

BURNHAM

CLARA LOUISE

CLEVER BETSY

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	24
CHAPTER VII	28
CHAPTER VIII	32
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	35

Clara Louise Burnham

Clever Betsy / A Novel

CHAPTER I

OPENING THE COTTAGE

“Hello there!” The man with grizzled hair and bronzed face under a shabby yachting-cap stopped in his leisurely ramble up the street of a seaport village, and his eyes lighted at sight of a spare feminine figure, whose lean vigorous arms were shaking a long narrow rug at a cottage gate. “Ahoy there – The Clever Betsy!” he went on.

The energetic woman vouchsafed a sidewise twist of her mouth intended for a smile, but did not cease from her labors, and a cloud of dust met the hastened approach of the seaman.

“Here, there’s enough o’ that! Don’t you know your captain?” he went on, dodging the woolen fringe which snapped near his dark cheek.

“My captain!” retorted the energetic one, while the rug billowed still more wildly. She was a woman of his own middle age, and the cloth tied around her head did not add to her charms; but the man’s eyes softened as they rested on her.

“Here! You carry too much sail. Take a reef!” he cried; and deftly snatching the rug, in an instant it was trailing on the walk behind him, while Betsy Foster stared, offended.

“How long ye been here, Betsy?”

“A couple o’ days,” replied the woman, adjusting the cheese-cloth covering more firmly behind her ears.

“Why didn’t ye let a feller know?”

“Thought I wouldn’t trouble trouble till trouble troubled me.”

The man smiled. “The Clever Betsy,” he said musingly. They regarded one another for a silent moment. “Why ain’t ye ever clever to me?”

She sniffed.

“Why don’t ye fat up some?” he asked again.

“If I was as lazy as you are, probably I should,” she returned, with the sidewise grimace appearing again, and the breeze from the wide ocean a stone’s throw away ruffling the sparse straight locks that escaped from her headdress.

“Goin’ to marry me this time, Betsy?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Same old reason.”

“But I *tell* ye,” said the man, in half-humorous, half-earnest appeal, “I’ve told ye a dozen times I didn’t know which I liked best then. If you’d happened to go home from singin’-school with me that night it would ’a’ ben you.”

“And I say it ain’t proper respect to Annie’s memory for you to talk that way.”

“I ain’t disrespectful. There never were two such nice girls in one village before. I nearly grew wall-eyed tryin’ to look at you both at once. Annie and I were happy as clams for fifteen years. She’s been gone five, and I’ve asked ye four separate times if you’d go down the hill o’ life with me, and there ain’t any sense in your refusin’ and flappin’ rugs in my face.”

“You know I don’t like this sort o’ foolin’, Hiram. I wish you’d be done with it.”

“I ain’t ever goin’ to be done with it, Betsy, not while you live and I live.”

“Have some sense,” she rejoined. “We both made our choice when we were young and we must abide by it – both of us.”

“You didn’t marry the Bruce family.”

“I did, too.”

Betsy Foster’s eyes, suddenly reminiscent, did not suit in their expression the brusqueness of her tone. She saw again her young self, heart-sick with the disappointment of her girlish fancy, leaving this little village for the city, and finding a haven with the bride who became her friend as well as mistress.

“I did, too,” she repeated. “It was my silver weddin’ only last week, when Mr. Irving had his twenty-fourth birthday.”

“Is Irving that old? Bless me! Then,” hopefully, “if he’s twenty-four he don’t need to be tied to your apron-strings. Strikes me you’re as much of a widow as I am a widower. There ain’t many o’ the Bruce family left for you to be married to. After Irving’s mother died, I can see plain enough why you were a lot o’ help to Mr. Bruce; but when he married again you didn’t have any call to look after him any longer; and seein’ he died about the same time poor Annie did, you’ve been free as air these five years. You don’t need to pretend you think such an awful lot o’ the widder Bruce, ’cause I know ye don’t. Don’t ye suppose I remember how all your feathers stood on end when Mr. Bruce married her?”

Betsy gave a fleeting glance over her shoulder toward the window of the cottage.

“’Twasn’t natural that I should want to see anybody in Irving’s mother’s place, but she’s – ”

“I remember as if ’twas yesterday,” interrupted Hiram, “how you said ’twas Irving she married him for; how that she could never keep her fingers out of any pie, and she didn’t like the hats Mr. Bruce bought for Irving, so she married him to choose ’em herself.”

Betsy’s lips twitched in a short laugh. “Well, I guess there was somethin’ in that,” she answered.

Hiram pursued what he considered his advantage. “When Irving was on the football team at college, you told me yourself, standin’ right by this gate, that she’d go to the game, and when she wasn’t faintin’ because he was knocked out, she was hollerin’ at him how to play.”

Betsy bridled. “Well, what’s all this for?” she demanded.

“It’s to show you plain as the nose on your face that if you ever was married to the Bruce family you’re a widder now; just as much as I’m a widower.”

“No, sir, for better or for worse,” returned Betsy doggedly.

“Get out. They’re dead, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, both dead; and the widder Bruce nothin’ at all to you.”

“Stepmother to Mr. Irving,” declared Betsy.

“Well, he’s used to it by this time. Had twelve years of it. Holy mackerel, that kid twenty-four! I can’t realize it. His mother – ”

“No, no,” said Betsy quickly.

“Well, *she* anyway, Mrs. Bruce, went over to Europe to meet him last year, didn’t she, when she took you?”

“Of course she did. He went abroad when he left college, and do you suppose she could stand it not to be in part of his trip and tell him what to do?”

“There now! It’s plain how you feel toward *that* member o’ the family.”

“But I told you, didn’t I? Can’t you understand English? I told you ‘for better or for *worse*.’”

“Go ’long, Betsy, go ’long! That husky football hero don’t need you to fight his battles. If she presses him too hard, he’ll get married himself. I guess he’s got a pretty solid place in the bank. When did you get back?”

“A month ago.”

“Mrs. Bruce come down here with you?”

Hiram’s eyes as he asked the question left his companion’s face for the first time, and roved toward the windows of the cottage retreating amid its greenery.

As if his question had evoked the apparition, a light-haired lady suddenly appeared in the open doorway. She was a woman of about forty-five years, but her blonde hair concealed its occasional silver threads, and her figure was girlishly slender. She regarded the couple for a moment through her gold eye-glasses, and then came down the steps and through the garden-path.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken, Captain Salter," she said graciously, extending one hand, ringed and sparkling, and with the other protecting the waves of her carefully dressed hair from the boisterous breeze.

The captain, continuing to trail the rug behind him, touched his cap and allowed his rough fingers to be taken for a moment.

"The Clever Betsy here was carrying too much sail," he explained. "I took 'em down."

Mrs. Bruce laughed amiably.

"And found you'd run into a squall, no doubt," she responded, observing her handmaid's reddened countenance.

Mrs. Bruce's eyes could be best described as busy. There was nothing subtle about her glances. She made it quite evident that nothing escaped her, and the trim exactness of her dress and appearance seemed to match her observations.

"It seems good to be back in Fairport," she went on. "One summer's absence is quite enough, though I plan to slip away just for a little while to take a look at the Yellowstone this year."

"That so? Should think you'd had travelin' enough for one spell," rejoined Hiram.

"Oh, it's an appetite that grows with what it feeds on, Captain Salter. I dare say you have been a rover, too. I know how all you sea-captains are."

"No'm. My line's ben fish, mostly."

"And," added Mrs. Bruce, "taking care of us poor land-lubbers in summer. My son was well satisfied with your sale of his boat. I don't know whether he will get another this summer or not. You'll be here as usual, I hope?"

"Looks that way."

"I'm glad. I'm positively attached to the Gentle Annie."

"Haven't got her no more," returned Hiram quietly. "I've parted with her."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I suppose the new one's better."

"Well, she's just as good, anyway."

"But if she's not better, I don't see why you let the Annie go."

"Taint always in our power to hold on to things when we'd like to," responded Hiram equably.

Mrs. Bruce's eyes shone with interest behind her bi-focals. "Poor man!" she thought. "How improvident these ignorant people are! Probably went into debt, and had to lose his boat, and calculated on doing enough business this summer to pay for the new one."

"And what," she asked, with an air of gracious patronage, "will you call this one? Gentle Annie second, of course."

He shook his head, his sea-blue eyes fixed intrepidly on the object of his affections, who regarded him threateningly.

"Can't be any Annie second," he returned quietly.

"Now I think you make a great mistake, Captain Salter," said Mrs. Bruce, with vigor. "For your own welfare I feel you ought to keep that name. The summer people have been attached to the Gentle Annie so long, and had such confidence in her."

Hiram nodded; but Mrs. Bruce could not catch his fixed eye as she wished, to emphasize her point.

"They were right," he answered. "She was a good craft."

"Confidence in her and you too, I should have said, of course," went on the lady.

"Yes, we sort o' went together, pretty comfortable; but – well, I've lost her."

“Yes, but there’s a good-will goes with the name. You make a great mistake not to keep it. Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; people have said it so many years and had all their sails and their picnics and clambakes with you, it’s like throwing away capital for you to take a new name for your boat. Now if you haven’t already had it put on – ”

“I have.”

Hiram’s eyes were steady, and his lady-love was nervously fighting with the jealous wind for her cheese-cloth headdress, her face apparently flushed by the effort, and her eyes defiant.

“What have you named her?” asked Mrs. Bruce, in disapproval.

“The Clever Betsy.”

“I don’t like it, emphatically. It seems very strange, and it will to everybody.”

“Yes, at first,” rejoined Hiram imperturbably, “but you can get used to anything. It used to be Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; but in future it’s goin’ to be Captain Salter and the Clever Betsy; and after a while that’s goin’ to seem just as natural as the other.”

The speaker continued to rest his gaze on the narrow reddened countenance, which looked back furiously.

Mrs. Bruce attributed his averted face to shyness, but the direction of his glance gave her an idea.

“Well, I’m sure, Betsy, *you* should be pleased,” she remarked. “One might think the boat was named for you.”

“Betsy wasn’t ever clever to me,” said Hiram calmly. “She began spellin’ me down at school here when we were children, and she’s ben spellin’ me down ever since.”

Mrs. Bruce looked curiously at the frowning countenance of the capable woman who had meant so much in her husband’s household.

“Just like a snapdragon always,” went on Hiram slowly; “touch her and she’d fly all to pieces; and I guess you put on the finishin’ touch, takin’ her to Europe, Mrs. Bruce. She’s so toploftical to-day that she won’t scarcely speak to me.”

“Betsy was a good traveler; I wouldn’t ask a better,” said Mrs. Bruce absently. The subject of the boat’s name rankled. Her desire to coerce humanity for its own good was like a fire always laid and ready to be kindled, and Hiram had applied the match.

“What do *you* think of the new name, Betsy? Don’t you think your old friend would have done better to stick to the Gentle Annie?”

“That’s exactly what I think,” was the explosive response. “That’s the only name that’ll ever be connected with Cap’n Salter in this world, and he’d better make the most of it. Hiram, if you’re perishin’ to wear a trail I’ll make you one out o’ paper-cambric. Give me my rug. I want to go in the house.”

Salter motioned toward the speaker with his head, then met Mrs. Bruce’s eyes.

“You heard?” he said. “That’s what I say. Snappy, snappy.”

“I’m very sorry,” said Mrs. Bruce impressively, “that it’s painted on. It’s a bad idea and won’t bring you luck.”

“Well now, we’ll see,” rejoined Hiram. “I feel just the other way round. I think it’s a good idea and will bring me luck. Folks’ll begin to say Cap’n Salter and the Clever Betsy, Cap’n Salter and the Clever Betsy, and first news you know there’ll be – ”

He paused. Lightnings would have shot from Betsy Foster’s eyes had they been able to express all she felt; but the audacity of his look and manner conveyed a totally new idea to Mrs. Bruce.

“I wish you’d both come out with me this afternoon,” he went on. “I’ll show you just what a good, reliable, faithful craft I’ve got. A bit unsteady sometimes, mebbe, but that’s only because she’s smart and sassy; she always comes up to the mark in an emergency, and never goes back on her skipper. She’s fast, too, and – ”

“Sailin’!” interrupted Betsy, unable to endure another moment. “I guess if you saw the inside o’ that cottage you wouldn’t talk to me about sailin’. If you’re so fond of peacockin’ with that rug, I won’t deprive you of it. You can leave it on the step when you get through.”

Mrs. Bruce’s idea received confirmation by Betsy’s manner and her precipitate departure up the garden-path, and she looked at Hiram Salter blankly. Betsy Foster was the prop of her household. She was the property of the Bruce family. Did this man suppose for one moment that just because they had gone to school together, he could remove her from her useful position? What a selfish, impossible thought! Of course the man wasn’t in love with Betsy. Nobody could be in love with such a severely plain creature; and yet that fancy of the new boat and the new name! It argued a plan of wooing which had some poetry in it.

Here was an affair which Mrs. Bruce would certainly stop with a high hand if there were any real threat in it; but fortunately Betsy would consider it as unthinkable as she herself. If ever displeasure was writ large all over a woman it had been evident in Betsy Foster throughout the interview.

After a short reflective silence during which, both hands behind him, her companion waved the rug in gentle ripples, and met her gaze with an undisturbed smile, she spoke.

“Do take my advice still, Captain Salter,” she said. “Wipe out the Clever Betsy and go back to the Gentle Annie.”

CHAPTER II

MISTRESS AND MAID

Mrs. Bruce remained with the captain at the gate for fifteen minutes longer before she re-entered the house. Hiram came as far as the door with her and laid the rug inside. He caught a glimpse of Betsy, stormily dusting and polishing in the living-room, but contented himself with touching his cap to Mrs. Bruce, and disappearing down the garden path.

That lady looked sharply at her factotum as she entered the room. Mankind loves a lover undoubtedly, as a rule; but there are exceptions. Mrs. Bruce decidedly did not love anybody who proposed to deprive her of her right hand: cook, waitress, lady's maid, housekeeper, either of which posts Betsy was capable of filling in the defection of the regular incumbent.

Betsy was a none-such, and Mrs. Bruce knew it sufficiently well to have swallowed her wrath on many previous occasions when her strong will had collided with that of her handmaid. During her husband's lifetime Mrs. Bruce had discharged the New England woman several times in her most magnificent manner; but the ebullition had not been noticed by Betsy, who pursued the even tenor of her way as one who had more important matters to think of. Since Mr. Bruce's death his widow had not proceeded to such lengths, some intuition perhaps warning her that the spiritual cable which held the none-such to her service had lost its strongest strands and would not stand a strain.

She looked at the faithful woman now with a new curiosity. Mankind loves a lover. Yes, of course; but Betsy couldn't have a lover! The cheese-cloth binding the hair away from the high sallow forehead, taken in connection with the prominent thin nose and retreating chin, presented the class of profile which explains the curious human semblance taken on by a walnut when similarly coiffed. No – that designing sailor was tired of living alone. He wanted a housekeeper and a cook. How did he dare! Quite a blaze of indignation mounted in the breast of Betsy's fortunate owner. What a blessed thing that Betsy was the sort of woman who could see into a millstone and could be trusted to flout her deceitful wooer to the end. Mrs. Bruce spoke with gracious playfulness.

“You never told me Captain Salter was a beau of yours, Betsy.”

The other did not cease to beat up the cushions of the wicker chairs.

“I don't know as I ever did take the time to reg'larly sit down and give you my history, Mrs. Bruce,” was the reply.

And that lady took a few moments to reflect upon the spirit of the crisp words, finally deciding to veer away from the subject.

“Now what can I do to help you, Betsy? I know you want everything spick and span before that cook comes to-morrow.”

Betsy looked up.

“I've laid the silver out there on the dining-room table. You might clean it. Here, let me put this apron on you.” And abruptly abandoning the cushions, the speaker hurried into the dining-room, divided from the living-room only by an imaginary line, and seizing an enveloping gingham apron, concealed Mrs. Bruce's trim China silk from head to foot.

The mistress sat down at the table and opened the silver-polish, and Betsy returned to her work.

“I've been asking Captain Salter about the neighbors, and especially about my little protégée.”

“Which one? Oh, you mean Mrs. Pogram's girl!”

“Yes, Rosalie Vincent. With that name and her pretty face and graceful figure, it did seem too bad that she shouldn't have her chance. I remember, though, you didn't altogether approve of my sending her away from washing Mrs. Pogram's dishes.”

“Washin' Mrs. Pogram's dishes was real safe,” returned Betsy. “Rosalie was pretty, and poor, and young; and that's a combination that had better stay right in the home village under some good

woman's wing. Mrs. Pogram's a clever soul, though some like putty. If she hadn't been, she wouldn't have spared Rosalie, I s'pose."

"Oh, it wasn't for long," replied Mrs. Bruce. "I thought it only fair that the child should have one season's course in English, with such a yearning as she had after poetry and all things poetical. Such a doom as it seemed to be to peel Mrs. Pogram's vegetables and wash her dishes. I can always discern an artist," added Mrs. Bruce complacently, "even in the most unlikely places; and that girl had a touch of the divine fire. I recognized it that day when she recited the bit of Browning up here."

Betsy's eyes happening to fall on the silver-polish, she remarked dryly.

"Well, whitin' 's safer than Brownin' for her sort, and I thought she was contented enough."

Betsy's two-year-old disapproval of this one of her mistress's undertakings revived. Education was a good thing, without doubt, but according to Betsy's judgment it was best, under circumstances of such dependence as existed with Mrs. Pogram's pretty adopted child, to let well enough alone. Mrs. Pogram's principal motive in giving the girl a home had been the material help she could render, and it was a doubtful experiment to send her to the new environment of the city, and the novel companionship of her fellow students, unless her benefactress intended to prolong her watch over the young girl's fortunes; and this Betsy knew would not be the case; for long before Rosalie's term of study was ended, Mrs. Bruce's energies would be directed toward superintending the affairs of somebody else. The girl's grateful letters had begun to be ignored some time before Mrs. Bruce joined her adored boy in Europe; and it is doubtful when she would have thought again of Rosalie Vincent, had she not returned to the village where the young girl had attracted her fleeting fancy.

"I gave her the wings to soar," she now added virtuously, "and I inquired of Captain Salter if she had used them. I found his report quite unsatisfactory."

"Why, where is Rosalie?" asked Betsy quickly, stopping her labors in the interest of her query.

"Captain Salter wasn't sure. He said he supposed Mrs. Pogram knew, but there had been some recent quarrel with a brother of Mrs. Pogram's and it had ended in Rosalie's going away."

"Soarin', perhaps," remarked Betsy dryly, grasping the legs of an unoffending table and giving it vicious tweaks with the dust-cloth. "Just as well folks shouldn't be given wings sometimes, in my opinion. When a bird's got plumage like Rosalie's, it'd better stick to the long grass. The world's just full o' folks that if they catch sight o' the brightness never rest till they get a shot at it and drag it down."

"Was she so pretty? Let's see, was she dark or light? Oh, I remember her hair was blonde."

Betsy gave one look at her employer. It was entirely characteristic that two years should have sunk the village girl's memory in a haze.

Mrs. Bruce sighed and began to polish another fork. "It seldom pays to try to help people," she said. "I distinctly remember the girl had talent, and I thought she might get a position in one of the Portland schools if she had a little training and applied herself."

"Her letters to you certainly sounded as if she was workin' her best."

"Did they?" vaguely. "Perhaps they did. Well, very likely she has gone to take a position then."

"Not in summer time, I guess," remarked Betsy.

"I don't seem to remember any brother of Mrs. Pogram's," said Mrs. Bruce plaintively.

"Humph! You've probably bought ribbons of him lots o' times. He sells 'em up in Portland, and I'll bet it's a strain on him every time he measures off over thirty-five and a half inches for a yard. Brown's his name. Loomis Brown; and it would seem more fittin' if 'twas Lucy. Such a hen-betty I never saw in all my days. I wonder if it's possible he took to shinin' up to Rosalie."

"Oh, he's a bachelor?"

"Law, yes. He wouldn't want to pay for a marriage license, but p'raps he took such a shine to Rosalie as she grew older that it spurred him on to the extravagance. No tellin'. If that's the case, no wonder she took wings."

"It's very tiresome," said Mrs. Bruce, "the way girls will marry after one has done one's best for them."

“Yes, Mrs. Bruce. The next time you take a fancy to a village girl, you give her a course in cookin’ instead of English. She can jaw her husband all right without any teachin’; but it takes trainin’ to make good bread.”

Mrs. Bruce sighed leniently. “That is your point of view, naturally,” she said. “You could hardly be expected to have that divining rod which recognizes the artistic. Strange how much better I remember that girl’s gift and her unstudied gestures than I do her face.”

Betsy paused long enough in her undertakings to pull up the bib of her mistress’s apron, which had slipped, endangering the pretty silk gown. There was a permanent line in Betsy’s forehead, which might have been named “Mrs. Bruce the second”; but she fastened the apron as carefully now as she did all things pertaining to that lady’s welfare, and made no reply to the reflection upon her æsthetic capabilities. Betsy would not have known the meaning of the word æsthetic, but she would have declared unhesitatingly that if it characterized Mrs. Bruce she was willing not to have it describe herself. Not that she had a dislike of her mistress. She took her as she found her. Mr. Bruce had been attached to her, and Betsy’s duty was to the bearer of his name. She seldom contended with her mistress, nor had any argument. She said to herself simply that it was hard to teach an old dog new tricks; and while it might seem a trifle rough to mention an old dog in connection with a lady of Mrs. Bruce’s attractive appearance, the sense of the axiom was extremely applicable, since Mrs. Bruce could become no more set in all essentials if she lived to be a hundred.

Betsy very rightly realizing that avoidable discord was foolishness, lived her philosophy, and contented herself with mental reservations which would have astonished her complacent mistress mightily.

On the evening, twelve years ago, when Mr. Bruce announced to his housekeeper his impending marriage, she shouldered this cross resolutely.

He had been a man of few words, and on this occasion he said simply to the woman who had seen his happiness with the bride of his youth, “I find myself very lonely, Betsy. I am going to marry Miss Flushing.”

“Very well, sir,” she replied quietly, though her heart leaped to her throat and her thoughts flew to the twelve-year-old boy who was then at home on his vacation. “Have you told Mr. Irving, sir?”

She remembered the father’s face as he replied, “Yes. That boy, Betsy, is a manly little chap. Miss Flushing is devoted to him and has gained his affection already; but – it was a blow to him. I saw it. A surprise, a great surprise.”

Betsy remembered to this day how she bit her tongue to keep it from speaking.

“He talked to me though,” the father had continued, “more like one man to another than like a child; but after being very civil about it, he announced that I mustn’t expect him to call her mother, because he should not be able to.”

Betsy had nodded. “Mr. Irving had a mother out of the ordinary, Mr. Bruce,” she replied very quietly, but with the hot blood pressing in her head; then she went up decorously to her room, closed the door, and indulged in one storm of weeping; after which she shouldered the cross above mentioned, which like all crosses heartily borne, lightened as the years went on.

One thing was certain. Greater devotion was never displayed by a stepmother; and if Irving Bruce had mental reservations, too, he did not divulge them to the faithful woman who was part of his earliest remembrance.

CHAPTER III

IRVING BRUCE

Mrs. Bruce had retired from her labors, but a vigorous cleansing process was still going on in the cottage, when a man's footsteps again sounded on the garden-path. Some one set a suit-case down on the porch, and then appeared in the doorway for a moment of inspection.

Betsy started at sight of the tall, gray-clad apparition.

"Mr. Irving!" she ejaculated, and the transfiguring expression which crossed her face gave the key at once to her loyalty. "Go `way from here, we ain't a bit ready for you!" she said severely.

He strode forward and gently shook the speaker's angular shoulders instead of her busy hands.

"Great that I could get here so soon," he returned, continuing to rest his hands on her shoulders, while she looked up into the eyes set generously apart under level brows.

"He ain't any job lot," she thought for the hundredth time, "he's a masterpiece." But all the time she was trying to frown.

"We ain't ready for you," she repeated. "The cook hasn't come."

"Bully!" ejaculated the unwelcome one. "It's the aim of my existence to catch you where there isn't any cook. Are the mackerel running?"

"You'll have to ask Cap'n Salter or some other lazy coot about that. Mackerel running! Humph! My own running has been all I could attend to the last two days. Mrs. Pogram's supposed to look after the cottage – air it and so on; but she always was slower'n molasses and I s'pose she don't get any younger nor spryer as the years go on. I've found mildew, yes, I have, *mildew*, in a number o' places."

The young man smiled, dropped his hands, and sauntered to a window overlooking the tumbling blue.

"She has what's-her-name there, that girl she adopted," he responded carelessly. "Why doesn't she shift such duties upon her?"

"Oh, you remember Rosalie, do you?" asked Betsy dryly, as she resumed her work.

"To be sure. That was her name. Pretty name. Pretty girl. A real village beauty."

"Yes," said Betsy. "You very likely remember Mrs. Bruce took a lot of interest in her. Had her here to speak poetry one day."

"Oh, I remember her very well," returned the young man. "I don't recall the poetry though. So that was her forte. Apt to interfere with opening up and airing out other people's cottages, I suppose."

"Yes, if it's encouraged. Hers was encouraged."

Betsy's lips snapped together and her tone caused her companion to glance around at her over his shoulder.

"Mildew sort of got on your nerves, Betsy?" he asked, amused. "Don't worry. There's a free-for-all chemistry here that will fix it up in no time. Drop that duster and come and look at the ocean. It will steady you."

"Steady me!" Betsy gave a derisive grunt. "Tell that to the marines. I've had experience of its steadiness the last month, haven't I?"

Irving laughed at certain memories of his companion's walnut profile, with lips pursed in the throes of endurance.

"You aren't a star sailor, are you?" he returned.

"I learned the meanin' o' one phrase o' Scripture; learned it for life. 'Unstable as water.' It fits some folks just splendid and you couldn't say anything worse about 'em. My! will I ever forget tryin' to wait on Mrs. Bruce and fix my hair in that stateroom! Never got my arms up that there didn't come a lurch and knock my elbow against the woodwork fit to break the skin."

"You ought to be better upholstered, Betsy," said Irving.

“And varnish!” she continued, with reminiscent loathing. “Shall I ever be able to use varnish again!”

“Joy!” exclaimed Irving. “Then I’m not in any danger of being shellacked! I never felt certain in childhood’s happy hour that keeping me surgically clean would wholly satisfy you.”

“No, sir,” said Betsy warmly, “the ocean won’t get me to look at it this summer. All diamonds, and blue sparkles, and white feathers, just as if butter wouldn’t melt in its mouth; then when it gets you in its clutches, bangs you around from pillar to post and nearly blows the hair off your head. I know its tricks now. It’ll never deceive *me* again.”

Irving smiled out at the maligned billows. “Looks pretty good to me,” he returned. “Wonder what I shall do about a boat. Has Mrs. Bruce said any more about the Yellowstone?”

“Yes, spoke of it this mornin’ to Cap’n Salter.”

“Oh, has she been out with Hiram already?”

“No, he was lally-gaggin’ around here for a while.”

“How is old Hiram?” The question was affectionate.

Betsy pushed an upturned rug under a table-leg.

“Oh, about as usual, I guess. Gets more like himself every year, same as we all do.”

“Well, he couldn’t do better. He’s a good sort.” Irving smiled at some memory. “I must have made that man’s life a burden. What a lot of patience he had! But when the end was reached, I can feel that hand of his come down on me, big as a ham, and toss me away as if I’d been a cunner he was throwing back. Mrs. Salter, too. Talk about salt of the earth! I suppose that must have been a stock Fairport pun during her life. Many a time she begged me off. The gentle Annie! I should think so. Let’s see. How long has she been gone?”

“Five years.”

“And the captain has never taken notice since, has he?”

“Don’t ask *me*,” was the curt response; and a table was whisked completely around with a celerity which must have given it vertigo.

“Betsy! Betsy!” It was a cautious call which came quietly from the invisible.

Betsy straightened herself and moved toward it, and the silent moment was followed by the swift entrance of Mrs. Bruce.

“My *dear* boy!” she exclaimed, aggrieved. “I thought I heard a man’s voice. How long have you been here? Betsy, why didn’t you tell me!”

The young man’s eyes were kind as he turned and came to meet the speaker, and his manner seemed very quiet in contrast to her alert, fussy personality and the froufrou of her taffetas.

“Good-morning, Madama,” he said, returning her nervous embrace lightly. “I’ve asked Betsy so many questions since I broke in here, that she couldn’t in civility leave me.”

Betsy returned to her labors, deaf to her mistress’s remarks. She knew that Mrs. Bruce had a chronic objection to her having a tête-à-tête, however short, with Irving. It was as if the widow were jealous of the twelve years’ advantage which her maid had over her; and notwithstanding Betsy’s humble position, her mistress constantly imagined that they referred, when together, to events which she had not shared, and spoke on subjects which would be dropped upon her appearance.

The newcomer slipped her hand through the young man’s arm, and moved with him as he returned to the window.

“Why didn’t you telegraph? How did you happen to come so soon?”

“Oh, I just saw that the bank was run by a lot of egoists who supposed that they could manage it without me, just as they have for thirty years, so I thought I would make the most of this last summer of their self-satisfaction, and take all that was coming to me, before I get into the harness.”

“Very wise; and I hope when you do get into harness you’ll never make such a slave of yourself as your dear father did.”

“You never can tell. I rather dread my own proclivities. If I should ever work as hard as I’ve played, the business world is going to be jarred when I leap into it.”

Mrs. Bruce hung fondly on his arm, rejoicing in the hard muscle she felt through his light sleeve.

“Well,” she said, “I’m glad you could come. There is such a wonderful feeling of freedom in this restful spot. Sometimes,” pensively, “I think the greatest blessing we have in life is personal freedom. I suffocate without it, and it is astonishing how difficult it is to get, in the ordinary affairs of life.” Then, with sudden attention, “What makes you wear that tie with that suit? I don’t like it at all, anyway. That isn’t one that I gave you.”

The young man’s hand mechanically sought his throat. “No, Madama,” he admitted, still looking absently from the window.

“I should think, Irving, as many neckties as I pick out for you, you might wear one of them when you’re going to be with me.”

“But I can’t bear to wear your neckties,” he returned gently, “they’re so decorative in my room. To tie them all up and bury them under a collar and vest would be a shame. I hang them on my tie-rack, where they can be admired morning, noon, and night. You know I keep trying to curb your extravagance in that line. You’ll impoverish yourself so that you can’t wear silk stockings if you go on like this. Every few days a new tie to go on the rack.”

“Nonsense,” returned Mrs. Bruce curtly. “If I didn’t have such good taste, of course I shouldn’t venture to buy ties for a man; but even as a girl I was considered to have the most perfect taste. I was famous for it, and I’m sure, Irving, I’ve tried to instill it into you.”

“You have, Madama,” he returned soothingly, “and I think I’m a credit to you. Now come, I’m prepared to maintain that I’ve caught the infection, and that my taste is perfect, too.” He stifled a yawn. “To prove it, I’ll throw down the bone of contention, collar and all, and get into a sweater. I’m going to hunt up Hiram before lunch and swap lies for a spell.”

So speaking the young man stepped out on the porch, picked up his suit-case, and walked through the spreading cottage until he came to his room, where Betsy was whisking things into readiness for his occupancy.

“There! Do you smell?” she asked, sniffing disapprovingly; “just like a cellar?”

“No,” he returned plaintively, “I don’t think I do.”

“I didn’t say do *you*; I say, don’t *it*,” snapped Betsy, in no mood for badinage. “If you hadn’t come so soon, I’d have had it aired out. I’d like to shake Mrs. Pogram till her teeth chatter.”

Irving set down his suit-case.

“As I remember, Mrs. Pogram’s teeth aren’t calculated to chatter. They don’t – what is the technical term now?”

Betsy grunted. “I do feel ashamed to have you come into such a comfortless place, Mr. Irving.”

“I’d rather be here, Betsy, even if I have to wear a clothes-pin on my nose while unmaking my toilet. I can sleep on the porch, you know. You think – eh, Betsy, you think there’s no use trying to side-step the Yellowstone?”

“We’re as good as there,” returned Betsy sententiously. “Mrs. Bruce says that when once you get into that bank, she might as well count on the wind that blows as you taking a vacation at any stated time; and you know it’s got to be a stated time for the Yellowstone.”

Irving sighed.

“I hope we know our place, Betsy,” he returned.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. POGRAM CONFIDES

Half an hour afterward Mrs. Pogram, unconscious of Miss Foster's yearning to administer to her portly person a vigorous movement cure, walked leisurely up the village street. From one hand depended a long slender package which she held away from her black shawl by a string loop around her forefinger.

A merry whistling attracted her, and she perceived coming along the walk, at a swinging gait, a bareheaded young man in a sweater. In a few days the streets of the village would be largely populated by girls and men, all with an aversion to hats and sleeves. Mrs. Pogram was familiar with the type, and noted that this care-free person was an advance guard proving that the summer was here.

She eyed him, however, with lack-lustre eyes until he stopped suddenly before her.

"You don't know me," he said, taking his hands out of his pockets.

The corners of Mrs. Pogram's lips drew down and her chin drew in.

"Why, Irvin' Bruce, it's you!" she declared. "We haven't seen you in these parts for so long I didn't know but you'd given up Fairport."

"Couldn't do that, Mrs. Pogram. You know how a man always returns to the scene of his crimes."

Mrs. Pogram again drew down the corners of her mouth and gave her gingerly-held package a shake.

"This pesky fish never will be done drippin'," she remarked.

"Been fishing?" asked her companion.

"Yes. I go fishin' on the wharf. It's cheaper than to the market and the walk does me good."

"You look well."

"I ain't well. It's kind o' hard for me to get around, and I miss Rosalie. She's gone off." Mrs. Pogram's voice took a whining note, and she indulged in a sniff of self-pity. "I donno as you ever saw Rosalie?"

"Oh yes, I've seen her."

"The way I come to take her, I was gettin' along in years and she was left alone in the world. She wanted a home and I wanted young hands and feet, so we'd 'a' got along real comfortable if it hadn't been for Loomis; and I've been more like a mother than a sister to Loomis, bein' so much older, and I do think he might have let me have a little comfort without naggin' me all the time."

"Has he left Portland and come here to live with you?"

"Oh no, he's still in Chatham's store, but he can run down over Sunday any time, you know, and ever since Rosalie came he's done so a great deal."

"What could you expect?" returned Irving. "I remember her."

"Hey? Oh, yes, Loomis was awful pleased with her at first, but she didn't seem to take much of a fancy to him. Kinder laughed at him. Loomis *is* sort o' fussy. Anyway, she made him mad one day, and from that on he didn't give me any peace."

Mrs. Pogram sniffed again and gave her lachrymose package another shake so that its tears bedewed the walk as if she were weeping vicariously.

"He made you send the girl away?" asked Irving quickly, a line coming in his forehead at the remembrance of the mincing young clerk who had been the natural victim of many a prank of his own boyhood.

"Not *made* me, exactly," returned Mrs. Pogram, "but Rosalie got so she wouldn't stand it any longer. You see," her complaining tone altering to one of some complacency, "though I ain't any millionairess, my estate ain't exactly to be sneezed at. The old Pogram mahogany and the silver that

was my mother's are worth considerable; and Loomis was on pins for fear I'd give some of 'em to Rosalie. I give her a spoon once – it was real thin, Irvin', not worth much of anything in money, but it was a time when Rosalie'd taken care of me through a fever and I felt to give her somethin'; and law, from the way Loomis took on you'd 'a' thought I'd made him a poor man for the rest of his life. Honestly I was ashamed of him; and I kep' his actions away from Rosalie as much as I could; but she's smart, and she saw she'd gained Loomis's enmity by laughin' at him, and saw that he was gettin' kinder jealous of her about the things; and if she would only have been quiet, and spoken him fair, and we both kept our own counsel, I could have slipped many a little thing to her and he'd never 'a' known the difference. Things weren't ever the same after your mother gave her that winter at Lambeth. She never laughed at Loomis till after that, and then came my sickness and I gave her the spoon, and from that time there wa'n't ever any peace."

The line in Irving's forehead came again. "Then you don't think Mrs. Bruce's gift to Rosalie was an advantage."

"Well, I was willin' to spare her for her own good, for I could see what her longings were, and felt I hadn't ought to stand in her way. Loomis favored it because I think 'twas his idea then that he and Rosalie would both come into the Brown-Pogram estate one o' these days."

Irving lifted a hand to conceal some ebullition which escaped him at the thought of the ramshackle ancestral halls of the Pograms.

"As I say," continued Mrs. Pogram, "if Rosalie could have worked with me we'd ha' kep' Loomis smoothed down; but after the spoon trouble that young one acted like all possessed. Every time Loomis came she'd throw out remarks to scare him. 'Oh, Auntie Pogram,' she'd say, 'just look how exactly the right height this work-table is for me to set by. It's the real stuff this wood is;' and then she'd gaze at it kinder thoughtful. 'If this was polished up, that grain would come out beautiful.' Then there is a silver slop-bowl and creamer that was my mother's. 'Oh, Auntie Pogram,' she'd say, and just clasp her hands and gaze at 'em like they was magnets and she a needle. 'How easy it is, after all, to tell the real antiquities from the made-up ones,' she'd say. 'How I do love that colonial pattern!' And all the time Loomis would fidget and run his fingers through his hair and get red in the face. After he'd go I'd talk to her, but she wouldn't do a thing but laugh till the tears come in her eyes." Mrs. Pogram nodded significantly. "But the day came when there was more tears and not so much laugh. Loomis got so he come down every Saturday night. He made a list of all the silver and he'd count 'em out, forks and spoons, every time he came. One Sunday night he said something real downright mean to Rosalie about beggars not bein' choosers. I spoke up for the girl then and there. I said Rosalie had earned everything she'd had from me and earned it fully. I can see her now standin' there, and the way her nostrils opened when she breathed. I don't think I ever saw her as good-lookin' as she was that minute. Her light hair was just fluffin' out like a cloud, and her blue eyes turned nearly black, and her lips was bit in between her teeth till she scared me the way she looked at Loomis. Then she went out o' the room without a word. The next mornin' she didn't get up at half-past four to get Loomis's breakfast, the way she had to when he stayed Sunday nights. I hadn't thought she would, and I got up in my double-gown and found him drinkin' some cold milk, and growlin'. Loomis likes his coffee. I told him 'twas his own fault, and he told me to go to bed and stay there, – 'twas all I was fit for." Mrs. Pogram sniffed again and shook the fish mechanically.

"I didn't hear any sound in Rosalie's room when Loomis slammed the front door; so after a spell I went in to find her and try to make peace, but – " the speaker shook her head – "there wa'n't any Rosalie. Her bed was made up neat and there was a note on her table. 'I love you, dear Auntie Pogram, but I can't stand it any longer. Don't worry about me. If I'm in any trouble I promise to write to you.'"

Here, the fish not seeming equal to the occasion, Mrs. Pogram dabbed some tears from her own eyes.

"How long ago was this?" asked Irving.

"Only a few weeks, and I haven't heard another word."

“Your brother is satisfied, I suppose?”

“Well, he ain’t real comfortable, ’cause he knows I don’t mean to live and work all alone. I ain’t fit to; and he’s afraid now I’ll pay wages that’ll be a tax on the estate.”

Irving muttered something under his breath.

“Hey?” inquired his companion plaintively.

“I’m sorry for all this, Mrs. Pogram. You must tell Betsy about it. Her head is full of sensible ideas. Perhaps she can help you.”

“I’d like to see her,” returned the other mournfully. “How are you all?”

“All well.”

“You’ve been to Europe. Now I s’pose you’ll settle down a spell.”

“Alas, Mrs. Bruce decrees otherwise. We’re off for the Yellowstone as soon as we can unpack and pack again.”

“I hear it’s real sightly out there,” returned Mrs. Pogram, without enthusiasm. “I’ll have to tell Betsy to get some one else to look after the cottage, though; I ain’t fit to hist mattresses.” Another sniff. “Good-mornin’, Irvin’, I’m real glad I met you. Remember me to the folks.”

CHAPTER V

ROSALIE VINCENT

A throng of pilgrims to the Yellowstone was emptying out of the cars upon the platform at Gardiner. The spectacular six-horse coaches were in waiting, and the customary competition and struggle for the outside seats began. Mrs. Bruce was wild-eyed in her determination to sit near the driver, and Irving turned to Betsy, who spoke promptly: —

“Never mind me, Mr. Irving. Just go up top with Mrs. Bruce. I’ll go inside.”

Which plan was accordingly carried out; and Mrs. Bruce was ensconced to her satisfaction where she could ask questions alternately of the driver and her son.

The jingling, gay teams started, and wound up the ascending road under a vast sky above the encircling hills and mountains. As they passed the Eagle’s Nest Mrs. Bruce had her first qualm as to Betsy. Upon being told that the high-placed bundle of sticks perched on a cliff was indeed the domicile of the king of birds, she exclaimed: —

“Oh, Irving, couldn’t you stoop over and call down to Betsy to put her head out? That is such a purely American sight, and Betsy is so American!”

But Irving, objecting to this contortion, diverted his companion’s attention.

As for Betsy, she preferred the seclusion from the sight of the six horses so dexterously tooled along the road, and felt that she saw all the scenery she cared for despite the roof of the stage. Miss Foster must have had an excellent conscience; she always accepted with such contentment her own society.

There was a chatter of voices in her ears from the other occupants of the stage, but her eyes rested absently on hillside and waterfall while she thought of Fairport and the deserted cottage whose condition was still far from satisfying her. Her thoughts roved, too, as they often did, to Rosalie Vincent. What was the girl doing, out in the world unprotected?

It seemed but a short time to Betsy before the coach swung around the circle in front of the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, and the passengers poured from the vehicle, watched by other crowds on the hotel piazza, who half resented the arrival of newcomers, for at this season food and beds were at a premium.

Irving had looked out for the comfort of his party, and Mrs. Bruce’s room satisfied her. They spent the day in the customary visits to beautiful terraces of heavenly tints built by boiling-hot scanty waterfalls, and at night laid them down to slumber well contented.

In a remote room of the hotel a young girl, after her evening’s experience of standing upon her feet long hours, waiting upon hungry hordes of sightseers, was hastening to get ready for her night’s rest, when the handle of her door was turned, and then as if some one outside was impatient of its resistance, it was shaken with energy.

The half-disrobed occupant of the room ran to hold the door.

“Who’s there?” she demanded.

A sharp girlish voice replied imperatively, “It’s me! Open the door quick!”

“You’ve made a mistake in the room,” returned the girl inside. “This is mine.”

“Is it, indeed!” shrilly. “Well, I guess if you don’t open this door pretty quick, I’ll have you sent flying!”

At which threat in the sharp voice, the girl inside opened the door and viewed in astonishment the stormy-eyed young person who entered, beginning to pull out hairpins from her lofty pompadour as she came. “What did you think you were? A lay-over?” she demanded scornfully.

The other girl, her fair hair falling in ripples about her bare neck and arms, closed the door and regarded the newcomer with wide eyes.

“Is it your room, too?” she asked.

“Yes, it is,” snapped the other, “and I hope it won’t be any more disagreeable for you than it is for me.”

“Oh – oh – of course not,” returned the fair one. “I only thought it was so small – and the bed is so narrow – and I didn’t know – ”

“Well,” returned the other, somewhat mollified, and with a yawn, “I saw down in the dining-room to-night that you were a green-horn. We’re mighty lucky not to be in a bigger room with half-a-dozen girls. My name’s Miss Hickey. What’s yours?”

“Rosalie Vincent,” responded the fair one, still standing rooted to her place while Miss Hickey removed a mammoth rat from her hair, and eclipsed with it one side of the wash-stand, which was dresser as well.

“Better get to bed, Miss Vincent. You’ll have plenty of chances to stare at me, and you look as tired as I feel. I stayed down to help the pearl-divers awhile to-night.”

“Pearl-divers?” echoed Rosalie.

“Yes. Dish-washers, Greenie. I’m a heaver like yourself; but we all have to turn in and help each other, once in a while. This is my third season. My first I waited on the sagebrushers.”

“Who are they?” asked Rosalie, overawed by so much sophistication.

“Campers; but I like the hotels best. The dudes are more my style.”

“What did you call me a few minutes ago? A lay-over?” asked Rosalie.

“Yes, those are the swells that stay more than one night. They’re the princes of the Yellowstone and they have to pay like princes, too. All their dishes washed separately, separate food, separate everything. I thought you must think you were one to have a room all to yourself.”

Miss Hickey here completed her hasty night-toilet and jumped into bed. “Come along, child. I’ll make myself small against the wall.”

“Indeed, I’m not a lay-over,” said Rosalie, now hastening to follow the other’s example. “I’m to be sent on with the crowd to-morrow.”

“So am I,” returned the other, with nasal sleepiness; “and I’m darned sorry, too. I like the swatties here better than at any post.”

“Swatties?” echoed Rosalie helplessly.

“Soldiers, Greenie,” drawled Miss Hickey. “You’ll see a lot more of ’em before you see less. Now I ain’t goin’ to say another word to-night.”

And Miss Hickey kept her word. Her sleep was as energetic as her waking; and Rosalie listened to her heavy breathing and stared wide-eyed into the darkness.

She had recognized the Bruce party at the evening meal. She had not been obliged to wait on them, and knew herself unobserved. But the discovery had excited her very much. Mrs. Bruce had been right when she said that Rosalie’s was the artistic temperament. The independence, caution, and reserve of the New Englander were not her characteristics. She longed for companionship and some one with whom to sympathize in the present predicament; for predicament she felt it to be. How extraordinary that this should be the summer chosen by the Bruces for their visit to the National Park.

She thought of the irreverent punctuation which made a well-known quotation read: “There is a divinity which shapes our ends rough, hew them as we may.”

She had believed Mrs. Bruce to be in Europe, and though that lady’s natural preoccupation there explained the ignoring of her protégée’s painstaking letters, it did not excuse it, or leave Rosalie the slightest hope that her benefactress continued to feel an interest in her. The fact was a hurt to the grateful girl, and the ever-present consciousness of it gave her a reason for desiring to leave Fairport, where the Bruces would return. This sensitiveness would not have induced her to leave Mrs. Pogram, had the latter’s brother not made her stay unendurable, but it was a secret reason for being glad to escape.

Perhaps Mrs. Bruce and her son would not remember her at all; but she could not expect to escape Betsy Foster's recognition. So she lay there awake; at one moment longing for Mrs. Pogram's kindly, invertebrate protection, and wishing that Mrs. Bruce had never opened to her another world; and again feeling the fire of ambition to repay that lady every cent she had ever spent upon her. Rosalie's color pressed high as she imagined Mrs. Bruce's amazed scorn that the talents in which she had at least for a time believed, had carried their possessor no higher as yet than to be a waitress – a heaver, according to Miss Hickey – in the Yellowstone.

The girl must at last have dozed; for she shortly experienced a vigorous shaking from her companion.

"Here, here, hustle!" exclaimed Miss Hickey, not unkindly. Rosalie opened her eyes with such bewilderment that her companion laughed.

"Come on, blue eyes. You look like a baby. Get into your duds. We're off for Norris Basin, worse luck."

The sight of Miss Hickey's readjusted pompadour gave Rosalie a realizing sense of the situation.

"Oh, Miss Hickey," she exclaimed, as she hurried to the washstand, "are many people lay-overs?"

"Oh, you've got them on the brain, have you?" asked the other, proceeding with her own toilet. "Not many, 'cause it costs too much."

"I saw some people here last night who have lots of money – oh, lots and lots! Shouldn't you think they'd stay?"

"H'm. I only *hope* they will," rejoined Miss Hickey, "as long as we're going. The crowds are fierce."

"I do hope they will!" Rosalie's echo was fervent. She almost summoned courage to tell her aggressive companion the situation; but one glance at the young woman's coiffure, which was now receiving the addition of a bunch of curls, arrested her.

Miss Hickey regarded her companion sharply.

"You ain't a heaver all the year," she remarked tentatively, "or else you wouldn't be afraid o' those rich folks. There's the tips, you know."

Rosalie was silent.

"Perhaps you was their waitress and ran off to see the world without giving notice."

"No, I wasn't that; but I – I know them, and –"

The speech drifted into silence.

"You know rich folks, do you? Lucky you."

"Not exactly. They – she –" stammered Rosalie, "they helped – educate me."

"Oh, you're educated, are you?" retorted Miss Hickey, giving her coiffure a satisfied lift. "Well, so am I. I'm a typewriter in Chicago, winters."

"Does – does it pay well?" asked Rosalie, with such serious wistfulness that Miss Hickey forgave her her rich acquaintances.

She grimaced. "Not so you'd notice it. I ain't goin' back this fall. You know the Yellowstone Company'll land you just as many miles from the Park as they brought you, and in any direction you say. Me for Los Angeles. I ain't afraid I can't make my living, and I'm sick o' bein' snowed on, winters, without any furs."

Rosalie looked enviously at the other's snapping black eyes.

"Wonder what savage we'll go over with," pursued Miss Hickey, stuffing her nightgown into a bag, and nonchalantly running her comb and toothbrush into her stocking.

"Over? Over?"

"Yes, over to Norris in the stage."

"Do you mean that *savages* drive them?" asked Rosalie, her eyes dilating.

Miss Hickey laughed. “Oh, you’re more fun than a barrel o’ monkeys,” she observed. “The drivers certainly are savages. You can ask anybody in the Park.”

Rosalie smiled faintly as she began twisting up her hair. “Oh, that’s some more Park English, is it?” she asked.

“I hope it’ll be Jasper,” said Miss Hickey, “but we won’t get to sit by him, anyway. The dudes all fight for the driver’s seat. I’m going down now. Hurry up, Baby, or you’ll catch it.”

Rosalie obeyed in a panic, and was soon ready to follow. She dreaded the ordeal of the breakfast-room, and prayed that she might be delivered from the Bruces’ table. Her heart came up in her throat when she saw them enter the door; but she was not obliged to wait upon them. As it happened, Miss Hickey had that station, and Rosalie devoted herself assiduously to a deaf gentleman who was traveling with his wife and a young woman at sight of whom Rosalie colored. “Oh, how small this big world is!” she thought; “but she won’t remember me. We seldom met!”

The ordeal of breakfast was at last over, and Rosalie with relief yielded herself to Miss Hickey’s orders, and presently the girls stood on the great piazza of the hotel, but on the edge of the crowd, watching the systematic filling of the stages which were starting on the tour around the Park.

“How shall we know when to go?” she asked of Miss Hickey, to whose side she clung in the confusion.

“Don’t you worry about that,” returned the other. “Have some gum?”

She offered several sticks of the same to Rosalie, who declined, wishing her veil were thicker as she glanced about, dreading to see the Bruce party, and longing to be safely away.

Miss Hickey slid a generous quantity of gum into her own mouth and then settled her hat more firmly on her pompadour by a rearrangement of largely gemmed hat-pins.

While she proceeded in an experienced manner to break up and chew the gum-sticks into a solacing sphere, her conversation continued, untrammelled by this effort.

“Don’t you hear the agent calling the names off?” she asked. “They can’t any of ’em say where they’ll go any more’n we can. They’re going to be took ’round the Park just like a kid out in its baby-wagon. They come when they’re called, you bet; and they don’t know where their bags are any more’n you do. When they get to the Fountain House their bags’ll meet ’em in the hotel; then to-morrow mornin’ they’ll disappear again to meet ’em at the next place. Oh, it’s a great system all right, if too many people didn’t come at once. They have awful times when there ain’t enough places for ’em to sleep, and six or seven get put in one room. These folks that are too exclusive to travel with a party are the ones that get left; for the conductors of these tours get to the hotels a little ahead o’ the other folks, and get all their people provided for; and it’s gallin’ to know you pay just as much as anybody and yet have to herd in with folks you never saw before – just the same as poor heavers like us.” And Miss Hickey gave her companion a nudge that nearly made her reel. “Weren’t you the mad kid last night?” she continued.

“I think you were the mad one,” rejoined Rosalie. “I was dazed. – O Miss Hickey!” She made the exclamation involuntarily; for the Bruce party came out of a door not far from where the girls were standing, and they were dressed for a move.

“Oh, they’re not lay-overs!” exclaimed Rosalie, retreating behind Miss Hickey’s broad shoulder.

“Who – them? Say, what’s the matter with you? Have you stole their diamonds?”

“Don’t you think they’re going in this next stage?” asked Rosalie nervously. “Do watch, Miss Hickey. You’re so tall you can see everything.” For the Bruces had moved to the other side of the piazza and were lost in the crowd.

“I waited on those folks at breakfast,” said Miss Hickey, craning her neck and chewing with such open vigor that she momentarily recalled a dog who endeavors to rid his back teeth of a caramel.

“I know you did,” replied Rosalie; “I saw.”

“Ain’t he grand!” exclaimed Miss Hickey. “I thought when I was pourin’ his coffee that he was just about the size I’d like to go through the Park with on a weddin’ trip. The way he said, ‘No sugar,

please!’ Oh, it was just grand. It made me forget every swattie at the post. There ain’t an officer here that can stand up to him, I don’t think.”

“Do see if they are getting into that stage!” asked Rosalie, still in retreat behind her companion’s ample shoulder.

“Nit,” responded Mr. Bruce’s admirer sententiously. “That swell woman with him went down the steps to get in, but his nibs there that’s loadin’ ’em told her to chase herself.”

The crowd was dispersing with celerity.

“There ain’t but two stages left,” went on Miss Hickey, with excitement. “If they don’t go in that next one, we’re all booked to go together. Say, wouldn’t that be grand?”

“No! No! No!” exclaimed Rosalie, emerging from her barrier and watching with dilated eyes.

The stage swept up to the steps. The tourists swarmed into it like bees. Again Mrs. Bruce essayed to enter, and Rosalie could see Irving draw her back, while Betsy Foster stood impassive at a little distance, observing the scene with inexpressive eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST STAGE

"I should like to know why they put us in the last stage!" demanded Mrs. Bruce, in an irate tone.

"Many advantages," returned Irving, with a twinkle of his eyes toward Betsy.

"There are not, Irving Bruce, and you ought to have done something about it! Haven't we always heard about the dust of the Yellowstone?"

"Yes, that's why they oil the roads now," returned Bruce pacifically, "and we don't have to hurry, by this means, you see. Take our own time. Don't have to hurry past anything to make room for the next stage."

"I never could endure *leavings!*" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, her eyes still snapping as the last stage came around the curve toward the steps.

Betsy attracted her attention.

"See those folks you said looked so aristocratic," she said quietly. "They're goin' with us."

Mrs. Bruce followed the direction of her maid's meaning glance and observed the deaf gentleman's party of three. Insensibly Mrs. Bruce's ireful expression relaxed. There was that in the tone of this party which could lend distinction even to the last stage.

Mrs. Bruce gazed at the trio appreciatively.

"I marvel," she murmured to Betsy, "that they haven't their own equipage."

Betsy sighed with relief and felt that the day was won.

Having observed the dignified, florid-faced man with the white mustache, the tall woman in half-mourning, and the quiet young girl who accompanied them, Mrs. Bruce spoke again distinctly:—

"If I should not be taking any one's place on the driver's seat, I should like to sit there very much."

"We shall take turns as to that, I fancy," replied Irving. He noticed the small rubber device hanging about the neck of the deaf gentleman and turned to the lady beside him.

"Will you sit up in front to start off?" he asked, lifting his hat. "Your husband enjoys more through the eyes than through the ears, I observe."

The lady, with whom smiles were evidently a rarity, met his eyes and essayed one. She thanked him, and turning to her companion pointed to the driver's place, as they moved down the steps.

The gentleman shook his head and motioned the lady into the middle seat of the stage, which she entered.

"But where is Robert?" she exclaimed in a sort of dignified panic. "Miss Maynard," turning to the companion who waited passively, "I thought you said you saw my son a moment ago."

"Yes, Mrs. Nixon, in the office," replied the girl.

"Henry! *Henry!*" pursued the lady, pushing against the deaf gentleman's shoulder both to attract his attention and to prevent his entering the stage. "Robert!" She mouthed the name distinctly and motioned toward the hotel. "*Robert!*"

"Damn Robert!" returned the other, under the usual impression of the deaf that his heartfelt expression was inaudible.

As a matter of fact no one observed it in the confusion. Mrs. Bruce was absorbed in mounting to the coveted place with the driver. Irving offered to put Betsy up beside her; but Miss Foster declined. "Get right up there, Mr. Irving. I'm going in here behind you."

Meanwhile the two waitresses had obeyed a summons, and Rosalie with her head down and praying to be invisible hastened with her companion to the steps. Her prayer was answered, because all the party were too preoccupied to note the two girls who came swiftly by and entered the back seat of the stage. Moreover, at the same moment out from the door of the hotel came a young fellow in

outing clothes and cap, who was greeted with well-bred rebuke by Mrs. Nixon, and a grunt of relief from the deaf gentleman, who put Miss Maynard into the seat and followed her.

“Well, I told you not to bring me, didn’t I?” responded Robert. His voice was loud and cheery, and had, in his more gleeful moments, a trick of breaking into a high register with a joyous inflection which endeared him to those who enjoyed his conversation. He was clean, gay, and young; but if he possessed any beauty it was of the mind; and among his acquaintance there was a wide difference of opinion on this point.

While his mother voiced her dignified rebuke, his quick eye glanced along the stage to take in its possibilities.

Rosalie was shrunk into the further corner of her seat, directly behind the Nixon party, and Miss Hickey, meeting his glance, chewed vigorously while lifting her head with an elegant air of impersonality.

In Robert’s own mental vernacular he “passed up the gum.”

The driver’s seat was full, the alternative was the one in front of his mother’s party, where Betsy Foster reigned alone. He stepped in beside her while he spoke to his mother.

“I told you not to bring me,” he declared again, cheerfully. “I told you I’d be more trouble than I was worth.”

“You actually detained the stage, dear. I was about to send your uncle Henry to find you.”

Quick as a flash the culprit snatched the device which aided the deaf gentleman’s hearing, and shrieked across it above the clatter of the stage.

“Don’t you ever do it, Uncle Henry. Rise up and declare your rights. What if I am lost?”

“That’s what I say,” responded the older man, equably. “Small loss. One of my rights is not to have my ear-drums cracked. They’re sufficiently nicked already.”

He took back the rubber disk with decision.

Irving had turned around during this interchange and looked down from his high perch.

“Hello, Nixie,” he said.

Robert leaned forward with alacrity, and took the down-stretched hand.

“*Et tu, Brute?*” he cried, his voice breaking joyously.

Betsy stole the first glance at her companion. His unfeigned gladness to see her idol was in his favor.

He turned to his mother: “Bruce of our class. Didn’t you recognize him? Best fullback the college ever saw.”

“I did think there was something familiar about that young man’s face,” responded Mrs. Nixon. “Most attractive; and such charming manners.” Her carefully modulated voice fell agreeably on Miss Foster’s ears. “He tried to give us the front seat; but the lady with him,” Mrs. Nixon raised her eyebrows, “was so very anxious to secure it, that I was glad your uncle refused.”

Mrs. Bruce turned and looked down to see Irving’s friend, and exclaimed at once, beaming with interest: —

“I remember you perfectly, Mr. Nixon. You were so funny on Class Day.” As Mrs. Bruce spoke, her eyes roved again to the young man’s party.

“I remember you at the games too, Mrs. Bruce,” replied the young fellow, rising, “and for the same reason. You were so funny! We’re a couple of family parties, it seems. My mother, and my uncle, Mr. Derwent, are here, and at the first stop we’ll all become acquainted.”

So saying, Robert dropped back into his seat, and turning with scarce a pause to his mother, said explanatorily, “Brute’s stepmother. An up-and-coming dame. You will have to meet her.”

Mrs. Nixon frowned at him significantly and nodded her head toward Betsy’s immovable back.

“All right,” said Robert airily, and glanced at the woman who shared his place. The walnut profile impressed itself upon him for the first time, and in connection with the Bruces he now remembered the woman to whom Irving had been so attentive on various college occasions. “I’ll be

jiggered,” thought the youth, “if it isn’t Brute’s nurse! Well, we are being chaperoned through the park, good and plenty.”

Then he amazed his mother by addressing his companion.

“Why, how d’ ye do? Why didn’t you speak to me?”

Betsy gave her odd one-sided smile as she looked back at his cheerfully grinning countenance.

“It’s all so long ago now, Mr. Nixon, I didn’t suppose you’d remember me. I didn’t know you at first.”

“I’m not at all surprised. I’ve grown old and decrepit in the last two years; but to show you my mind isn’t failing yet, I can tell you where I last saw you. It was in a gondola in Venice.”

Betsy smiled and nodded.

“I remember your calling across to Mr. Irving very well, Mr. Nixon.”

“Good. Your memory’s all right, too.”

Helen Maynard, sitting quiet and forgotten at Mrs. Nixon’s elbow, looked at Robert with some approval for the first time. He swung around in his seat so suddenly that he accidentally caught her glance. Miss Maynard had a symmetrical little nose and mouth, and he liked the way she did her hair; and wearing her present expression it occurred to him for the first time that the young woman, who was both his uncle’s stenographer and his mother’s companion, was rather fetching.

“Did you see the formation pretty thoroughly yesterday, Miss Maynard?” he asked briskly.

Her quickly averted eyes sought the splendid sweeps of Jupiter Terrace which the stage was now passing.

“Quite thoroughly,” she replied briefly.

“We went the regular round,” said Mrs. Nixon. “Your uncle was really bewitched with everything.”

Mr. Derwent, his hands crossed upon the head of the stick he carried, sat in the isolation of the deaf; his eyes fastened upon the delicate and wonderful coloring of the stationary cascades of deposit, over which the water was trickling; building – ever building greater beauty with its puny persistence.

He caught his nephew’s eye with a good-humored twinkle. “Great example of what industry will do,” he remarked.

“Fierce!” replied Robert, and made an energetic dive for the rubber disk, which his uncle foiled by a quick move. The youth fixed Mr. Derwent with his gaze, and moved his lips with care to be distinct.

“I’ve always refused,” he declared loudly, “to have the busy bee or the coral insect thrown at me; and I now add the Yellowstone water to the black list.”

“If words,” replied Mr. Derwent, “could build anything, you would rear temples of amazing height, Robert.”

“And rare beauty,” added the youth. “Don’t forget that, please.”

Miss Hickey changed her gum to the other side of her mouth. “Ain’t he fresh?” she murmured to her companion. “Did you see the look I gave him when he come up to the stage? I tell you I wasn’t goin’ to have him crowdin’ in here with us.”

“I waited on them at breakfast,” murmured Rosalie. “He’s just jolly all the time.”

Miss Hickey bridled. “Well, he wouldn’t jolly me more’n once. I know his kind: awful fresh;” and the gum gave a vault and turn which only the most experienced can accomplish.

“And they’re all friends!” murmured Rosalie apprehensively.

“Oh, brace up!” returned Miss Hickey impatiently. “If you haven’t stolen their spoons I don’t see what you’re so scared of; and you’re too much of a baby to have done that.”

“No, I never – never lived out anywhere,” breathed Rosalie.

“Well, if you think it’s such a disgrace to be a waitress in the Park, what did you come for?”

As Miss Hickey scented offense, her tone began to rise, and Rosalie grasped her arm pacifically. “No, no, it isn’t that! It isn’t in the least that!”

The girl's conscience squirmed a little as she made this reply, and she swallowed and went on. "It's a long story, too long to tell, and not interesting; but oh, Miss Hickey, do try to wait on the Bruces this noon, won't you, like a dear good girl!"

"Twon't be up to me; but I'd be mighty glad to do it, you bet! Did you hear that fresh chap call him Bruty? *Bruty!* That prince! Well, I've got a name for *him* all right. Did you ever study about them heathen gods? I did. I've got an awful good education if I do say it; and there was one of 'em so ugly if he walked by a clock it would stop. His name was – let's see; it was Calabash. Well, it just fits that feller to a T. If I looked like that, I'd go way back and sit down instead of fillin' the stage so't nobody can look at anybody but him."

"The girl with them seems to be a companion," whispered Rosalie. "I tried to get that sort of a place."

"Oh, shoot!" returned Miss Hickey, trying the endurance of the gum severely. "I could get that job easy, I know, on account of my education and knowin' my way round the way I do; but there ain't enough freedom to it. If we'd rather go to a Swattie ball now than to sleep, we have our choice; but a companion has got to be right on the job night and day."

Rosalie looked off at the distant mountains, and then back at the nape of Miss Maynard's pretty neck, and began to wonder if she was as lonely as herself. Apparently Mrs. Nixon addressed no one except her son, and Rosalie guessed that Miss Maynard, placed behind her employer's cold shoulder, was in reality as far removed from her as she herself felt with regard to her neighbor.

The beautiful, beautiful world! Rosalie sighed and leaned forward, the better to get the splendid sweep of vale and mountain, and suddenly caught the eyes of Robert Nixon, his arm thrown along the back of the seat as he turned to converse with his mother. Rosalie shrank back into her corner. Betsy Foster might turn around, too!

CHAPTER VII

THE NATIONAL PARK

Perched on the driver's seat, with Irving beside her, Mrs. Bruce was as near the zenith of contentment as falls to the lot of mortal.

The driver himself, philosopher as he was, discovered in the first three miles that it would not be necessary for him to volunteer any information, as everything he knew would be extracted from him, down to the last dregs of supposition.

"Three thousand feet of ascent in a mile, Irving! Think of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, as they neared the Hoodoo Rocks.

"I'd rather think of an ascent of one thousand feet in three miles," returned Irving. "It's less strain on the brain."

The driver gave him an appreciative glance across Mrs. Bruce's smart traveling hat.

"Oh, is that it?" she rejoined. "Perhaps I did get it a little twisted."

Here they came in full view of the desert of gaunt, pallid trees, amid the gigantic Hoodoo Rocks.

"Oh, what a dreadful scene!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce. "Such a dreary stretch of death and desolation! Driver, why do they allow such a thing in the Park?"

A hunted expression came into the driver's eyes. He had been gradually growing more and more mechanical in his replies. Now he maintained a stony silence.

"If I were here at night, alone," continued Mrs. Bruce, "I should go straight out of my mind! I'm so temperamental I could not – I really could *not* bear it;" and she shuddered.

"Then I positively forbid your coming here alone at night," declared Irving. "We must preserve your mind, Madama, at all costs."

"But it's a blot on the Park. It's more suggestive than the worst Doré picture. Boo!" Mrs. Bruce shuddered again, and looked fearfully at the dead forest, sparse and wild, rearing its barkless trunks amid the giant rocks of wild and threatening form. "The government ought to do something about it."

"You flatter Uncle Sam," said Irving. "I don't think any one else expects him to move mountains."

"Well, they might train vines over it," suggested Mrs. Bruce; and the driver burst into some sound which ended in a fit of coughing, while Irving laughed.

The sudden beauty of the scenery diverted Mrs. Bruce from her plans for reform. Her enthusiasm over the view led her to turn and look down to catch Betsy's eye.

"Are you seeing?" she cried.

Betsy nodded several times to express appreciation.

"It's just like life, isn't it?" went on Mrs. Bruce pensively to her son. "Full of startling contrasts. Do you know, Irving, I think Mr. Nixon is talking to Betsy?"

"No doubt he remembers her," returned Irving. "He has seen her as often as he has you."

"That's true; but it's nice of him, just the same."

Irving smiled. "Nixie's got to talk," he remarked.

"But you know," said Mrs. Bruce, "there *are* snobs in the world."

"So I've heard."

"I like Mr. Nixon, anyway," she went on argumentatively. "It isn't necessary for a man to be handsome."

Irving sighed. "What a blessed relief that you think so, Madama! Otherwise I'm sure you'd call upon the Creator, and make it a subject of prayer."

"Irving, you're making fun of me."

"You know, Madama, that I never did such a thing."

The stage drew to a standstill. Rosalie Vincent's eyes were starry as she looked in worshipful silence, and she momentarily forgot her situation.

Miss Hickey gazed and chewed.

"I've got to have me a new apron," she said. "A chump in the kitchen burned one o' mine yesterday."

The stage moved on and paused again in the picturesque pass that leads to the Golden Gate, while all eyes rested upon the Rustic Waterfall, whose tuneful grace as it leaps from ledge to ledge down the worn rock, speaks of life and beauty, striking after the desolation just passed.

Mrs. Bruce's suspended accusation was repeated as the horses started. "You do make fun of me, Irving," she said.

"No, no," he returned. "I simply recognize your spirit of knight-errantry. Glorious business." He smiled at her. "Journeying through the world and righting wrongs as you go."

"I really do think the vines would be a lovely idea," she declared; and the driver coughed again.

"See how the Hoodoos prepared you to revel in the present beauty," said Irving. "You just said that it wasn't necessary for all men to be handsome. Same thing applies to landscape, doesn't it?"

"But his mother is very handsome, I think," replied Mrs. Bruce, her butterfly habit of mind coming in play; "and that gentleman, – did he say –"

"Are you talking about Nixie? Oh yes, his mother is *grande dame*, and I've heard him speak of that uncle, Mr. Derwent, often. He's the capitalist of the family, I believe."

"The girl," went on Mrs. Bruce, "seems to be a companion. I noticed Mrs. Nixon didn't say much to her."

"Is that the sign of companionship?" asked Irving. "Something for you to fix, Madama."

"She's a very ladylike looking girl," replied Mrs. Bruce.

"Nixie'll talk to her all right if she has ears," remarked Irving.

"It's very nice of him to be nice to Betsy. Who else is in the stage?"

"I didn't notice."

"Driver," Mrs. Bruce turned to her bureau of information, "did you notice who is on the back seat of our stage?"

The driver's imperturbable lips parted. "They put two heavers in there, I believe," he replied.

"Who?" Mrs. Bruce spoke in italics.

"Waitresses from the hotel. They move them sometimes with the crowd."

Mrs. Bruce kept silence a moment to recover the shock. The presence of the Nixon party still proved the respectability of the last stage, however.

"Heavers! Is that your slang out here?" she asked at last, and laughed. "I hope that isn't descriptive of the way we're going to be waited on, Irving."

Rosalie's heart fluttered again on leaving the stage at Norris Basin; but the celerity with which the experienced Miss Hickey hurried her into the hotel to take up their duties aided her wish to be unnoticed. The verandas were alive with passengers already arrived, all ravenous from hours of coaching in the mountain air.

At last Rosalie, in her white gown and apron, stood in her appointed place, and the crowds began to be let into the dining-room. Miss Hickey was at some distance from Rosalie, and the latter felt a little hysterical rise in her throat in the knowledge that the snapping black eyes were watching for Irving Bruce.

The Nixon party came before the Bruces, and Mr. Derwent spied Rosalie and hastened his dignified footsteps toward her table.

"The waitress we had this morning," he said to Mrs. Nixon. "She has a head on her."

"Sounds alluringly like champagne," murmured Robert to Miss Maynard, who ignored him.

Rosalie involuntarily gave a shy smile as Mr. Derwent nodded at her. She could have embraced them all in her gladness to be delivered from waiting on the Bruces, who now entered, and, tragical

to relate, fell short of Miss Hickey's table. That damsel, however, being at once overwhelmed with orders from a famished group, had no time to mourn.

Mr. Derwent looked with pleasant eyes at Rosalie when he ordered his soup.

"You enjoyed the drive over," he said. "There are roses in your cheeks."

"Yes, sir. Consommé?" returned Rosalie faintly, the blush roses referred to deepening to Jacqueminot.

Robert glanced up and saw that this was the fair girl who had kept so still behind her veil on the back seat all the morning.

"I take my hat off to Uncle Henry," he said, again addressing Helen Maynard, who was seated beside him. "He can see more out of the back of his head than I can with my eyes."

"I will order for us both," said Mrs. Nixon to Rosalie; and forthwith proceeded to do so with an air which forbade levity.

When Rosalie had received her orders and hastened from the room, Robert again unburdened himself.

"If I could get at that rubber ear of Uncle Henry's," he remarked to his demure neighbor, "I'd tell him he was a sad dog. A very good thing he brought me on this trip."

"Mr. Derwent's eyes mean more to him than ours do to us, naturally," returned Helen.

"And I tell you," returned Robert devoutly, "anybody endears himself to Uncle Henry who brings his coffee just right. That blonde must have done it this morning. How," turning to his mother, "does my mother enjoy democratic traveling? This girl is a peach; but you should see the other one that was with her this morning in the coach. Did you?"

"No," returned Mrs. Nixon coldly. "Why should I trouble myself about my neighbors? I came to see the scenery."

"Well," Robert shrugged his shoulders, "all is, you've missed a chance to see how a perfect lady should behave. Her gum-manners were a dream; but cheer up! You'll have a chance this afternoon, doubtless."

Here Rosalie brought the soup. Helen Maynard looked up at her and received a strange impression of familiarity.

"She looks like some one," she said softly. "Who is it?"

"I know," responded Robert promptly, "Hebe."

"I haven't met her yet," returned Helen. "I'm climbing the mount of Olympus by slow and easy stages."

"Now if you mean anything about *me*," returned Robert briskly, "speak right out. I can't cope with clever people. If you're clever, I'm done for."

"Oh!" ejaculated Helen softly. "Lambeth!"

"Is that any relative to shibboleth?" effervesced Robert. "Because I can say it. See? Better let me in."

"Lambeth is a school," returned Helen, and stole another look at their busy waitress; "a school where I went."

Irving Bruce had Betsy on his right hand, but Mrs. Bruce absorbed him; and Betsy sat looking before her, idly waiting for her meal. Her roving glance fell suddenly on Rosalie's blond head as the girl was leaving the dining-room.

"Why, that looked like Rosalie Vincent," she reflected; then thought no more of it until later, when, her eyes again roving to that table, she obtained a full view of the fair-haired waitress as the girl refilled Mr. Derwent's glass.

Betsy held her knife and fork poised, while her steady-going heart contracted for a second. "That is Rosalie Vincent!" She held the exclamation well inside, and looked at her neighbors. They had evidently noticed nothing, and Betsy devoutly hoped they would not. It was doubtful whether Mrs. Bruce would recognize her protégée in any case; but instinctively Betsy desired to prevent

her from doing so; and contrary to her habit of speaking only when she was spoken to, she began commenting on the scenery; and Mrs. Bruce was impressed with the unusual docility and willingness to be enlightened displayed by her stiff-necked maid, whose thoughts were busy during the whole of her mistress's patronizing information.

"And some time, Betsy," finished Mrs. Bruce, "I will show you some pictures by a great artist named Doré, illustrating the Inferno, and you will be reminded of the Hoodoo Rocks."

Betsy listened and replied so respectfully that her mistress remarked on it afterwards to Irving.

"All this travel is developing that hard, narrow New England mind of Betsy's," she said. "You can see it."

And all the time Miss Foster was in a mild Inferno of her own, for her heart had always warmed to Rosalie Vincent, who used frequently to make her the confidante of her small hopes and fears, and whose sunny, confiding nature had endeared her to Betsy, and often aroused an unspoken sympathy in the sordid conditions of the girl's lot.

Betsy's one ambition now was to get the Bruces out of the dining-room before Mrs. Bruce should discover where the wings she had bestowed upon Rosalie had fluttered.

"I won't try to see the child," thought Betsy, "but I'll write to her as soon as we get away from here." She cast a furtive glance at the young girl. "She looks like one o' these pretty actresses," she thought, "rigged up to wait on table on the stage."

She saw that Rosalie was keeping an eye on the Bruce party, and nervous in the fear of recognition; and this added to her relief when, Mrs. Bruce's appetite satisfied, she begged Irving to hurry so that they might view the smoking wonders without.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLONDE HEAVER

“Isn’t it remarkable,” asked Mrs. Bruce, “that we were just talking about the Inferno?”

She, with her companions, had come down from the hotel into the hissing, steaming tract of the Norris Basin.

Deep rumblings were in their ears. Narrow plank-walks formed a footing amid innumerable tiny boiling springs, while the threatening roar of larger ebullitions and the heavy sulphurous odors of the air gave every indication that here indeed was the gateway to that region where our forefathers believed that the unlucky majority paid the uttermost farthing.

The Nixons had also elected to walk through the Basin, meeting the stage at a point farther on.

“Say, Brute,” called Robert, “doesn’t this beat New Year’s for the time, the place, and the good resolution?”

Mrs. Nixon’s nostrils dilated in disgust at the evil smells.

Irving caught a glimpse of her expression.

“Mrs. Nixon is making up her mind never again to do anything wrong,” he remarked.

“I always said my Hades would be noise,” she replied, “but I begin to think it will be odors.”

“I always said *mine* would be dirt,” declared Mrs. Bruce, “but I believe I’d prefer that to being boiled. Irving, don’t you let go of me. This is the wickedest place I ever saw. Those little sizzling springs are just hissing to catch my feet.”

The party stopped to watch the heavy plop-plop of a mud geyser.

“Now,” said Robert, “while we’re all thinking on our sins and properly humble, is the time to get acquainted. Mrs. Bruce, this is my mother, and my uncle Mr. Derwent, and Miss Maynard; and Mr. Bruce you all know by reputation.”

Betsy had moved to a remote corner of the geyser.

“I never know just how to address that member of your party,” said Robert to Irving.

The latter smiled. “She would tell you she was just Betsy. She’s such a good soul that down East, in the village where she comes from, they call her Clever Betsy; and she’s all that New England means by the adjective, and all that Old England means, too.”

Meanwhile Rosalie Vincent was making her hasty preparations for another move, and to her came Miss Hickey in a state of high satisfaction.

“I’m staying, Baby,” she cried, her eyes snapping. “I guess there must be a lot of lay-overs. Anyway they need me, and there’s a Swattie ball to-night. Hurray!” Miss Hickey executed a triumphant two-step and knocked over a chair.

Rosalie seized her arm. “Can’t I stay too, then?” she asked anxiously.

“No, you can’t, Blue-eyes. You’re to go.”

“Oh, you go and let me stay!” begged Rosalie nervously.

“And lose the ball?” exclaimed Miss Hickey. “Well, believe *me*, you’ve got nerve!”

Rosalie looked as if she were going to cry, and Miss Hickey’s good-nature prompted a bit of comfort.

“Besides, if you’re afraid of the lock-up, this is your chance to side-step those folks. More’n as like as not they’re among the lay-overs.”

At this consideration Rosalie did brighten, and when the last stage came around, Miss Hickey was present to speed the parting heaver whose apprehensive glance about her saw no familiar figure.

“Oh, they *are* staying, Miss Hickey!” she exclaimed, in hushed tones.

The sophisticated Miss Hickey did not respond, but nodded affably to the driver.

Rosalie breathed a relieved farewell as she left the big-boned bulwark of her friend and obeyed the agent's signal to enter the back seat of the stage. The vehicle was empty but for a stout man with a field glass strapped across his shoulders who mounted to the seat beside the driver, and they started.

The whole stage to herself! Rosalie could scarcely believe it.

She listened to the strange noises in the air and watched the steam which, mounting high, would make one believe that the locality was alive with factories. The girl's curious gaze roamed about, and she thought wistfully of such travelers as might visit at their leisure the wonders about her.

There were great beauties, however, even for a heaver to enjoy. The morning's ride had been a keen pleasure in the intervals of her embarrassment. The profusion of wild flowers; monk's-hood, hare-bells, and Indian paintbrush, had fed her eyes with their splashes of color; and the behavior of the wild animals made one think of the millennium. Sure of protection from being hunted and slain, the chipmunks sat up on their hind legs close to the road, to watch the stage go by, clasping their tiny hands beneath their chins, like children in ecstasy at seeing a pretty show. Frequently one would be seen sitting up and nibbling the seeds from a long stem of grass, which he held in such a manner that he appeared to be playing a flute. A big marmot here and there lay along a bough or rock, turning his head lazily to view the tourists through his Eden. Boiling springs and boiling rivers, hill, vale, mountain, and waterfall – all these had Rosalie enjoyed, even with the fear that the Bruces would turn around; and now! Think of making one stage of the picturesque journey with no companion but her own thoughts! It seemed too good to be true; and she soon found that indeed it was so.

The driver drew his horses to a walk, and Rosalie perceived that many of the other stages were in sight, some of them stopping, and that tourists were entering them from the roadside.

Soon it became the turn of the last stage, and Rosalie's heart bounded to recognize all the companions of the morning.

She saw Mrs. Bruce gaze sharply at the stout man in her seat by the driver.

"Won't your mother go up there, Nixie?" asked Irving.

Mrs. Nixon refusing, her son put Miss Maynard up, the young woman climbing to the place with alacrity.

Rosalie turned her head to gaze fixedly at the other side of the road. She grew warm as she felt some one climb into the seat beside her, but did not turn her head back, even when the coach started.

Finding herself not addressed, presently she turned about and looked squarely into the eyes of Betsy Foster.

"How do you do, Rosalie?" said the latter composedly.

"O Betsy!" exclaimed the girl softly, and seized the older woman's hand with an appealing grasp.

Betsy gave her one-sided smile, and Rosalie's eyes filled.

"You don't seem surprised!" she said unsteadily.

"I am, though," returned Betsy. "I supposed we'd left you behind at Norris."

"You saw me there! Did the – did Mrs. Bruce?"

Betsy shook her head. "No; and she hasn't yet; but I was thinkin' about you as we came up to the stage, and when all of a sudden I saw you, I thought I'd get in here."

The Nixon party were directly in front of them, and the Bruces in the next seat, and all were conversing busily among themselves.

"I'm so glad to see you, Betsy, that I can hardly bear it;" and a bright tear rolled swiftly down Rosalie's cheek, as she leaned back in her corner to regain her self-control.

"I've thought about you considerable," returned Betsy, "and I haven't been any too easy."

"I told Mrs. Pogram, I promised her, that if I were in any trouble I would write. How kind of you!" with a sudden burst of gratitude and a continued clinging to Betsy's slender fingers. "How kind of you to care!"

"Of course I cared, child," returned the other.

"And you saw me being a waitress!"

“Yes. First-rate idea for college boys,” answered Betsy quietly. “It’s quite the fashion for a lot of ’em to help themselves through school that way. I don’t know about it exactly for girls in a strange land, – little country girls that don’t know anything about the world; I don’t know whether I like it or not.”

“It’s a good way to see the world,” said Rosalie, without enthusiasm.

“Yes; and ain’t it a beautiful one out here? Is that what you did it for, Rosalie?”

“Partly – not exactly. I was getting away from Loomis.”

Betsy nodded. “I heard he pestered you.”

Rosalie looked off reminiscently. “I didn’t tell Auntie Pogram, because I didn’t want to hurt her feelings; but the reason Loomis began being so unkind to me was because I wouldn’t marry him.”

“I suspected as much,” said Betsy.

“So long as he was Auntie Pogram’s brother I knew there was no hope of escaping him if I stayed there, and so – I ran away. It was selfish. My conscience has never felt easy; but I couldn’t endure his insults.”

“I suppose not,” returned Betsy. Her tone was quiet, but there were sparks in her usually inexpressive eyes, and had Loomis Brown suddenly appeared it might have gone ill with his rapidly thinning hair.

“What did you do? How did you manage to get so far from home?” continued Betsy.

“I first went to a boarding-house that I knew of in Portland, and there I met a lady who had been taken ill and wanted to go back to her home in Chicago; but she had a little child and didn’t feel able to travel with him alone; so she agreed to pay my fare to Chicago if I would help her home. I didn’t know how I would ever get back, but it was getting away from Loomis, so I went. On the train I met a woman who spoke of a place in Chicago where they took girls to wait on table in the Yellowstone; so as soon as I could, I applied, and they took me and sent me out here.”

“And do you like it?” asked Betsy, eyeing the mignonette face closely.

“No, of course I don’t like it, exactly, and I’ve been frightened ever since I saw you all at the Mammoth Hot Springs, for I was sure Mrs. Bruce would be disgusted with me. She expected me to make some use of her kindness.”

“Don’t worry,” returned Betsy dryly. “She’s short-sighted, and ten to one she won’t see you; and if she does, she probably won’t remember you.”

“I may yet, you know,” said Rosalie eagerly, “I may yet reward her kindness; but I had no money, so I couldn’t stop to see about any school position; and besides, Loomis lives in Portland.”

“Oh, don’t bother about him,” said Betsy carelessly. “One donkey more or less that you meet in the street isn’t goin’ to affect you. He’ll be busy wavin’ his long ears at Mrs. Pogram’s new help; for she’ll have to get somebody. I went to see her just before we left, and heard the whole story.”

Rosalie laughed softly, and her eyes filled again. “O Betsy, it’s so long since I laughed!” she said; and her tone was so earnest and sad that Betsy averted her head and saw the scenery through a blur. “I was in the stage all this morning. It’s a wonder you didn’t feel how longingly I looked at the back of your head.”

“You were?” asked Betsy, surprised. “Are you goin’ with us all the way?”

“I don’t know. I may be left anywhere. I thought I had left you this time and hoped so, Betsy, because I was afraid of Mrs. Bruce; but oh, how glad I am now! for it’s such a comfort to see you, since you’re not angry with me.”

“Not a bit,” replied Miss Foster, going to the length of patting the hand that held hers. “I would be, though, if you’d gone off and didn’t write me or let me know where you were; but you didn’t know that we were home.”

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