WHITSON JOHN HARVEY

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Содержание

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BOOK ONE—THE PREPARATION

CHAPTER I
THE DREAMER AND THE DREAM

Before swinging out of the saddle in front of the little school house which was serving as a church, Curtis Clayton, physician and philosopher, looked over the valley which held the story of a romantic hope and where he was to bury his own shattered dream. The rain of the morning had cleared away the bluish ground haze, the very air had been washed clean, and the land lay revealed in long levels and undulating ridges. Behind towered the mountain, washed clean, too, its flat top etched against the sky and every crag and peak standing out sharp and hard as a cameo.

Clayton's broncho pawed restlessly on the edge of a grass-grown cellar. All about the tiny cluster of unoccupied houses were other grass-grown cellars, and the foundation lines of vanished buildings, marking the site of the abandoned town. Beside the school house, from which came now the sound of

singing, horses were tied to a long hitching rack. A few farm wagons stood near, the unaccustomed mud drying on their wheels.

Clayton dismounted and began to tie his horse. His left arm, stiff and bent at the elbow, swung awkwardly and gave such scant aid that he tightened the knot of the hitching strap by pulling it with his teeth. He was dressed smartly, in dust-proof gray, and wore polished riding boots. His unlined face showed depression and weariness. In spite of this it was a handsome face, lighted by clear dark eyes. The brow, massive and prominent, was the brow of a thinker. Over it, beneath the riding cap, was a tangle of dark hair, now damp and heavy. When he spoke to his horse his tones were suggestive of innate kindness. There were no spurs on the heels of his riding boots, and he patted the horse affectionately before turning to the door of the church.

The interior was furnished as a school house. Cramped into the seats, with feet drawn up and arms on the tops of the desks, sat the few people who composed the congregation, young farmers and their wives and small children, with wind-burned, honest faces. Apart from the others was a boy, whose slight form fitted easily into the narrow space he occupied. He sat well forward and looked steadily at the preacher, turning about, however, as all did, when Clayton came in at the door.

Clayton's entrance and the turning about of the people to look broke the rhythmic swing of the hymn, but the preacher, standing behind the teacher's desk which served as pulpit, lifted his voice,

beating the time energetically with the book he held, and the hymn was caught up again with vigor. He smiled upon Clayton, as the latter squeezed into a rear seat, as if to assure him that he was welcome and had disturbed no one.

The preacher took his text from the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.... Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not.'"

Clayton was not greatly interested in the Scripture read, in the preacher, nor in the people. He had entered to get away from his own thoughts more than anything else. But, weary of thinking, he tried now to let the preacher lead him out of himself.

His attention was caught and held by the application of the text. The preacher was using it not as a spiritual metaphor, but as a promise to be fulfilled literally and materially in the near future and in that place. Looking through the open windows at the level grasslands damp with the recent rain, he saw the good omen. The desert was there now, but men should till it and it should blossom as the rose; yellow grain fields should billow before the breezes that came down from the mountain; the blue bloom of alfalfa should make of the valley a violet cup spilling its rich perfume on the air and offering its treasure of honey for the ravishing of the bee; rice corn, Kaffir corn, and sorghum should stand rank

on rank, plumed, tufted, and burnished by the sunlight. Paradise —Clayton heard the name of the valley and the town for the first time—should become as the Garden of God.

Clayton saw that the man was a dreamer, putting into form the cherished hopes of the people in the narrow seats before him. A land boom had cast high its tide of humanity, then had receded, leaving these few caught as the drift on the shore. The preacher was one of them; and he looked into their eyes with loving devotion and flushing face, as he contrasted the treeless valley of the present with the Paradise of his desire. He was a dreamer who believed his dream and was trying to make his hearers believe it.

At first Clayton had observed the outer man standing behind that teacher's desk; he had noted the shabby, shiny suit of black, scrupulously clean, the coat much too long and every way too large, the white neatly-set cravat, and the protruding cuffs, which he was sure were scissors-trimmed. Now he looked only at the man's face, with its soft brown beard which the wind stirred at intervals, at the straight goodly nose, at the deep-set dreamy eyes, and through the eyes into the mind of the dreamer.

"The temperament of a seer, of a Druid priest, of a prophet of old!" was his thought. "He prophesies the impossible; yet by and by some one may appear who will be able to show that the impossible has had fulfillment. It has happened before."

Willing to forget himself further and know more of this man who, it could be seen, longed for a mental companionship which

the members of his congregation could not give him, Clayton remained after the services, accepting a pressing invitation to tarry awhile.

"We do not often have visitors here now," said the preacher, pathetically.

So through the hot afternoon they sat together in the preacher's little home, the one occupied house in the town, while he dilated on his dream; and as the day grew cool, they walked together by the banks of the tepid stream and looked at the deserted houses and the blaze of the sun behind the flat-topped mountain. The boy who had sat so far forward and given such apparent attention to the sermon walked out with them. Absorbed in studying the personality of the preacher, Clayton gave the silent boy little attention.

As the sun slipped down behind the mountain, throwing pleasant shadows across the valley, Clayton took his horse from the preacher's stable and set out for a ride. And as he went the preacher stood in his doorway, smiling and dreaming his dream.

From his boyhood, Peter Wingate had been a dreamer. In his college days the zeal of the missionary was infused into his veins, and the Far West, which he pictured as a rough land filled with rough and Godless men, drew him. He had found it poorer than the East, more direct and simple, more serious and sincere, but not Godless. And he had come to love it. It was a hopeful, toiling land, rough perhaps, but as yet unspoiled.

Then a day came which brought a new interest into his life.

A youth climbed down from a white-topped prairie schooner with a bundle in his arms and entered the preacher's house. The bundle held a baby, whose mother had died in the white-topped wagon. As the youth, who was almost a man in stature, but still a boy in years, told the story of the child, and placed in Wingate's hands its few belongings, he spoke of Paradise. At first the spiritual-minded minister thought he referred to spiritual things, then understood that he was speaking of a new town, situated in a wonderful valley that widened down from the mountains. Thenceforth, though the child had not come from this new town, this new town and its promise became linked in the minister's mind with the child; and by and by he journeyed to it, when the boy was well-grown and sturdy and the town had been caught up suddenly in the whirl of a wild boom.

He began to preach in the new school house, and organized a new church; and soon the fiery earnestness and optimism of the boom was infused into his heart, supplementing the zeal of the missionary. He no longer saw Paradise as it was, but as he wished it to be. The very name allured him. He had long preached of a spiritual Paradise; here was the germ of an earthly one. From rim to rim, from mountain to mesa, it was, to his eyes, a favored valley, fitted for happy homes. The town vanished, and the settlers departed, but the dream remained. The dreamer still saw the possibilities and the beauties—the fruitful soil, the sun-kissed grassy slopes, the alluring blue mountains. And the dream was associated with the child; the dreamer, the dream, and the

child, were as one, for had not the child brought to the dreamer his first knowledge of this smiling land?

So Wingate remained after the boom bubble broke, encouraging the few sturdy farmers who clung with fondness to the valley. Even when one by one the houses, all but those belonging to the town company, were torn down and borne away, the dream was not shattered. The dreamer became the agent of the company, charged with the care of the remaining houses until the dream should reach again toward fulfillment.

While he waited, the dreamer pictured the joy and devotion with which he would minister to the spiritual needs of the new people, who would love him he knew even as he should love them. And thus waiting, he moved the rounds of his simple life, in the midst of the few, who rewarded his love and zeal with ever-renewed devotion. Even those who cared nothing for religion cared for the religious teacher, and came regularly to hear him preach.

They could not give much to his support; they had not much themselves, but he needed so very little. He had his small stipend from the missionary organization of his denomination, the garden he tended on the low land by the stream yielded well in the favorable seasons, and the missionary barrel filled with clothing which some worthy ladies had sent him from the East two years before had held such a goodly store of cast-off garments that neither he nor the child, a stout boy now, had required anything in that line since. The shiny, long-tailed coat

which he kept so scrupulously clean and which was a world too large for him, and the tight-fitting, ink-spattered sailor suit which the boy wore, had come from the depths of that barrel, which seemed as miraculous in its way as the widow's cruse of oil.

And now, when he had seen no stranger in Paradise for months, and no new face except when he journeyed once a week to preach in the little railroad town at the base of the mountain, there had come this pleasant-voiced man, who spoke well of the prophetic sermon and seemed able to appreciate the promise and future of the land.

When Curtis Clayton returned from his ride night had fallen. The Milky Way had stretched its shining trail across the prairies of the sky, and the Dipper was pouring the clouds out of its great bowl and shaking them from its handle.

Clayton sat looking at the night sky, and as he sat thus the boy came out to put away his horse. Within the house, Wingate, busy with coffee pot and frying pan, directed him to the room he was to occupy, and announced that supper would be ready soon.

At the end of fifteen minutes the boy tapped on Clayton's door. The latch had not caught, and the door flew open. The boy stood in hesitation, looking into the little room, wondering if he had offended. What he beheld puzzled him. Clayton had been burning letters in the tiny stove; and beside the lamp on the little table, with scorched edges still smoking, stood the photograph of a beautiful woman. Clayton had evidently committed it to the flames, and then relenting had drawn it back. Turning quickly

now, when he heard the door moving on its hinges, he caught up the photograph and thrust it hastily into an inner pocket of his coat, but not before the boy had been given a clear view of the pictured face.

Wingate talked of his dream, when grace had been said and the supper was being eaten. The boy thought of the burned letters and of the scorched photograph showing that alluringly beautiful face, and wondered blindly. He saw that the stranger was not listening to the talk of the minister; and observed, too, what the dreamer did not, that the stranger ate very little, and without apparent relish. Though he could not define it, and did not at all understand it, something in the man's face and manner moved him to sympathy.

For that reason, when, after supper, the minister had talked to the end of his dream and was about to begin all over again, the boy slipped away, and returning put a small book into the stranger's hands. Clayton stared at it, then looked up, and for the first time saw the boy. He had already seen a face and form and a sailor suit, but not the boy. Now he looked into the clear open blue eyes, set in an attractive, wind-tanned face. His features lost their grim sadness and he smiled.

"Your son?" he said, speaking to Wingate.

The dreamer showed surprise. He had already spoken to this man of the boy.

"My adopted son, but a real son to me in all but the ties of blood."

The boy drew open the little Bible he had placed in Clayton's hands. Some writing showed on the fly-leaf. The boy's fore-finger fell on the writing.

"My very own mother wrote those words, and my name there —Justin," he announced, reverently.

Clayton looked at the writing, and then again at the boy. The record on the fly-leaf was but a simple memorandum, in faded ink:

"Justin, my baby boy, is now six months old. May God bless and preserve him and may he become a good man."

A date showed, in addition to this, but that was all; not even the mother's name was signed.

"This was in it, too; it is my hair."

The boy pulled the book open at another place and extracted a brown wisp.

"We think it is his hair," said Wingate. "It was found beside the writing on the fly-leaf."

Then while the boy crowded close against Clayton's knees, and Clayton sat holding the open Bible in his hands, Wingate told the story of this child, who now bore the name of Justin Wingate.

"The young fellow who brought him to me said there were some papers, which he had left behind, having forgotten them when he set out, and that he would fetch them later. But he never came again,—he was only a boy, and boys forget—and I even failed to get his name, being somewhat excited at the time, because of the strange charge given to me, a bachelor minister."

Clayton read the words over slowly, and looked intently at the boy.

"It is a good name," he said at length.

The boy took the book and placed the wisp of hair carefully between the pages as he closed it. He was still standing close against the knees of this man, as if he desired to help or comfort him, or longed for a little of the real father love he had never known. But Clayton, after that simple statement, dropped into silence. This absence of speech was not observed by Wingate, who had found in the story of the boy an opportunity to take up again the narrative of his introduction to Paradise and his life there since. Yet the boy noticed. His face flushed slowly; and when Clayton still remained mute and unresponsive, he slipped away, with a choke in his throat.

Shortly afterward he said good night to the visitor, kissed the dreamer on his bearded cheek, and with the Bible still in his hands crept away to bed. Wingate sat up until a late hour, talking of his dream, receiving now and then a monosyllabic assent to some prophetic statement. Having started at last to his room Clayton hesitated on the threshold and turned back.

"As you are the agent of the town company you could let one of those houses, I suppose?" was his unexpected inquiry.

The face of the dreamer flushed with pleasure.

"Most assuredly."

"Then you may consider one of them rented—to me; it doesn't matter which one. I think I should like to stop here awhile."

It was one o'clock and the Sabbath was past. Wingate, his dream more vivid than it had been for months, sat down at his little writing desk, and in a fever of renewed hope began to pen a letter to the town company, announcing the letting of a house and prophesying an early revival of the boom.

CHAPTER II
WINGATE JOURNEYS ON

Justin Wingate tip-toed softly to and fro in front of the improvised book shelves and looked at the formidable array of books which, together with some furniture, had arrived for Clayton, and had been brought out from the town. The books were of a different character entirely from those which composed the minister's scanty collection. Justin read the names slowly, without comprehension—"Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy," "Darwin's Origin of Species," "Tyndall's Forms of Water," and hard-worded titles affixed to volumes of the German metaphysicians. There were medical books too, a great many it seemed to the boy, in leather bindings, with gilt titles set in black squares on the backs.

Clayton came in while Justin was tip-toeing before the book shelves. His appearance and manner had changed for the better. He looked at the boy with kindly interest, and was almost cheerful.

"Do you think you would like to become an educated man, Justin?"

The boy's eyes shone.

"I don't know. Would I have to read all of those?"

A smile twitched the corners of Clayton's dark eyes.

"Not all of them at once, and perhaps some of them never. At

any rate we wouldn't try to begin so high up as that."

He sat down and began to question the boy concerning his acquirements, and found they were not inconsiderable, for the lonely minister had tried to be faithful to his trust. Except in one line, the Scriptural, the faculty of the imagination had alone been neglected; and that seemed strange, for Peter Wingate was so quiveringly imaginative that he lived perpetually in a dream world which he believed to be real. Justin had never heard of the Greek gods and demi-gods; the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, the Arabian Nights, were unknown names to him; he had never visited Liliput and the land of the giants with Gulliver, nor even gone sailing romantic seas and living in blissful and lonely exile with Robinson Crusoe and Friday. Yet he knew all the wonderful and attractive stories of the Bible. The friendship of David and Jonathan was as real to him as the love that existed between himself and the minister. He knew the height of Goliath, and had even measured on the ground, with the minister's help, the length of that giant's spear. He had seen the baby Moses drawn from his cradled nest in the bulrushes; had witnessed the breaking pitchers and the flashing lights of Gideon's band; and had watched in awed wonder when, at the command of Joshua, the sun had stopped over Gideon and the moon had hung suspended above the valley of Ajalon.

Clayton's dark eyes looked into the blue eyes of the boy as they talked, and the choking ache which had been in his heart when he came to that lonely home in that lonely valley all but ceased.

"You haven't missed so very much after all, Justin. I guess there aren't any better stories than those you know anywhere in the world. But you know them so well now that we will begin on something else."

Stepping to a box he drew out a book. When he came back with it Justin recognized the title, "Robinson Crusoe," for he had once heard the minister mention it in a sermon.

"Is it a story?" he asked, eagerly.

"One of the best stories ever written, I think. It has made boys run away to sea, I've been told, but I don't believe you will be harmed by it in that way. Seven-league boots would be needed to run away to sea from here. So we'll risk reading it."

He sat down and began to read; and the boy, standing close against his knees as on that first night, felt a strange warmth steal through him. He wanted to put his arms around the neck of this man; and when at length Clayton in shifting his position dropped a hand softly on the boy's shoulder and let it rest there as he read on, the inner warmth so increased in the heart of the boy that he could hardly follow the story, fascinating as it was.

What may be called Justin's course of instruction under Clayton began that day, after Clayton had talked with Wingate and asked the privilege of ordering certain books for Justin. The mail of a few days later brought "Treasure Island."

"A wild book and a bloody one," said Clayton, as he took it from its wrapping, while Justin looked on expectantly, "but a little wildness will be a good thing in this stagnation, and the

blood in such a book doesn't hurt a boy who isn't bloody-minded. I think there must have been pirates who went about bludgeoning folks in the days of the cave-dwellers, and certainly books about pirates couldn't have made those fellows what they were."

It was a delight to instruct such a natural, inquisitive, imaginative boy as Justin. And the lessons were not confined to books. Clayton had a little glass which he slipped in and out of his pocket at intervals as he walked about with the boy. Looking through that glass the greenish stuff that appeared on the stones by the margin of the tepid stream was revealed as a beautiful green moss, the tufted head of a dusty weed was seen to be set with white lilies, and tiny specks became strange crawling and creeping things. Suddenly Justin had found that the very air, the earth, even the water in the tepid pools of the stream, swarmed with life, and it was an astonishing revelation. And everywhere was order, and beauty of form and coloring; for even a common rock, broken and viewed through that glass, showed beautiful diamond-like crystals.

One day Clayton plucked the leaf of a weed and holding it beneath the glass let Justin look at it.

"It's covered all over with fuzzy hairs!"

Clayton plucked another of a different kind.

"Isn't it funny? You can't see them, only through the glass, but the edges are spiked, just as if there were little thorns set all along it!"

Clayton sat down, toying with the weeds and the glass.

"What do you suppose those spikes and hairs are for?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps no one really knows, but men may have theories. See that little moth moving now across the weed blade. He is on the under side, and the hairs help him to hold on. When he reaches the edge and wishes to climb over, the hairs and the spikes help him to do that. That shows, to me at least, that nature provides as completely for a moth as for a man, and that God cares as much for the one as for the other; only man, having a very high opinion of himself, doesn't think so. Aha! Mr. Moth's wings are wet and he is having some trouble; we'll see if we can help him."

He stretched out his hand to turn the grass blade over, and in doing so crushed the moth; it was his half useless left hand, heavy and clumsy. His face flushed as he looked at his crooked arm, and then at the moth, its mail of silver dust smeared over the green, sword-like blade.

"Poor little thing," he said.

He put away the glass and rose, and there was no further lesson that morning.

Sometimes Justin rode forth with him on a visit to the home of a settler. All knew him soon, and were glad of his coming. That he appeared to have established himself permanently in one of the abandoned houses of the town gave them selfish pleasure, for it was good to have a doctor near.

Often Clayton rode forth alone, spending whole days off in the hills, or on the level lands stretching away from their base.

He found Justin always watching for him when he returned, and he never failed to bring home something of interest in the shape of a crystal, a flower, a lichen, or mayhap an abandoned bird's nest, which furnished either a lesson or food for conversation.

Always on his return from any trip, far or near, Wingate questioned him with anxious yearning. Were the farmers still hopeful, what crops looked most promising, did the deceptive clouds about the mountain promise rain, had he seen any land-hunters or white-topped schooners on the trail? And when Clayton had answered, the dreamer talked of his dream. He was sure of its fulfillment some day.

"A baseless dream," thought Clayton; "but all dreams are baseless, gaudy, unsubstantial things, wrought by hope and fancy out of foundationless air, and to shatter his dream would be to shatter his heart."

As he returned one day, Clayton beheld in the trail the vanishing wheels of the mail carrier's cart and saw Justin running toward him in great excitement. Quickening the pace of his horse he was soon at the boy's side.

"Father—Mr. Wingate—has—had a fit, or something. He's lying on the floor and won't speak to me, and I can't lift him."

Clayton leaped from the saddle and rushed into the house, with Justin at his heels. The preacher lay on the floor, with arms spread out. Beneath him was an open letter, across which he had fallen. Clayton made a hurried examination, and with Justin's aid placed him on the low bed. Picking up the letter he glanced

at it. It was from the secretary of the town company, and was apparently an answer to one which Wingate had sent:

> "Mr. Peter Wingate.
>
> "My Dear Sir:—We regret that we cannot view the prospects of the town and valley of Paradise as hopefully as you do. In fact we have concluded to abandon it definitely and permanently, and to that end we have sold all the buildings. The agent of the purchaser will visit you at once and make arrangements for their removal.
>
> *"Very truly yours,*
>
> *"Royce Gilbert,*
>
> *"Secretary Paradise Land and Town Company."*

"Is he—very sick?" wailed the boy anxiously.

Clayton dropped the letter to the floor, and swinging about in his chair drew Justin to him, pressing him close against his heart. There were tears in his eyes and his voice choked.

"Justin," he said, "you will need to be a very brave boy now; Mr. Wingate is dead."

CHAPTER III
CLAYTON'S VISITORS

When jack-screws and moving teams had done their work in the town of Paradise but one house remained, the minister's, and that only because Curtis Clayton had purchased it and moved into it, with Justin. The farmers of the valley wondered that he should remain, but tempered their surprise with gratitude.

He and Justin seemed even more closely linked now. But not even to Justin did he ever speak of why he had come to the valley or why he tarried. The coming appeared to have been a thing of chance, as when a batted ball rolling to some obscure corner of the field stops there because no force is applied to move it farther. If there was any observable change in him after Wingate's death, it was that he became more restless. The mind of the dreamer, in its workings somewhat akin to his own, yet with a simple faith which he did not possess, had soothed and rested him.

Clayton wore out his increased restlessness by long walks with Justin, abandoning the rides apparently because he disliked to leave the boy alone. But his fame as a doctor was spreading through the thinly-settled country, and when forced away from home by calls he left Justin at the house of some farmer, usually that of Sloan Jasper, for there the boy found pleasant companionship in the person of Mary Jasper, a dark-eyed girl, with winning, mischievous ways and cheeks like wild rose petals.

Time never hung heavily with Justin at Sloan Jasper's.

In addition to his work of instructing Justin, and his reading, Clayton spent much time in writing, in the little room which the minister had fitted up as a study. Sometimes Justin was given the privilege of dusting this room, and once when so engaged he whisked from the table the scorched photograph he had seen before. Clayton had evidently been looking at it, had placed it under a large blotter, and then had neglected to put it away before admitting Justin. The boy stared intently into the beautiful face shadowed forth on that bit of cardboard, for he wondered; then he replaced it beneath the blotter and resumed his dusting. But a question had arisen in his heart.

To give Justin pleasant occupation and make the time pass more rapidly, Clayton purchased a few sheep and placed the boy over them as a herder; and, as if to furnish diversion for himself, he assisted Justin in building a sod-walled corral and sod shelters for the sheep.

It was a delight to Justin to guard the sheep on the grassy slopes and drive them to the tepid water-holes. Often he did this in company with Mary Jasper; he on foot, or high on Clayton's horse, the rosy-cheeked girl swaying at his side on her lazy gray burro, which she had to beat continually with a small cudgel if she progressed at all.

Once Clayton remonstrated with her for what he deemed her cruelty to the beast.

"Doctor Clayton," she said severely, wrinkling her small

forehead, "the only way to make this critter go is to kill him; that's what my paw says!" and she swayed on, pounding the burro's back with the stick and kicking his sides energetically with her bare heels.

Yet the valley life was lonely, so that the coming of any one was an event; and it was a red-letter day when Lemuel Fogg drifted in with his black-topped, wine-colored photograph wagon, and William Sanders with his dirty prairie schooner. Fogg was a fat young man, whose mustache drooped limply over a wide good-humored mouth, and whose round face was splotched yellow with large freckles. Sanders was even younger than Fogg. He lacked Fogg's buoyancy and humor, had shrewd little gray eyes that peered and pried, and slouched about in shabby ill-fitting clothing. Clayton gave them both warm welcome, and they remained with him over night.

Sanders, who was alone in his wagon, was looking for land on which to settle. Apparently Fogg's present business was to take photographs, and he began by taking one of Justin standing in the midst of his sheep, with Mary Jasper sitting on her burro beside him, her bare feet and ankles showing below her dusty gray dress.

In addition to the land, which he looked over carefully with his shrewd little eyes, Sanders cast furtive glances at Clayton's stiff arm. He ventured to word a question, when he and Fogg sat with Justin and Clayton in the little study after supper, surrounded by Clayton's books and papers, while the sheep were securely housed in the sod corral and the unrelenting wind piped

insistently round the house.

"'Tain't any my business as I know of," he began, apologetically, "but I can't help lookin' at that arm o' your'n, and wonderin' what made it so. I had my fortune told onc't by a man who had an arm like that, and he said a tiger bit it. He was an East Injun, er a Malay, I reckon. It come to me that you might have met with an accident sometime, er somethin' er 'nuther? There's a story about it, I reckon?"

The blood rushed in a wave to Clayton's face and appeared to suffuse even his dark eyes. He did not answer the question, being sensitive on the subject, and deeming it an impertinence.

Sanders waited a time, while Fogg talked; then he returned to his inquiry, with even greater emphasis.

"Yes, there is a story," said Clayton, speaking slowly, after a moment of hesitation, while a ghastly smile took the attractiveness out of his thoughtful countenance. "It wasn't an accident, though."

"No?" said Sanders.

"The thing was done in cool deliberation. I was in college, in a medical college, for I'm a doctor you know. I was a student then; and it was the custom among the students to perform various operations on each other, by way of practice, so that when we went out from there to begin our work we would know how things should be done. One day I sawed a student's skull open, took out a spoonful of his brains, and sewed the wound up so nicely that he was well in a week. The operation was a great success, but I

dipped a little too deep and took out too much of the gray matter, and after that he was always omitting something or other that he should have remembered. In return for what he had permitted me to do he put me on the operating table one day, broke my arm with a mallet, and then proceeded to put it together again. In doing so he omitted the funny bone, and my arm has been this way ever since."

Fogg broke into a roar of laughter. Sanders flushed slowly; and getting up walked to the other end of the room, chewing wrathfully, splintering the story with his teeth as he splintered the grass blades that he plucked and chewed when walking about to view the valley land.

"Huh!" he grunted, coming back and dropping lumpily into his chair. "Tell that to a fool an' mebbe you'll git a fool to believe ye, but I don't!"

Fogg slapped his fat knee and roared again.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Ask him something else, Sanders! Who-ee! Doc, I didn't think it was in you! If you do anything like that again I'll have to let a reef out of the band of my trousers. Fire another question at him, Sanders."

"No," said Sanders, while a sullen fire glowed in his little eyes; "I was goin' to ask him some other things, but I'm done!"

Then he chewed again, tried hard to laugh, and seemed about to say something; but Fogg broke in.

"I say, Doc, you can tell a story so well you'd ought to be in my line. Story telling is my long suit. Lincoln ought to have altered

his immortal saying before giving it to the world. My experience is that if you keep the people in a good humor you can fool _all_ of them _all_ of the time, and there ain't any better way than by feeding them anecdotes and jollying them until they think they are the smartest ever. For instance, Sanders believes in fortune tellers; they jolly him, and that pleases him, and they get his coin. It's the same way with everything and everybody."

In addition to the photographic apparatus stored in the wine-colored wagon Fogg had a collection of Navajo blankets, Pueblo pottery, Indian baskets, bows and arrows, and such things. Seeing that his host was not to be a purchaser, and being in a communicative mood, he did not hesitate to expose now the secrets of his trade, in proof of his view of the gullibility of the general public.

"See that," he said, taking up a hideous image of Pueblo workmanship. "Ninety men out of a hundred will believe that thing, with its froggy mouth, is a Pueblo idol, without you telling them, and the others will believe it when you do tell them."

"Huh!" grunted Sanders, still angry; "if 'tain't an Injun idol, what is it?"

It seemed natural for Fogg to laugh, and he laughed again, with easy gurgling.

"You may call it anything you want to, but it ain't an idol. I've seen Pueblo idols; there's a room full of them in the old Governor's Palace in Santa Fé, and they look more than anything else like stone fence posts with holes gouged near one end for

the eyes, nose and mouth. Them are genuine old Pueblo idols, but you bet the Pueblos didn't sell them, and they didn't give 'em away. Did you ever know of a people that would sell their God? I never did."

"None, except Christians!" said Clayton, speaking slowly, but with emphasis.

Fogg set the staring image on the table and looked at him.

"I hadn't thought of that. Yes, I reckon they do, a good deal of the time. But an Indian wouldn't; he would never sell his God. Maybe it's because Christians think so little of theirs that they're so ready to believe a Pueblo will sell his for 'most any old thing. Them images are just caricatures, made to sell. I go among the Pueblos three or four times a year and buy up a lot of their pottery, and I encourage them to make these images, which the average tourist thinks are gods, for they sell better even than the water jars and other things that they turn out.

"Then I buy blankets of the Navajos, which they make dirt cheap now. I helped to put 'em onto that. You can sell a dozen cheap blankets easier than a single expensive one, especially when the people you're selling to think they're getting the genuine goods at a bargain. It's easier for the Navajo weavers to tear old government blankets to pieces and re-weave them and color them with analine dyes than it is for them to take their own wool and their own dyes and put the things together in the old way. They won't wear of course, and the colors fade, but they sell like hot cakes.

"I buy for a dealer, who snaps up everything of the kind I can bring him and hollers for more. You ought to see the crowds of people, especially tourists, who wear out his floors. I'm going to have a store of that kind myself some day. I take photographs for him, of scenery and other things that will sell; and bring him loads of basket work and bows and arrows from the Jicarilla Apaches just over the New Mexican line. He grabs for the Jicarilla work, which I can get almost cheaper than anybody, for I know the head men. The Jicarillas used to be slow workers and too honest, like the Navajo weavers; but they're onto their job now, and can put a willow basket together and dye it with patent dyes in almost no time."

Thus Lemuel Fogg discoursed of his business methods, until he had succeeded in proving several things concerning himself, in addition to his easy belief that the whole world is either covetous or dishonest.

Fogg departed the next morning, on his way to Denver. Sanders lingered in the valley for two or three days, peeking and prying, at intervals visiting a fortune teller of local repute in the town, who saw land, houses, and cattle for him, in the grounds of a coffee cup. But he was angered against Clayton and did not return to his house. A dozen times he told inquiring farmers that he "reckoned" he would take land there and become one of them. But the grounds in the coffee cup did not settle just right, and at length he, too, departed.

CHAPTER IV
SIBYL

One day there came, across the level lands, a wave of horsemen and hounds in a rabbit hunt, the baying of the dogs breaking sharply on the peaceful calm of the valley. Justin rushed from the house when he heard the clamor. Clayton followed more slowly, and looked across the valley from his doorway. The flutter of skirts told him that some of the saddles bore women. He frowned. This slaughter of rabbits was particularly distasteful to him, though he knew that the few farmers on the low land by the stream would welcome it, if the horses and dogs did not cut up the cultivated fields.

Big gray jack rabbits, routed from their coverts, were bobbing on in advance of the baying hounds and galloping riders. More rabbits were seen to start up, bouncing out of bunches of grass or scattered clumps of sage. Following behind, driven at a lively gait, came a mule team, drawing a light spring wagon into which the slain rabbits were thrown.

The extended line had advanced in a big semicircle; and the ends bending in, the chase drew on toward the solitary home of the solitary doctor. Justin was filled with excitement. The lust of killing, which seems to be in the racial blood, stirred strongly within him, and was only held in partial leash by certain teachings and admonitions well hammered in by his instructor. Suddenly,

quite carried away, he swung his hat and yelled:

"Mary is on one of those horses! See her, out there on the right side, on the white horse! She must have been at the station and joined them when they started."

Clayton drew back from the doorway without a glance at the form of Mary Jasper borne onward with flying leaps. A rush of disgust shook him, so that he did not care to look longer. But Justin remained outside, swinging his hat and whooping at intervals, quite taken out of himself.

Then a louder clamor, and a cry from Justin, drew Clayton to the door again. One of the rabbits was approaching the house, springing on with indescribable swiftness, yet unable either by running or dodging to shake off the pursuit of the lithe-limbed, baying creatures that cleft the air behind it. Two of the foremost of the hounds were in chase of this rabbit, one twenty yards in advance of the other. Pushed hard, the rabbit crouched and dodged again with such celerity that the hound, whose open mouth at the instant was almost closing on it, was thrown headlong in a frantic effort to stop and turn as quickly as the rabbit itself. The second hound rushed at it, and the change of direction flung the fleeing rabbit upon the bit of trampled grass in front of the open door in which Clayton stood.

It saw the opening, and in desperation darted into it as into a cave, whisking past Clayton's legs. The hound came close after, yelping fiendishly. With an exclamation that sounded like an oath, Clayton kicked at it; but the hound almost overthrew him,

leaped into the house, and he heard the rabbit's death cry, and a crunching of bones as the dog's ponderous jaws closed on its quivering body.

Then Clayton heard a pounding of hoofs, and with eyes blazing wrathfully he looked up, and saw the original of the photograph which he had hurled into the fire and then had drawn out and treasured as if he could not bear to part with it. The blood receded from his face, leaving it livid and ghastly.

"Sibyl!" he exclaimed.

The woman drew up her horse in front of the door through which the dog had darted. She saw the man, and her clutch of the rein tightened. Clayton looked up at her, and, standing in the doorway, while the dog, having completed its bloody work panted out past him with furious haste, he put his strong right hand against the side of the door, with a faltering motion, as if he felt the need of aid to sustain him from falling.

The woman sitting there on her chafing horse stared back at him, while the clamor of the hounds broke over them. Her face had flushed more than even the excitement of the chase warranted; yet he knew she was marvellously beautiful, as he looked at her full rounded throat and chin, at her olive cheeks in which dimples nestled, and into her great dark eyes, that held now a surprised light. Her hair was as dark as her eyes, and even though much hidden beneath her riding hat, it was still a crown of glory. Clayton saw only enough of the blue riding habit to know that it became her; his eyes were drawn to her face.

"Are you living here?" she asked in astonishment, giving a glance at the small house.

"Yes," he answered huskily. "I thought it as good a place as any, and out of the world; but it seems you found your way here. And Death came riding with you, as usual."

"Curtis, you're always ridiculous when you say foolish things! I've been wondering where you were. You don't intend to return to Denver?"

"No."

"Not even if I wanted you to?"

She looked at him with her fascinating unfathomable eyes, noting his manly presence, his clear-cut dark features, and the stiff, awkward left arm. As she did so the color flamed back into his face.

"No! Not unless—"

"Unless I would consent to be as poky as you are!"

"No, not that. I shouldn't expect you to take an interest in the things I do. You never did, but I didn't care for that."

He stopped as if in hesitation and stood trembling.

"Well, I'm glad I've found where you're living. I suppose your post office address is the town over there by the side of the mountain, where the station is? I shall have something to send you by mail by and by."

"Yes, my mail comes to the station post office."

He still trembled and appeared to hesitate.

"It's queer, how I happened to find you here, isn't it? I have

an acquaintance in that little town, and she invited me down the other day. Some other strangers to the place chanced to be there, and this rabbit hunt was gotten up for our entertainment."

"A queer form of entertainment!" he observed, with caustic emphasis.

"To you I suppose it isn't anything short of murder?"

"It's strange to me how any one can find pleasure in it."

"I suppose that is as one looks at it. But I must be going. I don't care to have people see us talking too long together. I'm glad, though, that I found you."

"Good bye!" he said, his lips bloodless again.

She pulled her horse sharply about, and in another moment was galloping on in the hunt, leaving him standing in the doorway staring after her. He stood thus until the clamor of the dogs sounded faint and she became a mere swaying speck, then he turned back into the house. Justin came in at his heels. He had seen the woman and recognized the pictured face of the photograph.

"Take the rabbit out and bury it somewhere, Justin," said Clayton wearily.

Then he passed on into his study and closed the door behind him.

A few days later the mail carrier brought him a Denver newspaper of ancient date with ink lines drawn round a divorce notice. The paper had been sent to his address by Sibyl. Clayton read the marked notice carefully, and thrusting the paper into the

stove touched a lighted match to it.

CHAPTER V
THE INVASION OF PARADISE

Lemuel Fogg made other visits to Paradise Valley, as the seasons came and went, and Justin learned to look forward with pleasure to his coming. Always he stayed over night, and talked long with Clayton, for whom he had conceived a liking.

Clayton continued to cling to his lonely home. Though more than once tempted to depart he had never been able to make up his mind to do so. He averred to Fogg, and to other acquaintances, that, having been dropped down into Paradise Valley quite by chance, mental and physical inertia held him there; he was lazy, he said, and the indolent life of Paradise Valley had strong attraction for him.

Yet, as his reputation as an excellent doctor spread, he often rode many weary miles to visit a patient. Always the studies went on, and the writing, and the little glass slipping out of and into his pocket made the whole earth radiant with life and beauty. And Justin became a stalwart lad, whose strong handsome face, earnest blue eyes, and attractive personality, won new friends and held old ones.

The few farmers who remained had learned well some lessons with the passing of the years. Ceasing to rely on the uncertain rainfall, they had decreased the areas of their tilled fields and pushed them close to the stream, where the low-lying soil was

blest with sufficient sub-irrigation to swell the deep taproots of the alfalfa. They kept small herds of cattle, and some sheep, which they grazed on the bunch grass. The few things they had to sell, honey rifled from the alfalfa blooms by the bees, poultry, eggs and butter, they found a market for in the town, or shipped to Denver.

Sloan Jasper was of those who remained, and Mary, a tall girl now, had taken the place of her mother in the farmer's home. Mrs. Jasper had given up the struggle with hard climatic conditions, and had passed on, attended in her last illness by the faithful doctor.

With Lemuel Fogg there came, one day, a ranchman named Davison; and in their wake followed herds of bellowing, half-wild cattle, and groups of brisk-riding, shouting cowboys, who rode down the fields in the moist soil by the stream, as they galloped in pursuit of their refractory charges.

The advent of the cattle and the cowboys, the establishment of the Davison ranch, the erection of houses and bunk-rooms, stables and corrals, filled Justin's life to the brim with excitement. He fraternized with the cowboys, and struck up a warm friendship with Philip Davison's son Ben, a lively young fellow older than himself, who could ride a horse not only like a cowboy, but like a circus athlete, for he could perform the admirable feat of standing in the saddle with arms folded across his breast while his well-trained broncho tore around the new corral at a gallop.

When the other members of the Davison household came and

were domiciled in the new ranch house, Justin found that Lucy Davison, the ranchman's niece, the "cousin" of whom Ben had talked, was a beautiful girl of Mary's age, with more than Mary's charm of manner. She was paler than Mary, and had not her rose-leaf cheeks, but she was more beautiful in her way, and she had something which Mary lacked. Justin did not know what it was, for he was not yet analytical, but he was interested in a wholly new manner. He could not be with her enough, and when he was absent thoughts of her filled his mind and even his dreams.

Mary Jasper hastened to call on Lucy Davison; and in doing so made the acquaintance of that most interesting person, Miss Pearl Newcome, Davison's housekeeper. Miss Newcome had passed the beauty stage, if indeed she had ever dwelt at all in that delectable period which should come by right to every member of the sex; but she still cherished the romantic illusions of her earlier years, and kept them embalmed, as it were, in sundry fascinating volumes, which were warded and locked in her trunk up stairs. She brought these out at psychological moments, smelling sweetly of cedar and moth balls, and read from them, to Mary's great delight; for there never were such charming romances in the world, and never will be again, no matter who writes them. Some of them were in the form of pamphlets, yellow and falling to pieces; others were in creaky-backed books; and still others, and these the most read, in cunning bindings of Miss Newcome's own contriving.

Sitting on the flat lid of the trunk, with one foot tucked under

her for comfort, while Mary crouched on the floor with her rose-leaf cheeks in her palms, Pearl Newcome would read whole chapters from "Fanny the Flower Girl, or the Pits and Pitfalls of London," from "Lady Clare, or Lord Marchmont's Unhappy Bride," from "The Doge's Doom, or the Mysterious Swordsman of Venice," and many others. The mysterious swordsman in the "Doge's Doom" was especially entrancing, for he went about at night with a black mask over his face, and made love and fought duels with the greatest imaginable nonchalance. It taxed the memory merely to keep count of his many loves and battles, and it was darkly hinted that he was a royal personage in disguise.

"The Black Mask's scabbard clanked ominously as he sprang from the gondola to the stone arches below the sombre building, while the moonlight was reflected from his shining coat of mail and from the placid waters of the deep lagoon, showing in the pellucid waves alike the untamed locks that hung about his shoulders and the white frightened face of the slender, golden-haired maiden who leaned toward him with palpitating bosom from the narrow, open window above him."

When that point was reached Mary clasped her hands tightly across her knees and rocked in aching excitement; for who was to know whether the Black Mask would succeed in getting the lovely maiden out of the clutches of the foul doge who held her a prisoner, or whether some guard concealed in a niche in the wall would not pounce out, having been set there by the shrewd doge for the purpose, and slice the Black Mask's head off, in spite of

the protecting coat of mail?

Aside from her duties as housekeeper, which she never neglected, there was one other thing that could cause Pearl Newcome to surrender voluntarily the joys of that perch on the trunk lid in the midst of her redolent romances with Mary Jasper for an appreciative listener, and that was the voice of Steve Harkness, the ranch foreman. The attraction of the printed page palled when she heard Harkness's heavy tones, and stopping, with her finger between the leaves, she would step to the window; and sometimes, to Mary's regret, would go down stairs, where she would cut out a huge triangle of pie and place it on the kitchen table.

Harkness was big and jovial, and in no manner resembled the Black Mask, who was slender, lithe, had a small supple wrist, hair of midnight blackness, and "a voice like the tinkle of many waters." Harkness's voice was big and heavy, and his wrist was large and red. But he was usually clean-shaven, scented himself sweetly with cinnamon drops, and was altogether very becoming, in the eyes of Pearl Newcome. And she knew he liked pie. Sometimes Pearl came back to the trunk and continued the dropped romance. That was when Harkness was in a hurry and could not linger in the kitchen to joke and laugh with her. But if time chanced to hang heavily on his hands and no troublesome cowboy or refractory steer claimed his attention, she did not return at all, and Mary, tired of waiting, crept down in disappointment.

Delightful as Mary Jasper and Justin Wingate found the people of the new ranch, Curtis Clayton secluded himself more than ever with his books and his writing, and was not to be coaxed out of his shell even by Justin's stories of Ben's marvellous acrobatic and equestrian feats and of Lucy's brightness and clever talk.

Yet he was drawn out one day by a summons that could not be disobeyed. Harkness had been hurled against the new wire corral by a savage broncho, and Clayton's services as a surgeon were demanded. He never refused a call like that.

He found Harkness sitting in the kitchen of the ranch house, to which he had come as to a shelter, with Pearl Newcome bending over him, a camphor bottle in one of her hands and a blood-stained cloth in the other. Davison, Fogg, and several cowboys, stood about in helpless awkwardness. Harkness's face looked white and faint, in spite of its red tan. The sleeve of his flannel shirt had been rolled to the shoulder and a bloody bandage was wound round the arm.

"Nothin' to make a fuss about," he said, when he saw Clayton. "I got slung up ag'inst the barbed wire and my arm was ripped open. It's been bleedin' some, but that's good fer it."

"I shall have to take a number of stitches," Clayton announced, when he had examined and cleansed the wound. He opened a pouch of his saddle-bags.

"No chloryform ner anything of that kind fer me," said Harkness, regarding him curiously. "Jist go ahead with your

sewin'."

Clayton obeyed; while Harkness, setting a lighted cigarette between his teeth, talked and laughed with apparent nonchalance.

Brought thus into close contact with the people of the ranch, the shell of Clayton's exclusiveness was shattered. After that, daily, for some time, he rode or walked over to the ranch house to see how his patient was doing, or Harkness came over to see him. And he found that these people were good to know. They lessened the emptiness which had gnawed. They were human beings, with wholly human hearts. And he needed them quite as much as they needed him.

CHAPTER VI
WHEN LOVE WAS YOUNG

Justin shot up into a tall youth; he was beginning to feel that he was almost a man; and love had come to him, as naturally and simply as the bud changes into the flower. It flushed his face, as he came with Lucy Davison up the path to the arbor seat in the cottonwoods, after a stroll by the stream. Planted when the ranch was established, the trees were now a cool and screening grove. Justin had made for her a crown of the cottonwood leaves, and had set it on her brown hair. As they walked along, hand in hand, he looked at her now and then, with the light of young love in his eyes. He was sure he had never seen a girl so beautiful and it gave him a strange and delightful pleasure just to look at her.

"Tell me more about Doctor Clayton," she said, dropping down upon the arbor seat. "You told me about that scorched photograph. What is that woman to him, anyway?"

"I don't know," he said, as he sat down by her.

"I think she must have been his sweetheart."

"Just because he couldn't burn her picture?" "Because he came down here in that queer way and has stayed here ever since. Something happened to separate them."

"If that is so I ought to be sorry, I suppose, but I can't; it was a good thing for me; it kept me here, and gave me a chance to —get an education."

"And we do need a doctor here," she said, with unnecessary emphasis.

"If he hadn't come, I'm afraid I should have been sent away when Mr. Wingate died, and then I shouldn't ever have—met you."

"Oh, you might have!" she declared, tossing her crowned head coquettishly.

She crumpled a cottonwood leaf in her fingers. With a boldness that gripped his throat he slipped his hand along the back of the arbor seat.

"And if—if I had never met you?"

"Then you wouldn't have known me!"

"No, I suppose not; but, as you said, I might have; it seems to me that something would have drawn me to you, wherever you were."

The hot color dyed her fair cheeks. Her brown eyes dropped and were veiled by their dark lashes. A strand of the brown hair blown in a tangle across the oval of her face, the delicate curve of the white throat, the yielding touch of her body as he pressed his extended arm close up against it, intoxicated his youthful senses.

"I don't want to think how it would have been if I had never known you," he declared earnestly. "We have been good friends a long time, Lucy."

"We're good friends now, aren't we?"

"Yes, but I want it to be something more than just friends."

He pressed his arm closer about her and bent toward her.

"I hope you won't mind my saying it; but I do love you, and have from—from the very first. I didn't understand so well what it meant then, but now I know—I know that I love you, and love you, and love you!" The arm tightened still more. "And—and if you would only say that you love me, too, and that—"

She lifted her face to his. A dash of tears shone in the brown eyes.

"I—I have—hurt your feelings!"

"No, Justin."

The sight of those tears, and her tremulous lips, so moved him that, with an impulsive motion, and a courage he would not have thought possible, he stooped and kissed her.

"If you would only say that you do love me," he urged.

"I do love you, Justin," she said, with girlish earnestness, "and you ought to know that I do."

"I have always dreamed of this," he declared, putting both arms about her and drawing her close against his heart. "I have always dreamed of this; that we might love each other, and be always together. I think that has been in my heart since the day I first saw you."

He held her tightly now, as if thus he would keep her near him forever.

"Have you truly loved me always?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Always; ever since I knew you!"

"But you—you did care for Mary, before I came?"

"I always liked Mary."

"And you like her now?"

"Yes, but I love you; and that is very different."

She sat quite still, but picked at the leaf of the cotton wood. He seemed so strong and so masterful that the touch of his hands and the pressure of his arms gave her a delightful sense of weakness and dependence, a hitherto unknown feeling.

"You never cared for Mary as—as you do me?"

"I truly never loved Mary at all; I liked her, and we used to have great fun together. But we were only children then, you know!"

She saw one of the hands that enfolded her; the sleeve of his coat was drawn up slightly, disclosing the clear white of the skin and the deep line of tan at the wrist. She ventured to look at his face—the side of it turned toward her; it was as tanned as his hand. Something more than admiration shone in her brown eyes.

"And now you think you are a big man!"

"I am older," he said, simply.

"And was that—that the reason why you tamed my mustang that day, so that he wouldn't be killed? Because you loved me? I've wondered about that."

"That was the reason; but I was anxious, too, to save him."

She was silent again, as if pondering this.

"I've thought that might be the reason; and, you won't laugh at me if I tell you, that's why I've ridden him so much since. Uncle Philip didn't want me to go near him after that. But I would; and I've ridden him ever since; though Pearl has told me a dozen

times that he would throw me and kill me. But I was going to ride him if I could, because—because you conquered him—for me."

He kissed her again, softly.

"You musn't take too many risks with the mustang; for—for some time, you know, you are going to marry me, I hope?"

She did not answer.

"It's a long way off, that some time, but—"

She did not look at him.

"Yes, some time, if I can," she said timidly.

"If you can?"

"If Uncle Philip will let me."

"He's only your guardian, and you'll be of age by and by."

"It seems a good while yet."

"But it will come."

"Yes, it will come."

"I'll wait until that some time," he promised in a low voice.

Time sped swiftly beneath the cottonwoods. To the boy and girl in the morning glow of love hours are minutes. They did not know they had so many things to talk over. Every subject was colored with a new light and had a new relationship. But love itself was uppermost, on their lips and in their hearts.

Justin bore away from that arbor seat a conflicting sense of exaltation and unworthiness. The warm inner light that illumined him flowed out upon the world and brightened it. He walked with a sense of buoyancy. There was a tang in the air and a glow in the sky before unknown.

Meeting Ben Davison he had a new sense of comradeship with him; and though Ben talked of the young English setter he had recently purchased, and sought to show off the good points of the dog, Justin was thinking of Ben himself, who was a cousin to Lucy, and now shared in some degree her superior merits.

Also, when Philip Davison came out of the ranch house and walked toward the horse corrals, the glance of his blue eyes seemed brighter and kindlier, his manner more urbane and noble, and the simple order he gave to Ben concerning work to be done fell in kindlier tone. Though Davison's words bit like acid sometimes, Justin was resolved now to remember always that he was Lucy's uncle and guardian.

Walking homeward, Justin looked now and then at the ranch house. He had seen Lucy flutter into it like a bird; she was in that house now, he reflected, brightening it with her presence. The house, the grounds, and more than all the cottonwood grove, became sacred.

CHAPTER VII
WILLIAM SANDERS

The feeling which hallowed the mere local surroundings of love held its place tenaciously in Justin's heart and seemed not likely to pass away. It was no sickly sentimentality, but had the power to strengthen his inner life and add to his growing manliness.

Justin was employed on the ranch now, and though there were many distasteful things connected with the work, he desired to remain, because it gave him so many opportunities to be near Lucy Davison. The necessary cruelties connected with the rearing and handling of cattle on a great range sickened him at times; for a love that was almost a worship of all life, the lower forms equally with the higher, had been instilled by Clayton into every fibre of his being. To Justin now even the elements seemed to stir with consciousness. Did not certain chemicals exhibited by Clayton rush together into precipitates and crystals, as if they loved and longed to be united, and did not so common a thing as fire throw out tentacles of flame, and grapple with the wood as if hungry? And who was to say that the precipitates and crystals and the fire did not know? Certainly not ignorant man.

With this love of every form of life there grew a manly gentleness, broken strangely at times by outbursts of temper, so that often it seemed whimsical.

Riding forth one day, in cowboy attire, along the line fence that held in the cattle from the cultivated valley lands, he came upon Philip Davison engaged in angry controversy with a young man of somewhat shabby appearance. The shrewd little eyes of this man observed Justin closely. Beside the fence was a dirty prairie schooner, from which the man had descended, and to it two big raw-boned farm horses were hitched. Eyeing Justin the man pushed back his hat, then awkwardly extended his hand.

"So you're Justin, air ye—the little boy I met one't? I reckon you don't know me? I wouldn't knowed you, but fer hearin' the name."

Justin acknowledged that the man's face was unfamiliar.

"Well, I'm William Sanders!" He plucked a spear of grass and began to splinter it with his teeth. "I landed hyer some seasons ago with Mr. Fogg, and stayed all night with the doctor over there. Mebbe you'll remember me now. I've thought of you a good many times sense then. You've growed a lot. I was thinkin' about you t'other day while on my way hyer; and a fortune teller I went to in Pueblo picked you out straight off, from the cards she told with. She showed me the jack of hearts, and said that was the young feller I had in mind. Sing'lar, wasn't it?"

Justin recalled this young man now, and shook his hand heartily.

"It was singular," he admitted.

"We'll have to talk over old times by and by," said Sanders, amiably.

But Davison was not pleased to see Sanders, whom he had never met before. Sanders, it appeared, had bought a quarter-section of land not far from the stream, and had now come to occupy it. Trouble had arisen over the fact that it was included in a large area of mortgaged and government land which Davison had fenced for his cattle. Sanders was demanding that he should cut the fence.

"Cut it and let me git my land," he insisted, "er I'll cut it fer ye. I know my rights under the law."

"You can't farm there, and you know you can't," said Davison, in a tone of expostulation. "This is simply a piece of blackmail. You want me to pay you not to trouble me about the fence. But I won't do it. If I did I'd have dozens of men landed on me demanding the same thing. You know that nothing but bunch grass will grow on that land."

Though he chewed placidly on the grass spear, Sanders' little eyes glittered.

"Cut the fence and let me git to my land, er I'll cut it fer ye!"

His love for Lucy, which extended now to Philip Davison as a warm regard and intense boyish admiration, would have inclined Justin to the ranchman's side; but it was clear that Sanders was in the right and Davison in the wrong.

"I'll see you again, Mr. Sanders," he said; and rode on while the two men were still wrangling. It was remarkable, he thought, that Sanders should have remembered him so long, and more remarkable that a fortune teller who had never seen him should

be able to describe him even in a dim and uncertain way.

Farther along he encountered Ben, ranging the mesa with dog and gun, training his young English setter. It was Ben's duty to ride the line on this particular day; but Ben had shirked, and Justin had been assigned to his place. The current opinion of the cowboys was that Ben was shiftless and unreliable.

"What's that hayseed mouthing about?" Ben asked.

"He has bought some land in there, and wants your father to cut the fence so that he can get to it."

"These farmers are always making trouble," Ben growled.

Then his face flushed.

"Why didn't you stand up with me against that granger the other day, when I told him that his horses, and not ours, had damaged his crops?"

Justin desired to think well of Ben and remain on terms of friendship with him because of Lucy.

"I couldn't very well," he urged, "for I saw our horses in his millet, myself."

"Well, he didn't; he was in town that day. He would have believed you, if you had said they were his horses. You might have backed me up, instead of flinching; I'd have done as much for you."

"You've got a handsome dog there!" said Justin.

"Oh, that setter's going to be fine when I get him broke," Ben asserted, with enthusiasm. "I only wish we had some Eastern quails here. Harkness put you on this line today, did he? I wanted

to train my setter; so I told him I wasn't well, and slipped out of it."

As the dog was now far ahead, Ben hastened to overtake him, and Justin rode on, thinking of Ben, of Lucy, and of William Sanders. Ben's easy disregard of certain things he had been taught to consider essentials troubled him. He wanted to think well of Ben.

When Justin learned the outcome of the controversy between Davison and Sanders he was somewhat astonished. Sanders' truculence had made him think the man would persist in his demands; but Sanders had agreed to fence his own land, if Davison would but give him a right of way to it.

Within a week Justin understood why. Sanders, visiting the ranch-house to see Davison, had also seen Lucy. He became a familiar visitor, where his presence was not desired. If Lucy rode out, William Sanders invariably chanced to be in the trail going in the same direction. If she remained at home he came to the house to get Davison's advice as to the best manner of constructing a fence, and Lucy's advice concerning the proper furnishing of a dug-out for a single man who expected to live alone and do his own cooking.

Lucy came to Justin with the burden of her woes.

"He follows me round all the time, just as if he were my dog!"

"You ought to feel flattered," said Justin, though he was himself highly indignant. "I don't suppose you want me to say anything to him about it?"

"Oh, no—no!" she gasped, terrified by the threat concealed behind the words.

"I've noticed he hasn't come near me since our meeting down by the line fence. He told me then that he wanted to have a talk about old times, but he hasn't seemed in any hurry to begin it."

As Justin rode away in an angry mood Lucy Davison looked at his receding figure with some degree of uneasiness. Justin had on a few occasions showed a decidedly inflammable temper. Ordinarily mild in word and manner, borrowing much of that mildness doubtless from Clayton, when he gave way to a sudden spasm of rage it was likely to carry him beyond the bounds of reason.

The provocation came in a most unexpected, and at the time inexplicable, way. Justin, riding along the trail by the stream, saw Lucy come out from the shadows of the young cottonwoods near Sloan Jasper's and walk in his direction, as if to join him. The sight of her there filled his sky with brightness and the music of singing birds. He pricked up his broncho and turned it from the trail.

As he did so he beheld William Sanders appear round the end of the cottonwood grove, mounted on one of his big, raw-boned horses. Riding up to Lucy, Sanders slipped from his saddle and walked along by her side. Justin's anger burned. It was apparent to him, great as was the separating distance, that Sanders' presence and words were distasteful to her. She stopped and seemed about to turn back to the grove. Justin saw Sanders

put out his hand as if to detain her. As he did so she stooped; then she screamed, and fell forward, apparently to avoid him.

Justin drove his broncho from a trot into a wild gallop. His anger increased to smoking rage. It passed to ungovernable fury, when he beheld Sanders catch the screaming girl in his arms, lift her to the back of his horse, and scramble up behind her in the saddle. Justin yelled at him.

"Stop—stop, you villain!"

In utter disregard of him and his shouted command Sanders plunged his spurs into the flanks of his big horse, and began to ride away from the cottonwoods at top speed. Lucy lay limp in his arms.

"I'll have his life!" Justin cried, longing now for one of the cowboy revolvers he had made it a practice, on the advice of Clayton, never to carry; and he drove the broncho into furious pursuit of the big horse that was bearing Lucy and Sanders away.

The light, clean-limbed broncho, unimpeded by a cumbersome double weight, began to gain in the mad race. Justin ploughed its sides mercilessly with the spurs, struck it with his hands, and yelled at it, to increase its speed.

"Go, go!" he cried; "we must catch that scoundrel quick!"

His line of action when that was accomplished was not formulated, further than that he knew he would hurl himself on Sanders, tear him from the saddle, and punish him as it seemed he deserved.

Steadily the separating distance was decreased. Sanders still

sent the big horse on, almost without a backward glance. He held Lucy tightly in his arms. Apparently she had fainted, for Justin could not observe that she struggled to release herself.

Again Justin bellowed a command to Sanders to halt. He was close upon the big horse now. Sanders turned in his saddle heavily, for the weight of the girl impeded his movements. Justin fancied he could see the man's little eyes glitter, as they did that day when he delivered his ultimatum to Davison.

"You go to hell!" he bellowed back.

The momentary slacking of his rein caused his horse to stumble, and it fell to the ground.

Justin galloped up in an insanity of blazing wrath. Lucy, hurled from the back of the horse with Sanders, sprang up with a cry, and ran toward Justin. Sanders, having picked himself up uninjured, stared at her. His flushed face whitened and his little eyes showed a singular and ominous gleam.

"Take her," he said, hoarsely; "damn you, take her—I was doin' the best I could!"

Lucy's face was white—piteously white; her dry hot eyes gushed with tears, and a sob choked in her throat.

"Justin—Justin, it was not—his fault—nothing he did; it was the snake; see, it bit me, here!" She thrust forward her hand. "Near the wrist, there; and—and it is swelling fast, fast! We—we must—get to Doctor Clayton's quick—quick!"

Justin staggered under the revulsion of feeling. He caught the shaking and terrified girl in his arms.

"Help me—get her into the saddle, Sanders," he begged, stammering the words. "And—and I ask your pardon! Later I will tell you what I—but now I need you to—"

Sanders sprang to his assistance.

"Better take my horse; he's bigger!"

"The broncho is faster," said Justin. "That's right. Now—that's right!"

He climbed shakily into the saddle. He felt his very brain reeling. Then the broncho leaped forward. Sanders struck it a smart blow to hurry it on; and stood looking at them, as they galloped wildly on toward Clayton's, which had been his own destination.

"Damn him!" he cried hoarsely. His little eyes glittered and his lips foamed. "I was doin' the best I could, and I would have made it all right." He clenched his fists. "I would 'a' been his friend—and helped him; but now—"

The sentence, the threat, died, gurgling, in his throat.

As for Justin, he had no thought now but to reach Doctor Clayton's in the quickest time possible. He did not spare the broncho. Yet, even in these minutes of whirling excitement, when anxiety, fright, love, chagrin, and regret, fought within him for the mastery, he did not forget some of the things learned of Clayton. He took out his handkerchief, rolled it into a cord with hands and teeth, and with hands and teeth knotted it round the bitten arm just above the two small punctures made by the teeth of the rattlesnake.

The arm was already swollen, and he thought it was becoming discolored. At times burning tears gushed from his eyes in a way to blind him and keep him from seeing anything clearly. Lucy lay in his arms as if dead. For aught he knew she might even then be dying. The poison of the rattlesnake had been injected near the great artery of the wrist, as she stooped in her embarrassment to pluck a flower, and it would be speedy in its malignant effects. With that terrible fear upon him, Justin blamed himself ceaselessly for the delay he had wrought in the mistaken notion that Sanders was acting with sinister intent. If that brief delay should aid to a fatal result he knew he should go mad or kill himself.

When Lucy stirred, or moaned, he bent over her with wild words of inquiry. Her eyes were closed, and she was very white.

"We are almost there—almost there!" he cried.

Yet how long the distance seemed!

Clayton came to the door, when he heard the clatter of hoofs. He wore a faded smoking jacket and had a black skull cap perched on the top of his head. His half lounging manner changed when he saw the trembling broncho, dripping sweat and panting with labored breath from the strain of its terrible run, and saw Justin climbing heavily out of the saddle with Lucy. When her feet touched the ground she stood erect, but tottered, clinging weakly to Justin's arm. She made a brave effort to walk, as Clayton hurried to her side. He saw the knotted handkerchief and the swollen arm, and knew what had happened.

"Into the house," he said, tenderly supporting her. "Don't be frightened, Lucy—don't be frightened! Justin, help me on the other side—ah, that's right! A little girl was here only the other day, from the Purgatoire, who had been bitten hours before, and I had her all right in a little while. So, there's really nothing to be alarmed about."

Clayton's cheering words were a stimulant. Yet the battle was not fought out. Before victory was announced, word had gone to the ranch-house and to Jasper's. Philip Davison came, with Harkness and Pearl Newcome, and Mary Jasper rode in on her pony, wild-eyed and tremulous. Among others who arrived was William Sanders.

Justin found him in the yard, out by the grass-grown cellar, where he stood in a subdued manner, holding the reins of his raw-boned horse. His manner changed and his little eyes burned when he saw Justin.

"I don't keer to have you speak to me," he said, abruptly. "I reckon from this on our ways lays in different directions. I don't know what you thought I was up to, but I was doin' the best I could to git that girl to this place in a hurry. You chipped in. I s'pose you think it was all right, and that you helped matters?"

"I have already asked your pardon, and I ask it again. I see now that I was a fool. We'll forget the whole thing, if you're willing."

Justin held out his hand in an amicable manner.

Sanders disdained to take it.

"I'm not willin' to fergit it, myself. I wanted to think well of

you, rememberin' when I first come to this house, and some other things, but that's past. You made me look and feel cheaper than thirty cents Mexican, and I ain't expectin' to fergit it."

He turned away, and walked along the edge of the old cellar, leading his horse. That William Sanders had in him all the elements of a vicious hater was shown then, and many times afterward. He did not speak to Justin again that day; and when the announcement came that Clayton had won his hard fight and Lucy was on the high road to recovery, he mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER VIII
AND MARY WENT TO DENVER

Mary Jasper did not know that she went to Denver because she had read Pearl Newcome's romances; but so it was. She was in love with Ben, and expected to become his wife by and by, but her day-dreams were of conquests and coronets.

The alluringly beautiful lace of Sibyl had reappeared in Paradise Valley. On her first visit, long before, Sibyl had marked the rare dark beauty of Mary Jasper. Mary was now a fair flower bursting into rich bloom, and wherever a fair flower grows some covetous hand is stretched forth to pluck it.

Though Sibyl had flung Curtis Clayton aside with as little compunction as if his pure heart were no more than the gold on the draggled wings of the butterfly crushed in the road, curiosity and vanity had drawn her again and again to the little railroad town at the base of the flat-topped mountain. There in the home of an acquaintance she had found means to gratify her curiosity concerning the life led by Clayton, and could feed her vanity with the thought that he had immured himself because of her.

Twice she had seen him, having taken rides through the valley for the purpose; once beholding him from afar, watching him as he strolled near the willows by the stream, unconscious of her surveillance, his bent left arm swinging as he walked. On the second occasion they had met face to face in the trail, while

he was on his way to the town to inspect some books he had ordered conditionally. Sibyl was on a mettlesome bay, and he on his quick-stepping buckskin broncho. She towered above him from the back of the larger horse. He lifted his hat with a gentle gesture, flushing, and holding the reins tightly in his stiff left hand.

"You are looking well!" she cried gaily. It touched her to know that he still carried himself erect, that he was still a handsome, pleasant-eyed man, whom any woman might admire. "And really I've been thinking you were moping down here, and suffering from loneliness and hopeless love!"

"Love is no longer hopeless, when it is dead!" he declared, voicing an indifference he did not feel. Her light laugh fell like the sting of a whip. "Oh, dear me! Is it so serious as that? But of course I don't believe anything you say. Love is a bright little humming-bird of a boy, who never dies. Truly, it must be lonesome down here, in this poky place. I can't understand why you stay here. You might come to Denver!" She looked at him archly, half veiling her dark eyes with their lustrous lashes, while her horse pawed fretfully at the bank. "I mean it, Curtis. You could be as far from me in Denver as you are down here, if you wished to be. You know that as well as I do."

"I don't think I could," he said, and though his voice showed pain it showed resolution. "I find this a very good place. I like the quiet."

"So that no one will ever trouble you while you're studying or

writing! You'll be a great author or scientist some day, I don't doubt."

He did not answer.

"Well, good bye, Curtis. I'm not so bad as I seem, perhaps; you don't see any horns or cloven hoof about me, do you?" She waved her hand. "And I'm glad to know you're looking so well, and are so contented and happy!"

She gave her horse a cut with her riding whip and galloped away.

How many more times Sibyl Dudley (she had taken her maiden name) came to the little town by the mountain Curtis Clayton did not know, and never sought to discover; but one day he was almost startled, when Justin brought him news that Mary Jasper had accompanied Sibyl to Denver, and was to remain there with her.

Clayton at once mounted his horse and rode up the valley in the waning afternoon, to where Sloan Jasper's house squatted by the stream in the midst of a green plume of cottonwoods of his own planting. He found Jasper in a stormy temper. There had been heavy August rains and a cloud-burst. The sluggish stream had overleaped its banks, smearing the alfalfa fields with sticky yellow mud and a tangle of weedy drift, in addition to softening the soil until it was a spongy muck. Hundreds of cattle had ploughed through the softened soil during the night, for the storm had torn out a section of fence and let them drift into the cultivated area of the valley. Standing with Jasper was Clem

Arkwright.

"Glorious, sublime!" Arkwright was saying.

He had taken off his hat, and stood in reverent attitude before the lighted mountain, a young, red-faced, pudgy man, with thick mustache. Though Sloan Jasper was not gifted with keen discernment he felt the attitude to be that of the Pharisee proclaiming his own excellence rather than that of his Maker. Arkwright seemed to be saying to him, "Behold one who has been endowed with a capacity which you lack, the capacity to appreciate and enjoy this sublime picture!"

All the way up the valley trail Curtis Clayton had been delighting in the beauty of that evening scene. The misty clouds lingering after the storm had hung white draperies about the wide shoulders of the mountain. Into these the descending sun had hurled a sheaf of fire-tipped arrows, and straightway the white draperies had burned red in streaks and the whole top of the mountain had flamed. The colors were fading now.

"Glorious, sublime!" Arkwright repeated.

"The sunlight on that mountain don't interest me a little bit, Arkwright," said Jasper, with curt emphasis; "what I want to know is how I'm going to protect myself? You say there ain't any herd law. You're a justice-of-the-peace, and I reckon a lawyer, or a half of a one. We can have a herd law passed, can't we? And what's to keep me from shootin' them steers when I catch 'em in here? Powder and lead air cheap, and that's what I'll do; and then I'll let Davison do the sum'. I ain't got nothin' much, and

he'll find it hard work to git blood out of a turnip. Let him do the sum', and see if he can collect damages; you say I can't."

"You're hopeless, Jasper!

"'A primrose by the river's brim, A yellow primrose was to him— And it was nothing more!'"

Arkwright made the quotation and sighed, as Clayton rode up. "But see the fading light on those clouds! Was there ever anything like it? What does it make you think of?"

"It makes me think that if I had my way I could improve on nature a bit in this valley; I wouldn't send all the rain in a bunch and jump the river out of its banks and roll it over everything, but distribute it a little through some of the other months of the year."

Arkwright turned his pudgy form about.

"Ah, Doctor! Glad to see you. You ought to get over to the town oftener. You wouldn't care to ride up this evening, I suppose? The sunlight is going, and I must be going, too."

Clayton did not care to ride to town. When Arkwright was gone he questioned Jasper concerning the occasion of his visit.

"I reckon he come down for a word with Ben Davison; I don't know what else. He and Ben air gittin' thick as fleas lately. It's my opinion that Ben's gamblin' away his wages up there in the town with him, but I don't know; and I don't care. I'd be glad to have both of 'em keep away from me. Look at that millet, Doctor; just look at it! Ruined by Davison's cattle; and Arkwright tells me I can't do anything, because there ain't any herd law in this

county. But I can shoot 'em; and I'll do it next time they git in here, see if I don't."

Clayton had heard Jasper rave in that way before, and nothing had ever come of it. Other settlers had raved in the same manner, and then realized their helplessness. Looking into Jasper's angry face, he tried now to speak of Mary.

"I hear that your daughter has gone to Denver, Mr. Jasper!"

Jasper drew himself up, forgetful for the moment of his millet. A look of pride and pain overspread his hairy face.

"Yes, she's gone there to stay awhile with Mrs. Dudley. I didn't want her to, but she would go; it makes it mighty lonesome here, but she'll be happier up there, I reckon. Mrs. Dudley took a likin' to Mary, and wants to give her a better chance fer an ejication and other things than she can have here. So I reckon it's all right, though I didn't see at first how I could git along without her."

All at once Clayton's heart seemed to shrivel and shrink. He fumbled with the yellow mane of the broncho and with the reins that swung against its neck. When he spoke after a little, trying to go on, his voice was husky.

"That woman is—"

"Yes, I allow Mrs. Dudley is a fine woman!"

Clayton's resolution failed utterly.

"And she's smart," Jasper declared, "smart as a steel-trap; when she talked with me about takin' Mary, and what she could do fer her, I could see that. She's mighty good-lookin', too; though I don't think anybody can come up in looks to my Mary.

I wisht you could have seen her with some of her new fixin's on, which Mrs. Dudley bought fer her. She was certainly handsome. And she's goin' to enjoy herself there, I don't doubt. I've already had a letter from her, tellin' me how happy she is. I reckon I ought to be willin' fer her to have things her mother never had, fer she's fit fer it, and not have to slave as her mother did, and as I've always done. Yes, I reckon I'm glad she's gone; though 'tis a bit lonesome here, fer I ain't got anybody with me at all now, you see."

Though Curtis Clayton had visited Sloan Jasper for the express purpose of uttering a warning against Sibyl, he permitted Jasper to talk on, and the warning words remained unsaid. Jasper was inexpressibily lonely, now that his daughter was gone; yet it was plain that he would not call her back, and equally plain that he knew she would not return if he called never so loudly. And he was trusting that the thing he could not help was the very best thing for the child he loved. Clayton felt that he could not stir up in the heart of this man a useless, peace-destroying, and perhaps a groundless, distrust.

So he rode away as the night shadows were falling, and gathered a great contempt for himself as he returned slowly homeward. He had no right to judge Sibyl, and possibly, very probably, misjudge her, he thought; yet he had a fear, amounting almost to conviction, that she was not a woman to whom should be given the charge and training of such a girl as Mary Jasper. That fear had sent him to Jasper; his retreat seemed a cowardly

flight.

As for Mary, she was childishly happy in Denver. The only present cloud on the sky of her life was that her father had not really wished her to go. He had objected stoutly at first, but ever since her mother's departure from the earthly Paradise, which had been full of all manner of hard labor, to that upper and better one where, her simple faith had assured her, she should toil no more, Mary had contrived to do pretty much as she pleased. Her head was filled with romantic ideas, garnered from Pearl Newcome's much-read novels. In this matter, as in all others, she had taken her own way, like a high-headed young horse clamping the bit tightly between its teeth and choosing its road in defiance of the guiding rein. And her father had submitted, when he could do nothing else, had admired and praised her in the wonderful new clothing provided for her by Mrs. Dudley, and had driven her to the station with her little trunk packed with pretty trifles. He had kissed her good bye there, bravely enough, with hardly a quiver in his voice, and so she had gone away. She recalled him often now, standing, a pathetic figure, in his cheap clothing, waving his hand to her as she looked from the car window to throw a kiss as a final farewell.

But this picture seldom troubled her long. Denver was too attractive to the girl who had scarcely in her whole life seen a place larger than the little town at the base of the familiar flat-topped mountain. And what a gay, care-free life Denver led, as viewed by her through the eyes of Mrs. Dudley! This was Vanity

Fair, though Mary had never even heard that name. Mrs. Dudley kept a carriage, which rolled with shining wheels through the Denver streets to the merry tattoo of trotting hoofs and the glint of silver-mounted harness. A driver sat on the box in blue livery, and the easy sway and jounce of the springs made her feel as if she were being lifted forward on velvet cushions.

Young men and old men turned about to admire her and the woman who sat by her side, as the carriage rolled along. Women looked at them, too, sometimes with shining eyes of envy; looked at the carriage, at the beautiful clothing, and the two bright faces. Mary wore jewels now, and Sibyl had roped her slender neck with a heavy gold thread which bore a neat little locket at its end. Into that locket Mary had put the gnarled wisp of hair which in a moment of devotion at home she had clipped from her father's head. To wear it now was something of a penance for leaving him in his loneliness.

Sibyl had a "set," which was very gay and overflowed with parties where cards were played for favors, and in little dances which were said to be very "select." Gay debonair men and handsomely dressed women attended these dances and parties and made life one never-ending round of merriment. Mary thought she had never known what it was to really live until now. Sibyl delighted in her; the girl's fresh flower-like face and inevitable gaucherie set off and added to Sibyl's own attractiveness.

Mary wrote to her father with religious regularity every

Sunday. Sunday was a religious day, and the writing of a letter to her father was performed almost as a sacred duty, so that Sunday seemed the appropriate day for it. She wrote also to Ben Davison, more fully than to her father, describing to him the joys of her new mode of life, and appealing to him not to be "savage" about her comments concerning some of the young men she met.

"Dear Ben," she said in one of her letters, "Sibyl Dudley is a perfect darling. I am surprised that you didn't know she had been married. I thought you knew all the time. She is divorced now, I think, though she never says anything to me about it. I'm sure there must be a beautiful romance in her life, as lovely as any of those Pearl reads, for sometimes when she thinks I'm busy she sits for a long time perfectly silent, as if thinking of something serious. But in spite of that she is as gay and happy as can be. Yes, she is a darling; and so are you, you old grumpy, grizzly bear! I wish you could send me a pony—not a broncho! It would be such fun to go galloping on my own pony through the streets. I ride a good deal, but these Denver horses are such big things. Mrs. Dudley is a superb horsewoman. Is that right, horsewoman?—it sounds funny, worse than cowboy. Sometimes when we meet people she introduces me as her niece, and the people smile and say how much we look alike. Isn't that funny, too?"

Sibyl abounded in "charities," and had numbers of feeble men and old women who devoutly, or otherwise, blest her shadow as she passed. Under her tutelage Mary also found it pleasant to play Lady Bountiful. It gave her quite as much comfort as the penning

of that Sunday letter to her father. Her father had lived a saving and scrimping life and had never given anything to anybody, so that to Mary this was an entirely new and pleasing phase of life's conduct. It made her feel so superior to bestow with unstinting hand, and be blest for the largess, as if the donor were a veritable gift-showering angel, or luxury-distributing fairy, with red gold on her wings.

All in all, Mary found Denver to be a place of unheard-of delights, in which, especially to those who were not poor and in want, life passed like one of the plays which she sometimes witnessed from a box in the opera house, or after the fashion of the rollicking fanfare of the romances in Pearl Newcome's wonderful trunk. And it was good, all of it; much better than Paradise Valley, or even the society of Ben Davison, though she was sure that she still loved Ben.

CHAPTER IX
A REVELATION OF CHARACTER

William Sanders did not forget nor forgive.

He ceased to annoy Lucy Davison, and even in time affected to overlook the humiliation to which he felt Justin had subjected him; but deep in his heart he nursed both for Philip Davison and Justin an ineradicable hate, which revealed itself at times in disputes fomented with the farmers.

Sanders' half-veiled enmity troubled Justin less than the discovery which came to him one day of the innate dishonesty of Ben Davison's character.

Philip Davison was in one of the bunk rooms, paying off his "hands," when Justin and Ben arrived from the high mesa where for a month they had been line-riding together. Bronchos stood outside on the trampled grass. Within, where the walls above the rude wooden bunks were hung with bridles and quirts, saddles and ponchos, ropes and spurs, sat Davison, at a small unpainted table, counting out money to his employes and keeping a record of the amounts paid by writing names and sums with a stub pencil in a soiled account book. Davison was fifty years of age now, red-faced, blue-eyed, and bearded. Justin had learned to admire and like him, for there were admirable traits in his character. Though he swore horrible oaths at times, which he complained a man had to do if he handled cattle and cowboys, he had generally

been kind to Justin, and he had conceived a fondness for Clayton, whom he respected for his learning and skill as a physician.

Having received his wages from the hands of Philip Davison, Justin went out behind the bunk house, and was counting his bills in the drizzle that was falling, when Ben appeared, his manner nervous and his eyes shining.

"I'm ahead this time!" he said.

Then, to Justin's astonishment, he lifted one of his boots, and there, sticking to the muddy sole, was a five-dollar bill. He pulled it away with a chuckle, wiped off the mud as well as he could, and added it to the pile in his hands.

Justin stared at him, with a look which Ben resented.

"Some money was on the table and the wind flirted that bill to the floor. I set my boot on it, and when I walked out it walked out with me."

"You didn't do that!"

"What's the difference? Father will never know! And he's got plenty more where that came from. He only pays me beastly cowboy's wages, when I'm his own son. So I helped myself, when I saw my chance."

Justin's look showed reproof, and Ben flushed in angry irritation.

"You'd tell, would you?"

"That's stealing!"

A flush of red waved into Ben's face. Stung by the inner knowledge of his wrong, this blunt condemnation roused the

latent devil in him. He leaped at Justin blindly, and struck him in the face.

Justin had never fought any one in his life, nor could he remember that he had ever before been struck in anger. But when that blow fell on his face with stinging force, his head became unaccountably hot, he trembled violently, and with a hoarse cry gurgling from his lips he sprang upon Ben and struck him to the earth with one blow of his fist.

Having done that, he drew back, shaken and dismayed. He had knocked Ben Davison down, when but a moment before they had been friends! He stared at Ben, who had dropped heavily to the ground. Already he was remorseful and almost frightened. Ben scrambled up, cursing.

"I'll make you pay for that!" he said, wiping a speck of blood from his trembling lips with his hand.

"It—it was your fault! I—"

Philip Davison came round the corner of the building upon this scene, having heard the blows and the fall. He saw Ben's cut and quivering lip, his clothing wet and muddy, and Justin standing before him with hot, flushed face.

"You struck Ben?" he cried.

Ben was his pride.

Justin looked at him, after an appealing glance at Ben.

"Yes," he acknowledged, with humility and a feeling of repentant uneasiness. He had gained Ben's enmity, and he feared he had lost Philip Davison's regard, which he valued highly.

Ben was crumpling together the wad of bills, and thrust them into his pocket.

"Yes, he struck me, but I hit him first," he confessed. "We had a little quarrel, a few words, that's all."

Though no larger than Justin, he was older, and it humiliated him to confess even this much.

Davison was annoyed and angry.

"Go into the house, Ben," he commanded; "I'll see you later."

When Ben was gone he turned to Justin.

"I've tried to do right by you, Justin, and I've liked your work; but you must remember that Ben is my son. I can't think that you had any good reason to strike him."

"I didn't intend to strike him," Justin urged, "and I shouldn't have done so if he hadn't struck me first."

"Well, I won't have you two quarreling and fighting. Just remember that, will you?"

"He struck me first!" said Justin, sturdily, though deeply troubled by the knowledge that he had offended Philip Davison.

Davison followed Ben into the house, leaving Justin weak and bewildered. He had smothered his sudden explosive rage, yet he still felt its influence. That he could have struck Ben in that way seemed incredible; yet he tried to justify the deed to himself. He was about to walk away, when Ben reappeared and came up to him.

"Justin, you're a brick, to stand by a fellow that way! You knocked me down, but I don't hold it against you, for you can

keep your mouth shut."

"You still have that money?"

"Of course."

"I haven't changed my opinion about that!"

Ben's face reddened again.

"What if I did keep it? You're fussy, and you're a fool! What is my father's is mine, or it will be mine some day; I just took a little of it ahead of time, that's all. It will all be mine, when he goes over the divide."

Justin was horrified. Ben had expressed reckless and defiant views on many subjects, but nothing like this flippant speculation concerning his father's death.

"I won't listen to you when you talk that way," he declared; and he moved away.

CHAPTER X
PIPINGS OF PAN

The result of this quarrel was that Justin was banished temporarily from the ranch, though it was not assigned as the reason for his exile. Fogg had been forced to take a flock of sheep in payment for a debt owed him by a sheepman. The sheep were already in Paradise Valley, and were to be sent at once into the mountains. Davison ordered Justin to take charge of these sheep, and hurried shepherd and flock into the hills, while Lucy was temporarily away from home. Justin could not rebel against this order except mentally, if he wished to remain in Davison's employment and retain, or regain, his good-will.

Before setting forth he left a letter for Lucy with Pearl Newcome, and was sure she would get it. Yet he departed from the ranch with a heavy heart; and as he went on his way he questioned why he and not another had been selected for this life of lonely exile in the mountains. He was almost sure it was because of his trouble with Ben.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.