yourself in so hard?" Leonard asked.

"I don't believe in that argument. Every time you break down you break training. I'm going to travel steady all my life. I'll do my work and pull my load."

"Not a brilliant prospect."

"It's mine."

They rode on in silence. As they neared home Leonard spoke out impulsively:

"Kid, I wish I 'd had your sense at your age. But I did n't. I liked fun, and took it, anyway it came. And I had no father or mother to stop me."

Bob reined in his horse — he was riding a little in advance. Turning in his saddle, he looked the young actor, who had also paused, full in the face.

"See here!" he said. "Don't you make any mistake. My father and mother are n't stopping me. They have n't said one word about that blamed trip to Cody. They would n't. I stop myself. They know that 's the only kind of stopping worth speaking of. If I did it to mind them, or even to please them, they know that some day, when I 'd think myself beyond their knowledge, I 'd begin again. But when I myself see the damnedness of it — why, then I 'm safe. They know it — and they trust me. I had to see for myself. But I 'm not such a fool that I have to see a hundred times! Once is enough."

It was plainly a simple matter to the clear-eyed, vigorous young fellow, as he sat there in the mountain wilderness, miles and miles of earth and air, vivid in the intense sunlight, plain to his view. He saw that all this splendid panorama was built of simple materials, according to

simple laws, attaining to impressiveness by mere mass and repetition. He knew something of the laws of it, and understood, and in the wilderness was not afraid.

But Leonard felt rather than saw; and moved always in a blurring shadow. For him, life had no interpreter. His acting was an attempt at expression rather than interpretation.

Bob's decision now was built, like the mountains, of simple things, massed together. He did not know — though his mother did — how many, many childish decisions, how many exemplifications of the eternal law of righteousness, went to build that solid purpose which plainly possessed him.

Once Leonard would have laughed the unbelieving laugh of the man of low ideals, telling Bob plainly the day would surely come when he would fall from this high estate. But now, thinking of Mrs. Warfield, he refrained. Then another look at the boy himself, so strong, so quiet, with so set a jaw; and the memory of the fact that this was the only word he had spoken of that exciting night and morning; and the further fact that he had really given up smoking, brought him a shock of conviction.

"You 'll make good," he cried. "I wish to God I could."

"If you wish hard enough, you will," said Bob.

Being fond of happiness, and disliking painful contemplation, the boy remembered as rarely as possible that his own fault and failure had brought his mother into her present condition. Where Beth or Warfield might have brooded over such a fact and have driven the sore consciousness further and further home, Bob did his best to throw it off. Nevertheless, the whole course of his life was changed from that day. In the very centre of his being lay the conviction that he could not sin ever so lightly to himself alone. Others were sure to be implicated by his conduct.

From the moment when he clearly perceived this fact, the fierce individualism of adolescence abated in him. He no longer cried out that the world was his, and no one should interfere with him or teach him what to do with it. He knew that not only was the world not his, but that he himself was not his own. There were within him feelings and passions which came upon him, he knew not whence — from the long line of his

ancestors; from those who taught him; from his environment. And when, yielding to these passions, he acted, he himself set in motion a chain of causes whose effects were worked out in the lives of others — not only those whom he saw and knew and loved, but unseen others, like the friends and relatives of Leonard Raymond, like those children and grandchildren of his own loins for whom he must make himself a fit progenitor. In short, Bob awoke through this, his fault, and its heavy effect upon his own beloved mother, and the whole family whom he held so dear; he awoke out of a narrow self-consciousness into the dawn of race-consciousness.

. . . . . .

In the latter part of September, when the harvest had been gathered in and all Nature was giving herself up to a glorious harvest festival, dressing her trees in splendid colors, crisping the air with frost, pouring out unstinted sunshine, they took Margaret home.

Jeff, the efficient, was everywhere at once. No one could do without him. It was he who found out when the last stage came along through the National Forest on the way from the Yellowstone Park to Cody, and secured places in it for them

all. It was he who sent their luggage on ahead, who saw to the buying of their tickets, the engaging of their berths. Everywhere, when anything was wanted, the cry was:

"Where 's Jeff?" And always he was at hand.

Yet, for all his promptitude and efficiency, Jeff was plainly laboring under some sort of a strain. His jaws were so set that Beth listened to hear them crack when he opened them to speak. His lips, the flexible, humorous lips of the American, were drawn into a thin straight line. His eyes looked strained and wistful.

Beth noted these things without seeming to see them at all. She wondered if — if — but no! She was too young, too undeveloped to have such an effect upon a man like Jeff. How good he was, and strong, and sufficient!

"Jeff," said she, looking down and poking her toe in the dust, — she had come into the alfalfa field to ask him some question about the moving; he was directing the last crop of the year, which lay now in fragrant, sun-dried swathes upon the face of the field; the men were tossing it on the wagons, and carting it off to the hay-barn, — "Jeff, you look sad. What 's the matter?"

Jeff started. The red slowly mounted beneath

his tan. He looked at her with faithful, pained eyes, like an intelligent animal unable to speak.

"Nothin'," said he, at last, shortly.

"Yes, there is too something. You don't look natural. Has anything gone wrong?" persisted Beth. The answering color stained her own brown cheeks, but she would play with fire.

"No — nothing extra."

"Extra!" she cried. "Is there usually something wrong then?"

"Oh — not usually." His eyes pleaded with her; but she was obdurate.

"Then there is something wrong *now!*" she exclaimed. "What is it, Jeff? You might as well tell me. You know I 'll have it out of you sooner or later."

"Well — you 're all going!" he blurted out. "Don't you suppose it 's lonesome here in winter?"

"I — don't know. I — never thought," she stammered. A realizing sense of the long, cold Winter came over her, a winter of isolation, of struggle with the snow and ice, of uncompanioned work. "But you 're not alone, Jeff, are you? There are the men —" She broke off at the leap of scornful light in his eyes.

"Yes, there are the men," he said, slowly. "There are the men — and that's all. *You're* gone!" It burst out of him, like a cry; and he stood abashed, feeling as if his soul had gone suddenly naked there under the unclouded sun.

Beth involuntarily stepped back from him, and dropped her eyes. For a breathless moment she had the instinct of flight. Something forceful, compelling, ardent, and even terrible, seemed to be about to pounce upon and possess her. But she held herself still; and presently, because he did not move or speak, she ventured to look up. What she saw gave her instant courage, for Jeff stood downcast and abashed before her, plainly as overcome by his self-revelation as she had been.

"Oh, yes!" she ventured at last in rather a trembling voice. "I suppose you do miss us — all." He raised his eyes, and looked at her, reproachfully; yet he, too, was plainly gaining courage.

"I miss you all," he said, firmly. "But I miss you most, Beth — dear."

That little word again — spoken as he used to speak it when she was a child — yet differently, too! Beth's blood beat in her ears. That word

sounded familiar, and safe, and kind — as if she should like to hear him say it often. There was no terror in that word from Jeff — good old Jeff!

"I shall miss you, too, Jeff — dear," she answered, smiling at him with clear, innocent eyes.

He came closer, and took her arm to guide her home across the stubble. As he walked beside her — rather close beside her — he seemed almost to carry her, so strong was his lift of her arm, so full of vigor his wholesome body. He smelt of alfalfa, of the good out-of-doors. He was health and manliness itself; and Beth swayed unconsciously toward him. So they went silently through the sweet alfalfa.

"You — you will be back next year," Jeff said. "You will be older then. I shall be waiting here — and working. I have saved almost enough to buy my own ranch now. Do you think — Beth — you will remember? There are many smarter men than I am — there in the city — many who know more, and can make more show. But there is no one truer or more faithful." His voice pleaded with her. There was a tone in it that made the girl's throat swell. Suddenly the newborn womanhood in her rose, and she freed her-

self, and faced him, candor speaking from every line of her brave young face:

"I am very young, as you say, Jeff. I cannot promise much; for I do not know myself. But this I can promise — that I shall not forget you; that, whomever I see, whoever seems to me good, and manly, and worth while, I shall yet know that he is no manlier, no truer, no finer, than my friend in Wyoming." She held out her hand, and he took it, and held it firmly clasped in his for a full minute while they looked, clear and straight, into each other's eyes.

And that was their real parting — a parting full of revelation, of self-restraint, of withheld promises more binding than outspoken vows.

Margaret, from her hammock under the cottonwood tree, saw them standing thus, unashamed, in the full blaze of the sun. For a moment her heart leaped with fear, and she rose as if to call her young daughter to her. But she bethought herself. It was unconventional, but it was right! It was in the order of Nature. She would say nothing. She would teach her girl, and give her every opportunity for growth, and then let her choose. If, as she grew, Jeff's simple manhood compensated for the lack of intellectual com-

panionship — well, only Beth herself could tell. It was her own life she had to lead — her own, and that of the race to come.

Beth came up to her, blushing and sweet-faced, very lovely.

"Mother! don't you *like* Jeff? Is n't he splendid?"

"Yes, he is, my dear."

"He — he — has such eyes, mother! They say so much! And he is so good, so strong, so true!"

"Yes, he is, dear — all that."

"Is n't that enough?" asked Beth, belligerent at once.

"Perhaps it is. And he is more. Anyway, Beth, go a little carefully. You are growing to be a woman."

"I am careful, mother — let me tell you —" and, swaying with her mother under the cotton-wood tree, the eager girl poured the tale of her first shy wooing into her sympathetic ears. And she — wise, tender woman, who knew love well — said nothing, except to emphasize, by her whole manner, as of one in the presence of the holiest mystery, the solemnity of the choice to be made. Beth said:

"I know I must wait, mother; and I am willing. I will bind neither myself nor him."

The next day they set forth. The parting between Beth and Jeff was very simple — just a hand-clasp, and a deep exchanged look.

Bob was almost late. He had ridden over to the Rocking S Ranch before daylight. He came back in high feather, a silver ring, cut from a dime, on his little finger, where it scratched and hurt him a good deal. His face was lighted up and eager, as if he would race through the years ahead, beginning this instant to annihilate them. As the stage labored to the top of a long incline, he stood up and waved his handkerchief. From far away, over in the direction of the Rocking S, came an answering flicker of white.

Warfield, observing, started to say something, but his wife laid a swift hand upon his lips. Bob did not see it. His eyes were looking off across the piled hills. He was looking into the brief past; but presently, with a sigh, he turned to face the long road ahead.

Leonard Raymond went with them as far as Chicago; then left them and went on to New York. They were sorry to see him go. Bril-

liant as he was, they all knew, even Beth, that before him lay almost certain defeat.

Margaret's heart yearned over him. "Oh, if some one had taught his mother! If some one only would teach all of us mothers!" she cried. "We need training — hundreds and hundreds of years of it!"

"Where do the fathers come in?" asked Warfield.

"Oh, they ought to support the mothers — hold up their hands while the battle rages!" Margaret answered. On this subject she was always, except when certain memories came to her, a little arrogant.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE HAUNTED HOUSE

IT was strange to Margaret to be brought back to her house and to be no longer the commanding mistress of it, moving all its machinery to serve those whom she loved, but the heart of it, the passive one about whom all activities revolved. Mrs. Tatezel promptly assumed the definite duties of housekeeping, while the graces of hospitality fell upon Beth. She in her turn, all unused to so many demands, leaned upon her father; and he, who for years had been rather a quiet figure among their friends, letting his active, sunshiny wife do most of the social work, now came forward and answered the inquiries of loving friends with a gentle appreciation of their good-will which won all their hearts.

He took also the liveliest interest in preparing the young people for school and college. He actually went with Bob to the clothiers, and gravely inspected the fit of Beth's new clothes. Naturally, neither Mrs. Tatezel nor Beth liked to

embark on the purchase of these articles without some clear understanding with the man who held the purse strings. They were all resolved not to trouble Margaret with any of these details, and in consequence Warfield had to enter into matters of which he had formerly had only the vaguest consciousness.

They had merry times over his mistakes and his queer comments. They retold the stories to Margaret, and she lay upon the couch in her room, smiling and gratified. Sometimes she started to exclaim to Beth and Bob that they must not bother their father so much, that he had his winter's lectures to look over and put in shape. But as often as the words rose to her lips she remembered the new companionship which was growing up between father and children over these little bothers, and she shut her lips again. No one can enter into the life of children except he takes it as he finds it, a mass of little things, all of importance as bearing upon their happiness and the growth of their character. Few men know this; and although Richard Warfield had, much more than other men, entered with his wife into the serious questions of their children's training, yet her efficiency and strength had saved

him all these details; and in doing so had cut him off from full participation in their lives.

Of course, the young people themselves were not aware of the principles which underlay the shaping of their education, but they had a lively consciousness of the clothes they wore, of the schools they were going to attend, and the way in which they got their lessons. Heretofore, though he had determined the larger matters, their father had not shared these lesser ones, much more present to their consciousness; but now he did so. It was touching to see the thoughtful, scholarly man interested in the discussion as to whether a school-girl ought to wear ostrich feathers or quills, and debating with Bob the comparative advantages of school shirts with soft collars or starched. And when one knew all the mighty forces that were back of this bending of an intense, concentrated nature, one saw in these little acts the outward token and seal of an inward regeneration. They made evident the fact that the man no longer looked only within for the great truths with which to combat great errors; but that he resolutely gave himself up to the performance of every little outward duty that knocked at his door.

One evening, after the young people were in bed, he and Margaret lingered before the fire in the upstairs study. At one side of the fireplace, leaning against the wall, was a life-sized portrait of Warfield himself, just uncovered from its crating — an oil painting, executed when he was a young man. It showed him with abundant dark hair and a full dark beard. The expression was stern almost to severity, but the eyes were the same clear, kindly eyes, the forehead was broad and smooth. A comparison of the living with the painted face showed that years had mellowed and sweetened him. In both faces was a look of almost austere self-control; but in the living face this was softened by the light of habitual affection and good-will.

The picture was framed in a wide, somewhat tarnished gilt frame, old-fashioned but suitable.

Margaret's musing eyes fell upon this picture, and she said, reviving the discussion of the earlier evening:

"How are we going to explain this picture to them, Richard?"

"Don't," said he, promptly. "I can't think why you want it around. I hate it, myself."

"Oh, no!" she cried, and spread her hands

out toward it as if to protect it. "No, Richard! It looks as you did when I first knew you — so young, so handsome, so devoted, so rigid with yourself, so tender to others, so resolved to live bravely without any happiness. No wonder I loved you, and that I made you love me."

"You made me, that's sure," he answered, smiling. "But, as you say, how are we going to explain the picture to the children?"

"To begin with, I think we can just tell them that we are about to sell the old family home, and that we have had some of its furnishings — the things that were precious to us — sent over here. That's the truth, and it will serve also to explain those other things I want to save — the lamp you used to read by, that cast of Joan of Arc, some of the fine old china and silver. I can't bear to let *everything* go, Richard! After all, it was your home, the home where you grew into the man you are, and some bits of it I like to have about. Don't you, dear?" Her voice was a little anxious.

"To tell the truth, I suppose I should like never to hear of or see it again. I'd like to blot that — and some other things — out of my memory altogether."

"But, Richard, —" she sat upright and leaned a little forward in the eagerness of her pleading, "I don't really think that is the right way to look at it. Your mother loved you there — and your father — yes, and your brother. You loved, and fought, and suffered, and conquered there. Do you have to remember the terrible things to the exclusion of the sweet and pleasant ones?"

"I ought not — perhaps some day I shall learn to see it as you do; but meanwhile — I can't see anything in that face that I like to remember."

"You would in a portrait of me, Richard? Well, I think of this as you would think of that. I wish you could see it as I see it. It would give you faith in yourself."

Warfield came over to her, and stood a moment before her in silence.

"Have you never been sorry you married me, Margaret?" he asked, from the depths.

"Never!" she answered, promptly, "except when I have failed, as I failed this Summer. Yes, my dear!" She put up a hand against his protest. "I did fail. My faith deserted me, and my fears triumphed. It is a fit punishment that I should be thus weak and unequal to my work."

Her eyes filled with tears. The strong, competent woman felt her weakness like a reproach. "Of course," she added, with an effort to regain her usual good cheer, "of course, I 'm getting better every day. Soon I shall be able to do my part again. But oh, Richard, I 'm dreadfully ashamed about last Summer — too ashamed to talk about it. Why did n't I trust you, and Bob, and the truths we 'd pledged our lives to — and, most of all, our Heavenly Father, in whom alone is the secret of growth? But no! I must put *myself* into it — go myself to see how my boy, who was also God's boy, was faring in the world, which is God's world! I failed, Richard, I failed."

Then answered her husband with quiet intensity: "If you never failed I could not endure to go on living beside you, Margaret. I am far from a perfect man, as you know. Were you too perfect beside me I could not endure the contrast. As it is, your goodness holds my heart even while your human inconsistencies — dear wife! — give me courage to go on."

Thus out of the depths of tragedy, faced together with understanding and mutual love, they plucked the sweets of marriage.

. . . . . .

When Bob and Beth awakened the next day, refreshed by their long rest, they had so much energy to spare that, since school had not yet begun, they felt they must do something. They set forth therefore on one of their long rambles, wishing heartily that they had their Western ponies at hand. Since they had not, they summoned the lightning, by the easy way of lifting a finger, took the electric car far out on the North Shore, and walked home along the bluffs and beaches.

It was a brilliant autumn day. There had been frost in the night, and the air tasted like dry wine — it had a crinkle in it. The lake was a deep purple, pale green along the horizon line. Little white clouds sailed briskly over it, changing its colors. The waves tossed up white hands of greeting.

The trees on the landward side of the bluffs still stood with their arms full of gloriously colored leaves. At the bidding of each gust of wind, they cast numbers of them fluttering to the brightly carpeted ground; but still so many remained that nothing seemed to have been lost. It was Nature's miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Everything was full fed with beauty, but still plenty remained.

Through this splendid world, getting ready for Winter so sumptuously, like a king retiring with his courtiers standing around, a ceremonial of rest and renewal, the two young people walked along, talking, with the warm enthusiasm of youth, of their friends. To hear them, one would have supposed that Jeff and Alice were unmatched wonders, rare creatures, of whom the world should hear some day. They were not thinking of the Haunted House nor of any shadows. The present was real to them; the future full of alluring possibilities; but the past — they did not know that the past touched them.

When they came out, then, upon the top of the dune whence Bob had watched the strange man walking his life away in the overgrown garden of the old house on the beach, they were both somewhat startled. There below them lay the house, broad, generous, built for hospitality, but with that indescribable, death-like air, as of a body without a soul, which belongs to empty houses — especially to empty houses standing alone.

Beth caught at her brother's arm.

"What was that word, Bob, that we used to say in our secret language? It meant the weird

and spectral feeling of an old house standing alone and empty in the moonlight."

"Oh, I know," said Bob. "Wait a minute. Yes — ankerduddle — that 's it."

"Well, that house is ankerduddle in daylight."

They both laughed, but a little uneasily. One of the swiftly sailing white clouds just then darkened the air, and a chill touched them. Bob was remembering that strange experience of his in the Spring. It had never been explained. The events of the Summer had crowded it into the background of his thoughts and he had never found a fitting opportunity to ask Mrs. Tatezel to release him from his promise. Secrecy, in the frank community life of the ranch-house, was almost impossible, and he could not have asked her without betraying to the others that there was some understanding between them; and with his strict ideas of honor he felt that this in itself would be a betrayal of his promise. He looked at the house with a scowl of perplexity, wondering whether he should see again that bent, lean figure falling from one foot to another, in an aimless, helpless walk through the ruined garden, around and around the house. Yet the man had shown purpose at length — that time. He had

got through the hedge and out upon the sands. How odd his walk had been when his will took possession of it! Bob remembered how he had staggered, and hesitated, how uncertainly he had moved, as if his soul rode a body scarcely able either to carry it or obey it. And so he had got to the pier, and into the icy water — had he intended it?

Mrs. Tatezel had been brave and strong — Mrs. Tatezel! Why she was here no longer, she was at his own house, at home with his father and mother! What, then? Could that poor madman be living here alone? He looked more closely at the house.

"Beth," he exclaimed, "I believe it is empty!"

"Of course it is," said she. "Have n't I just been saying it is ankerduddle? No house is that except an empty house."

"Well, but — what 's become of the madman?"

"The one we saw that day I hurt my temple? I wonder, Bob! Since it 's empty, let 's go closer and get a good look at it."

For only answer Bob held out his hand to help her down. Pulling him with her, for all he tried to steady her, she started with a little run, that

soon, in the shifting sand, became a series of mad leaps. And so, laughing and breathless, full of youth and health and good spirits and eager, natural curiosity, these two came to the house which, though they knew it not, had shaped their whole lives.

It stood silent and almost expressionless before them, its windows boarded up, its grounds roughly pulled into shape, its high hedges trimmed, so that now a passer-by could look in. Plainly, such looking was invited, for a "For Sale" sign three feet square hung conspicuously on the front veranda.

The black iron gate, however, was locked, and the thick hedge of many years' growth still stood a sufficient barrier against invasion. But Bob, to his sister's surprise, led the way to one side, where, after a few minutes' groping among branches that scratched and stung, he found an opening, hidden from both the house and the beach, but quite clear of obstruction beyond this slight screen.

"Why, Bobbie! How on earth did you find it?" asked Beth. But he did not answer.

Once within the grounds, Beth indeed found that this was a haunted place. In the rustling

of the leaves overhead she seemed to hear whispers, either of warning or of entreaty. When a twig snapped beneath her feet, her heart jumped to her mouth. She seemed to feel Presences crowding near, pleading, half regretful, yet menacing Presences. She felt them pluck at her dress, and turning quickly to release it, found it caught in a branch, but almost thought she saw their shadows shrink out of sight. Unconsciously she held her brother's hand tightly, as she had done, when, two children, they braved together the terrors of the dark.

For his part, he held her hand quite as unconsciously. At every step he expected to see again that pitifully emaciated, saddened man, walking, falling forward, catching himself up, his head bent, lost in a sad and dreadful world of his own — a world to which the sun could not penetrate.

Awe-struck as they were, neither would give up the investigation. Treading very softly, as if at any moment they might be caught and rebuked, they stepped upon the narrow, old-fashioned veranda. Bob tried the front door with his right hand. Then, discovering that his left hand was held fast,

"Let go!" he commanded, shaking himself free. "What are you afraid of?"

"That man!" said Beth, in so thrilling a voice that Bob thought she actually saw him, and turned swiftly to look behind him. "I seem to see him. I feel him," Beth went on. "I know he is near. And oh! he makes me so sorry!" To her own amazement, no less than to Bob's, she burst into silent crying.

"You always were a spook-seer," said Bob, speaking roughly and loudly, to cheer himself and her. He shook the front door fiercely.

"Oh, don't make such a noise!" wailed Beth. "How can you?" Nevertheless, she welcomed the loud, commonplace sound. She followed her brother closely as he went about trying windows.

"Say, give me room to breathe, can't you?" he growled. He felt that he really had to be brave with so feminine a thing clinging to him. Yet it was to be observed that, scared as she was, Beth never once mentioned giving up. She felt an almost overpowering sense of presence and of gloom, but her will was uninvaded.

After all, they could not enter the house. Every possible means of ingress was carefully barred, even the small cellar windows. The barn,

the outbuildings, all were sealed up against curiosity.

Back of the house they found a pile of ashes left from a bonfire that had evidently been employed to burn up rubbish. Bob, remembering the detective stories in which he used to delight, poked over this heap of ashes and charcoal with a long stick. Sure enough, he came upon some charred bits of paper, evidently the remains of old letters. He looked them over carefully — they were bits of grocery and market bills, a few personal letters, and advertisements. At length a torn scrap of an envelope held his attention. On it was the name "Warfield." Beth saw it at the same instant, and made a grab for the scraps he held in his hand. Sure enough, on almost every bill was some part of the same name.

Before this tangible scrap of evidence Beth's spookiness vanished; her objective mind had enough to do, and her subjective mind, dimly aware of the past, and of things beyond the region of her senses, could no longer make her hear its feeble speech. She raced about the yard freely and alone, looking for more evidence of the secret that she felt sure, now, was their own

secret. But there was nothing more to find; and at last the slanting rays of the westering sun, ending the short day, warned them both that they must hurry home.

She talked and argued eagerly all the way, but Bob, afraid of betraying his secret knowledge, was provokingly non-committal. By the time they reached home, Beth was almost angry with him, and his resistance was almost worn down by her continual assaults upon him for approval of her ingenious guesses. In the house he got a shock that made it impossible for him to hold his peace much longer.

They entered their father's pleasant study, lured by the light of the open fire. The room was empty, save for the shadows and the flickering firelight. Above the mantel, looking austerely at them, was the life-sized portrait of the man of the Haunted House! He was younger, to be sure; nor was he pale and distraught; yet for some few breathless seconds both of them thought it was the same man.

As they recovered their wits, and grew able to think and see more clearly, they saw the points of difference — the forehead, the eyes, the expression.

"It's father!" said Beth, at last.

Bob, slower of comprehension, heaved a sigh of relief. "So it is!" he said. "But I never saw a picture of him with a beard before."

"Yes, you did," said Beth, her wits actually quickened by the touch they had had of the world beyond sense. "He had a slight beard in that picture we saw up in the attic last Spring."

"Gee!" Bob cried. "He did. And that man with him — his brother, —"

"Was the man of the Haunted House!" cried Beth — and they both stood staring. Now she had spoken it, each of them knew it to be true. In a vague way, they had felt it ever since last Spring. In the living faces there had been something of the resemblance which now they saw so clearly. To be sure, the man Beth had seen looking through the hedge and the man Bob had worked over, as he lay half drowned, was sad, emaciated, broken, and distraught. Their father was well cared for, for the most part serene, and eminently master of himself.

"But oh, Bob!" cried Beth. "Once I saw father look like that man; he looked wild — like him — and his eyes stared like his, full of sadness and a sort of horror."

"Our father?" Bob asked, incredulously. "Where did you see him looking like that? I never did. You must have been dreaming."

"It was in the mountains, the day mother was lost. We were in Kill-bird Cave — you remember that awful storm? It was enough to drive any one crazy — the noise of the thunder, echoing among the rocks, the river rushing and crying out below us, the lightning glaring through the dark, and, worst of all, the smells! It was as if the reek of the Pit was all about us. The cave was full of those dreadful gases that kill the birds and beasts. I should have gone mad myself with terror if I had been there alone. Those fearful stenches waked things in my brain. But father was there, very quiet; and I felt safe, until, in a flash of lightning, I saw his face. And it looked like that man of the Haunted House.

"Just before the storm broke over us he had been telling me that he had battles to fight — that it was when he was absorbed in them that he was unfeeling toward mother. I don't think he ever is, myself; but he thought so. And he blamed himself for her being lost — and for your trip to Cody."

Bob gave a queer sound like a groan choked back, then poked the fire vigorously to cover it.

"He was n't to blame," he said, under his breath. "I was."

"Yes, you were," said Beth, with a finality that almost roused him to combat. But his continued silence showed the sincerity of his repentance.

"Anyway, father blamed himself. And I had the strangest feeling, Bob — almost as if I were mother. I felt I must save him, and that it would save him to have to take care of me. So I crept up close to him, and clung to him, and bothered him every way. Then some of that poison gas must have overwhelmed me, for the next I knew we were outside, both lying on the ground, and the storm was over, and the air tasted so good — smelled so sweet and *living*."

"I suppose," Bob said, slowly, "if father is that man's brother there must be something wrong in the blood. That must be what he was afraid of."

"And that explains the queer way we 've been brought up — so little schooling and so much out-of-doors. And the way I was treated when my head was hurt. I must have scared them by some of the things I said."

"And that 's why we 've never been told about the Haunted House, of the man who lived there — though he was — Beth! — he was our own uncle!"

Beth looked fearfully about her into the gloom. Again came that curious prickling and creeping of her skin that had beset her that afternoon in the old garden.

"No wonder I felt him!" she whispered. "I feel him now."

"And that 's where Mrs. Tatezel comes in," Bob went on. He was thinking too actively for creeps. "She took care of him."

"What! Why in the world do you think that?" Beth asked. Bob realized that he was on dangerous ground.

"Well — ah — there has to be some reason for her coming to us the way she did," he said, rather lamely. "And you remember that her coming always stirred up both the mater and dad."

"That drowned girl, too," Beth went on. "Who was she? I know she was Mrs. Tatezel's girl."

"*What!*" shouted Bob in his turn. "How did you find that out?"

"Mrs. Tatezel told me," she said; and went on to relate her conversation in Mrs. Tatezel's room at the ranch.

"Why in thunder did n't you tell me before?" growled Bob, his curiosity at fever heat.

"You were too taken up with Leonard Raymond those days to listen to a little girl's chatter," retorted Beth, finding a fleeting satisfaction in revenge.

"If I could only tell you what I know," Bob burst out. "Perhaps we could piece it out — "

"Do you really know anything?" Beth cried, eagerly. "I thought you were only fooling."

"Well, I was teasing you; but there is something — "

"Oh, Bob, tell! We need to stick together in this, and I 've told you everything. It 's mean of you to keep back anything important."

"It 's important, all right," said Bob. "But I promised."

"You really promised? Whom did you promise?"

"Mrs. Tatezel."

Beth fell back in amazement.

"But, by George, I did n't promise forever! She said it was only for a time. She 's either

got to explain or let me off. I won't stand this any longer!"

Whirling about, he started off to find her, and ran full into his mother, who was standing in the shadows of the doorway, very pale, lifting her hand for silence.

CHAPTER XIII

RETROSPECT AND PROPHECY

MARGARET WARFIELD came slowly forward, her head bent, her eyes upon the floor. Yet there was such dignity in her approach that Bob gave back before her until he paused at the fireplace, where he stood waiting, a little at one side, a hand upon the shelf. Beth, to cover her confusion, drew forward an easy-chair and pulled her mother gently into it. She fetched a little stool, and sat down, leaning against her mother's knees. By instinct, Beth was mistress of the disarming arts.

Margaret sank into the chair and raised her eyes to the portrait above the fire. She sat gazing at it as if taking counsel, and at length spoke, in a deep, inward voice:

"You need not ask Mrs. Tatezel's permission, Bob. She told me, while we were in Wyoming, of your brave rescue of Clifford. Wait!" she said to Beth, who sat upright and eager on hearing this; "I will tell you the whole story from

the beginning. Then, afterwards, Bob can tell you any details of his experience that you may want to know."

"Why didn't Mrs. Tatezel release me from my promise?" growled Bob. "It wasn't fair to leave me bound when you knew."

"Well, we weren't quite ready to explain. I don't know that I am ready now —" her hand stole to her heart, and her breath came quick; "but the time seems to have come — and I must meet it, somehow. You — you — will both help me by being patient and quiet until I am through. It is not an easy story for me to tell."

Beth patted the knee against which she leaned. Bob said, encouragingly,

"Go ahead."

"I hardly know where to begin," Margaret hesitated. "It is a long story, and parts of it may seem dry to you, and you may not see the connections of all I say. But listen as well as you can. Try — oh, my dear children! — try to understand with your hearts! Summon your love for me and especially for your father, while you listen.

"That house on the lake front was, as you have rightly guessed, his old family home. The

"She raised her eyes to the portrait above the fire. 'I will tell you the whole story from the beginning,' she said"

so-called madman who dwelt there was his brother."

"*Was* he a madman?" asked Bob.

"That is a difficult question to answer. Wait. I will tell you all I know; and then, perhaps, you will not hurry so to label him. But certainly he was not a normal human being."

"Where is he now?" asked Beth.

"He is dead," said her mother. "He died just before we went to Wyoming." (She added in her secret soul, "Thank God.") "But you are not to interrupt. I cannot tell my story in this backward fashion."

"We 'll be good," Beth assured her.

"When I first knew your father — I think, after all, that is the right place to begin — he looked like this portrait. That is the reason I have it here.

"It was no wonder that I was attracted by him. As you see, he was a splendid-looking man. Then, too," she smiled a little, "he was perfectly indifferent to all the girls. And I was n't used to having men indifferent to me. I was, you know, rather good-looking myself. I 'm not sure but that I resolved in my heart that he should notice me. I dressed carefully, and gave almost

as much time to the doing of my hair as Beth does."

Serious as she was, the memory of this part of her life made her smile and she gently pulled her young daughter's ear.

"Girls are all alike," growled Bob, but the light in his eyes was tender. "So I suppose you roped in the poor old dad?"

"Yes, I really did. I 've often wondered since that I succeeded, for he had made up his mind not to marry."

"Why? Why?" cried boy and girl together.

"Well, you see, there was terrible trouble in his family. It was a fine family. For generations it had been cultured and quietly prosperous. No shame stained it. Its women had been beautiful; its men brave and successful. There are many honorable names on its roll — college presidents, judges, governors, and senators. But — but — perhaps they lived too softly and too well. Perhaps they were overtrained on the nervous and intellectual side. Perhaps the wave of advance had risen to its height and must, unless some new impulse changed its rhythm, crest over, fall, and vanish. At any rate, the brilliant record was, in late years, more and more broken

by tragic failures. Some of the men drank too hard — though in that day hard drinking was little noticed. But it was noticed that the drink which sturdier men endured ruined these men. It set them wild. Their delicate, high-bred organisms could not endure the harsh lash of alcohol." She paused, and Bob knew she was thinking of him. "Some of them went literally crazy," she went on, with an effort. "Others had locomotor ataxia."

"What 's that?" asked Beth.

"A particularly dreadful — and incurable — form of paralysis. The man who has it walks like a galvanized corpse, a peculiar slapping, jerking walk.

"But all sorts of strange things happened. There was hysteria among the women; the girls had St. Vitus's dance. The babies died early. Your father had five brothers and sisters, of whom the only one that survived was Clifford. Yes, that man. His name was Clifford.

"All these things happened, and many more. One man was eccentric and lived all alone. Some people thought him a genius. Another travelled far and wide, living the life of a tramp. He rebelled against houses, and all civilized restraint.

The family, shocked at his clothes and his manners, thought him the maddest of all, but I 've sometimes thought he was the sanest. His instinct led him straight.

" Well, there 's no use going into all the family peculiarities. In those days no one thought to class them together and read their plain warning; so that no one put on the brakes. The girls continued to be housed, and coddled, and dressed, made decorative and useless; their vanity, their appetite for pleasure, sharpened; their sensibilities heightened; until, whenever the stress of life struck them — as it strikes all — they promptly broke."

" Broke? " asked Beth. " What do you mean? "

" I mean all sorts of horrors," answered her mother. Now that she was telling the tale she would not soften it. She would not spare them. Only by seeing the danger as it was, unrelieved, could they hope to escape it.

" One of them left her husband and children, and was lost; no one knows what became of her. She went off with a man who lived a reckless life. Presently he reappeared, but she did not. Another had no children, and died after a selfish invalidism twenty years long. She had not one

friend left to mourn her. Her husband felt only relief.

"Well, there are plenty of instances, only they didn't all come together as I'm telling you. These bad cases were scattered among people, who, in the main, were considered normal. The brother of the hysterical girl I've just told you of was a remarkably successful business man. He was your grandfather and added greatly to the family fortune. He drank occasionally, but only at intervals, and that after he was past middle life. During all your father's boyhood, he was more than straight, he was stern and severe. Without having reasoned it out, as your father has done, your grandfather evidently knew that there was danger for himself and his children in too much luxury and idleness. Therefore he built his house out on the North Shore, at what was then a considerable distance from the city. His wife — your grandmother — was a quiet, sweet-natured woman who loved him with all her heart. She had all the simple domestic virtues; but she never thought of asserting herself against her dominant husband.

"He, you must know, was one of the forceful, organizing men who built this great city. There

is a street named for him, and at one time there was a public school also named for him; but it has since been abandoned. He was one of the founders of the public library, and a pillar of the First Presbyterian Church. He was a brilliant man, too. His very oddities and enthusiasms acted like charms, set as they were in the pure gold of an upright character. His great evil was the love of power, and in the end this proved his overthrow. For the power he loved was easily his by virtue of his mental qualities, but he had too vivid and fiery a personality to endure the terrible strain of its responsibilities.

"Before this point was reached, however, he had set a good seal upon your father's character. He denied him extravagant spending-money, and ran his great house with the help of few servants, so that the boy had much work to do. He had to chop wood, and take care of the horses, and milk the cow, and keep the lawn cut. His father would hire no manservant. He let the boy have horses and dogs on condition that he would care for them himself. Also, in those earlier days the fortune was not so great, and the scale of living was simpler, so that it was possible to induce him to perform these tasks without making him feel

too sharply the contrast between him and other boys in his own station. I firmly believe that it is to this early training as well as to the fact that he resembles in many respects his mother's family, and to his own unrelenting self-control, that your father owes his escape.

"It was quite different when his brother Clifford came into the world. Then your grandfather's fortune had already mounted to what was for those days a considerable height. His importance in the community had grown, so that it seemed necessary for him to live with more stateliness. The city, too, had crept within reach of his country home. Also, the man himself was beginning to go to pieces. As I told you, he drank occasionally.

"Your grandmother, too, was not so vigorous as she had been. Her life had not been full enough to command all her energies. While her husband had been forging ahead in the outside world, she had been shut up to a lonely life in the country. She had no avenues for the use of her strength beyond housekeeping and the entertaining of her husband's friends. I think that under such devitalizing conditions only a very strong woman could remain steadfast, and equal to the great task which was soon to be hers.

" This is only my way of explaining the fact that Clifford was brought up in a manner totally dissimilar from the way in which his elder brother had been treated. He was a delicate baby from the start, and his frail health required more nursing; and, as his mother thought, more indulgence than had been given to his stronger brother. He had a violent temper, and would go off into such frantic rages when he was crossed that his mother fairly feared to face him. She argued, not unnaturally, that such spells of furious excitement were bad for his health, and for the unstable nervous system which he inherited. She knew no other way of avoiding them than by giving in to almost all his whims.

" Once in a while, his father, seeing this, would raise objections, and start in to bring him up as he had brought up his brother; but he was too absorbed by the increasing claims of business to be able to carry out his own programme; and his wife was at once too weak and too little convinced to carry it through herself against the pronounced opposition of the child. So these spasmodic attempts at discipline fell through.

" Besides, the boy was very beautiful and had an indescribable, winning charm of manner. His

mother adored him. In her husband's preoccupation she was left much alone. Richard, of course, was absorbed in his school and soon went away to college. She had nothing to comfort her except the impulsive, beautiful, fascinating boy, who was her heart's darling, and almost her only companion.

"The fruit of all this began to show itself when he was about your age, Bob. When I saw the influence that Leonard Raymond had over you my heart died within me, because Mrs. Tatezel said to me — and it was true — that he reminded her of your Uncle Clifford. And when you went off with him —" she turned pale, and again her hand stole to her side. She could say no more, but Bob understood. In a moment she resumed:

"I suppose he must have broken his mother's heart. Not that he was so much wilder than other boys, born like him to wealth and position, but that he could not with impunity do as they did. With them, who were often the sons of sturdy farmers and simpler working people, the wild doings of their youth left traces less easily to be discerned. They were in truth sowing, for their descendants to reap, the very seeds which

had sprung to fruition in Clifford's unstable nature; but it would be several generations before the fruit would show. In him it was immediately apparent.

"I don't know how to describe to you what his state was. It was not exactly insanity, for he was seldom under any delusion. He saw himself and the facts about him objectively and rationally enough; but his *emotions* were insane. He betrayed an intensity of excitement over the most trivial thing, so that all sorts of little happenings sufficed to drive him frantic. It did not take more than two or three glasses of wine to make him drunk, and when under that influence there was no wild, irresponsible thing that he was not equal to. When 'his spells,' as his mother used to call them, came on — and they might be caused by anything, from anger because his horse went lame to hurt vanity because he had received some rebuff — when these spells came on his state was like that of a man possessed by devils.

"But while this was the bad side of his character, he was just as warm in his loves, just as intense, and as unable to endure thwarting. Therefore, when he fell in love with Helen

Arnold it was a foregone conclusion that he would either get her, or destroy her or himself.

"Helen was, as you know, Beth, Mrs. Tatezel's nursling. She was an orphan, a beautiful girl; but ill brought up, like all the other girls of her class. She fell passionately in love with Clifford, who was handsome, rich, and devoted to her with a wild abandon, which might well make any girl feel that the days of chivalry had dawned again. Friends who knew Clifford warned her against him, but she refused to believe anything they said. I suppose she thought she knew him better than any of them; that her heart's intuition was to be trusted — just as I thought about his brother when my time came. That is, she *felt* that; I doubt if she *thought* anything about it at all. Few girls do. They marry just as their feelings sway them. At any rate, she married him without counting the cost or, very likely, believing in it.

"Mrs. Tatezel was the one who opposed her marriage most vigorously; but what could a devoted, plain-spoken old nurse do to stem the tide of such passion as swept these two young people to their doom? She followed Helen into the great house on the lake front, and watched

over her, hoping to avert as much of the evil as she could. I suppose she must have hated Clifford then, because she could see he was wrecking her darling's life.

"Yes, he wrecked it. During the first six months or so all went fairly well, though Clifford was unreasonable and exacting at times; but for the most part, his love for her triumphed, and for the rest, her love for him, while it made her suffer keenly, also made her quick to forgive. But the quarrels grew more frequent. If she had been older, or if she had understood, perhaps she could have endured better. But she was high-spirited and young, and she did not know how to make allowances for him.

"My heart aches, too, as I think about his mother. How often she must have tried to explain to that young wife! How the wife, impatient and suffering, must have turned upon her and rent her for venturing to interfere! How irritated her own son must have been at her attempts at explanation! I think the walls of that house on the North Shore must have quivered with pain in those days.

"The evil grew until at last the young wife saw him not merely quarrelsome, intense, and un-

stable, but in one of those terrible paroxysms of emotional excitement, when seven devils entered into and possessed him. His mother tried to explain, told her something of the family history, excused her son by exposing his heredity. And Helen was not well able to bear such a recital. She knew that she was about to become a mother. When she saw the father of her child transformed into a raging demon, when she learned that back of him were others who had raged as he raged, she was completely overcome by the fear she had refused to face in time. She was afraid to bear a child, who would be foredoomed, as she supposed, to its father's fate. You must remember that she, too, was sick. All her slight being was shaken, both by agony for her husband and by the physical changes incident to coming motherhood. I don't suppose she realized at all what she was doing.

"But, however that was, on one hot, breathless, midsummer day there was a terrible quarrel. The weather always affected Clifford; and I suppose it also affected Helen, poor child! Mrs. Tatezel heard them — she admits she listened at the door, afraid that Clifford would strike his wife, or hurt her. But, although he raved, he was a

gentleman; he would not strike her body with his fists, but only her soul with his dreadful words.

"After a time she grew quiet, and he flung himself out of the room, so blind in his white-hot passion that he did not see Mrs. Tatezel waiting there. She says she wanted to murder him; but instead she went in to her darling, who was sitting, quite still, with set lips, and awful eyes, looking out at the lake, which was heaving slowly there beyond her window as if panting under the pressure of the hot sky.

"Not a word could Mrs. Tatezel win from her. She had gone down into some dark region of despair, where she wandered alone, where the old nurse's tender love could not reach her.

" That night Helen disappeared. For several days they could find no trace of her. Then they saw an item in the newspaper stating that the body of a young woman had been found floating in the lake. The description tallied in some respects, but they were puzzled by the initials on the underwear, — initials which were not hers. They knew, too, by the brevity of the item, that the clothes must have been plain — quite different from the rich and delicate clothes she usually wore,

every piece of the bridal underwear embroidered with her name. Mrs. Tatezel alone guessed the truth; the initials were hers, the clothes were hers, borrowed to conceal the identity of their wearer. She went to search among her things — sure enough, some of them were gone.

"All alone, without telling any one, she went to the morgue on her sad errand of identification. There, lying on a cold marble slab, covered with a sheet, her long hair hanging off the end of the slab, little drops of water slipping along the dark strands and dropping to the stone floor with a gentle splash, there she found her nursling."

A tremulous sigh of pity broke from both boy and girl. Against the shadowy background of the firelit room they saw the old tragedy re-enacted. At length:

"Do you blame Helen, mother?" asked Beth, in an awe-struck voice.

"No! Blame! How could I?" Margaret cried. "Poor child! How could she know? Who had fitted her to grapple with so difficult, so complex a problem? I know how hard it was — I know well, for have I not had it to face?"

"What! You, mother?" both children exclaimed.

"Your heredity is the same as that which she feared for her child — feared so intensely that she preferred death." These were terrible words for a mother to speak to her children. A deep silence fell.

"But father?" stammered Beth. As she spoke she remembered those awful hours in Kill-bird Cave.

"Your father has fought all his life — and conquered. He is the bravest and strongest man I ever knew. But the evil is latent in him; and it is often transmitted to the second and third generations — to the fourth. You know that 'the iniquity of the fathers shall be visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generations.'"

"How did you dare marry him, then?" Bob asked. "Did you know?"

"Yes, I knew. But I loved. And I trusted the heredity from God. The rest of that quotation from the Bible is, 'and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.' I love Him; and I find His commandments written in the Book of Nature

as well as in the Bible. Ever since you children came into the world — and before — your father and I have sought to learn those laws and to keep them. As you know, your father has devoted his life to that study — the study of the laws of the mind and of the body, and the effect upon the mind of heredity, environment, and education. It has been my life study, too, as you know. You two children are our life's work, — our final experiment, — our proof to the world that heredity, rightly seen, is not an unescapable curse."

"It was a curse to Clifford," said Beth, very low, "and to Helen — and — and — to that poor little baby who was not allowed to live. Oh, mother!" She hid her face in her mother's lap.

Margaret softly touched her hair.

"Yes, it was a curse to Clifford and Helen," she answered. "It is to all who, blind and unthinking, throw themselves in its way, or let themselves remain in its power. But, like every other evil, it can be conquered. It must be faced and fought — but it can be overcome. For the forces of all Nature, and of God, work constantly to overcome weakness and disorder, and to establish order." Her voice rang out on a high clear note of courage and certainty.

Beth choked back the rising tears, and sat upright, understanding, for the first time, why her mother had so persistently taught her that even beautiful emotions, like this of pity, must be controlled.

Margaret went on with the story:

"After that, Clifford was never himself. He was ill for a long time, lying motionless in a stupor of grief and remorse for days together. When he recovered, he seemed to live only in a dream, from which he was roused chiefly by the sense of motion. So when his despair was heaviest upon him; when all his life seemed, as he expressed it to his mother, to be one long nightmare, within which he could discern no reality, he walked and walked, day and night. Only by feeling himself move, by feeling his feet slap down upon the hard pavement, tingling from the impact, could he make himself sure that he was living. At intervals he would break out into accessions of despair, and at such times he betrayed a tendency to self-destruction. But this tendency did not amount to an actual attempt at suicide until the day Bob saw him throw himself into the lake.

"I am glad, my son," she said, turning toward

him, solemnly, " that you were there to save him. Not that it mattered to him. He might as well have died in the lake there as later on in his bed, from the effects of that exposure. But I am glad for you. I feel that it is incumbent upon you to atone for the sins of your ancestors. They are a load upon you, — a heavy load; but you have broad shoulders and can bear them. As you tried to rescue him from the consequences of his own wrongdoing, so I hope you will rescue from the consequences of their wrongdoing all those whose lives are linked to your life. They gave you great gifts. From them you got your power of leadership, your brilliance of intellect. They gave you also great faults. It is for you to make what they gave you all clean and wholesome. Somehow, I have faith to believe that wherever they are now waiting, they will know when you have overcome that which they failed to overcome. I think as you steady and purify your own life, you will ease life for them, wherever they may be."

Her voice again had an inward sound. She spoke as a true mystic. Who that loves deeply does not believe in immortality, and in the infinite, outreaching, redeeming power of love —

love that has no past, and no future, but is all present?

A silence fell. Both the young people, staring into the fire, felt upon them a pressure of great responsibilities. But at the same time, with their young eager natures, they felt the call of great opportunities.

Presently their mother spoke again in a brisker voice:

"After the death of his parents — saddened, heart-broken people — your father devoted himself wholly to these studies, and to the care of Clifford. Mrs. Tatezel remained in the house, his devoted attendant. She had grown by this time, through seeing his repentance at the dreadful consequence of his unchecked moods, to pity him with her whole soul, and for years she cared for him there. Your father's studies grew more and more intense. I suspect they were his chief refuge from the melancholy-haunted loneliness of that house on the North Shore. At first he rather avoided me, because although he believed his own contention, he did not yet believe it enough to be willing to put it to the test in his own person; but by degrees his hope, his belief in his own theory, was growing stronger and stronger.

We had much in common. He needed some one with whom he could speak upon the subject that was absorbing him. We talked only in generals, of course, but I soon guessed that back of this ardent pursuit of knowledge was some personal reason, and after a time my accidental acquaintance with Mrs. Tatezel — I 'll tell you that story some other time; it 's unimportant — gave me the clue to it. I saw Clifford — " she paused. Her voice grew fainter — " and I confess I was afraid. All my life he has stood to me as the living symbol of fear, the only fear I know. It was that fear which drove me into the weakness of trying to follow you to Cody, Bob."

" Mother! " the boy cried out sharply and choked.

" Yes," his mother went on, more calmly, " you were wrong; but I was wrong, too, my dear, and it is right that I should acknowledge it.

" Well, to go back to my story. Your father, talking with me, found it easier and easier to believe, what now he believes with his whole heart, that the personal will actually builds the brain, and that the thoughts a man habitually thinks literally form his mental and nervous structure.

"Of course, he made me believe as he believed, and to the truth of that doctrine I have committed my whole life's happiness. It is because I believed this so thoroughly that I am now telling you the whole truth, so far as I know it, of my life and yours. You, in your turn, will have to be conscious of the hereditary material with which you work; and you will have consciously to employ of your own free will those forces which during your childhood your father and I have invoked for you."

Beth stirred a little uneasily. She objected to this interruption of a love story. With the selfishness of youth she was remembering with satisfaction that there was certainly no inherited weakness in Jeff.

"But how did you make him love you?" she asked, eagerly. Her mother laughed.

"Oh, by arts!" she said, gayly. "It was mostly just because I loved him, and because I was perfectly sure in my heart that he loved me, or would if he would let himself go. I could not help seeing how strong he was; I admired the splendid force of his mind. When to this was added the knowledge of his devotion to his strangely afflicted brother; and the hero-

ism with which he, full of vigorous manhood, having plenty of money and great powers of mind, nevertheless renounced all happiness for himself, my heart yearned over him until it seemed sometimes as if I should fairly force upon him the comfort and help which I knew he needed, and which I knew I could give.

"I cannot explain all the steps, my dear." She paused and blushed a little. "But when the time comes, if your situation should be like mine, you will know how I did it. I led him to feel that if his theories were true, as he firmly declared they were, we might safely marry. And when he began to hope for that, one day the hunger of his heart had its way with him and he told me that he loved me.

"The end, my dear children, rests with you. If you, knowing all, can now coöperate with us, holding yourselves in check, keeping your bodies strong and your hearts pure, you will be the living proof that your father did right to marry me, that I did right to win him from his resolve." Her voice stopped on a pleading, breaking note, and Bob, forgetting himself, impulsively kneeled before her, caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. Beth turned about, and

hugging the knee against which she leaned, hid her face upon it, struggling not to yield to her tears.

The twilight had deepened in the room, the shadows lay heavy behind the little group, and within them stood Richard Warfield. He had come in unnoticed, those before the fire being too much absorbed in their own thoughts to listen for the slight sound of his footfall on the thick carpet. But now he came forward and stood behind his wife, his hand resting upon her shoulder. It did not startle her. In her heart he was always present, and his physical nearness never surprised her, but merely completed, in the external, a constant fact of her inner being. Turning her face, she lifted his hand and put her cheek into the warm, firm palm of it, feeling strengthened and reassured.

Warfield spoke to his two children.

"You do well to adore your mother. I, too, adore. No man can win a great battle for his race unless the Right Woman is beside him. Your mother has not only loved — she has understood. You are the children of love and wisdom. To you much has been given; from you much will be required."

"When I am called I shall answer!" said Beth, low and certain, "I and my children." She leaned closer against her mother's knee.

Bob rose, and in silence grasped his father's hand. For a second the two men looked deep into each other's eyes — a look of high resolve, of profound emotion. Then, with the shyness that besets men in such supreme moments, they looked away from each other and toward the women. A smile of tenderness eased the ache of their hearts.

THE END