

# GRAHAM MARGARET COLLIER

THE WIZARD'S  
DAUGHTER, AND OTHER  
STORIES

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# Margaret Collier Graham

## The Wizard's Daughter, and Other Stories

### The Wizard's Daughter

There had been a norther during the day, and at sunset the valley, seen from Dysart's cabin on the mesa, was a soft blur of golden haze. The wind had hurled the yellow leaves from the vineyard, exposing the gnarled deformity of the vines, and the trailing branches of the pepper-trees had swept their fallen berries into coral reefs on the southerly side.

A young man with a delicate, discontented face sat on the porch of the Dysart claim cabin, looking out over the valley. A last gust of lukewarm air strewed the floor with scythe-shaped eucalyptus-leaves, and Mrs. Dysart came out with her broom to sweep them away.

She was a large woman, with a crease at her waist that buried her apron-strings, and the little piazza creaked ominously as she walked about. The invalid got up with a man's instinctive distrust of a broom, and began to move away.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Palmerston," she said, waving him back into his chair with one hand, and speaking in a large, level voice, as if she were quelling a mob, – "don't disturb yourself; I won't raise any dust. Does the north wind choke you up much?"

"Oh, no," answered the young fellow, carelessly; "it was a rather more rapid change of air than I bargained for, but I guess it's over now."

"Sick folks generally think the north wind makes them nervous. Some of them say it's the electricity; but I think it's because most of 'em's men-folks, and being away from their families, they naturally blame things on the weather."

Mrs. Dysart turned her ample back toward her hearer, and swept a leaf-laden cobweb from the corner of the window.

The young man's face relaxed.

"I don't think it made me nervous," he said. "But then, I'm not very ill. I'm out here for my mother's health. She threatened to go into a decline if I didn't come."

"Well, you've got a consumptive build," said Mrs. Dysart, striking her broom on the edge of the porch, "and you're light-complected; that's likely to mean scrofula. You'd ought to be careful. California's a good deal of a hospital, but it don't do to depend too much on the climate. It ain't right; it's got to be blessed to your use."

Palmerston smiled, and leaned his head against the redwood wall of the cabin. Mrs. Dysart creaked virtuously to and fro behind her broom.

"Isn't that Mr. Dysart's team?" asked the young man, presently, looking down the valley.

His companion walked to the edge of the porch and pushed back her sunbonnet to look.

"Yes," she announced, "that's Jawn; he's early."

She piled her cushiony hands on the end of the broom-handle, and stood still, gazing absently at the approaching team.

"I hope your mother's a Christian woman," she resumed, with a sort of corpulent severity.

The young man's face clouded, and then cleared again whimsically.

"I really never inquired," he said lightly; "but I am inclined to think she is. She is certainly not a pagan."

"You spoke as if she was a good deal wrapped up in you," continued his hostess, addressing herself unctuously to the landscape. "I was thinkin' she'd need something to sustain her if you was to be taken away. There's nothing but religion that can prepare us for whatever comes. I wonder who that Jawn's a-bringin' now," she broke off suddenly, holding one of her fat hands above her eyes and

leaning forward with a start. "He does pick up the queerest lot. I just held my breath the other day when I saw him fetchin' you. I'd been wantin' a boarder all summer, and kind of lookin' for one, but I wasn't no more ready for you than if you'd been measles. It does seem sometimes as if men-folks take a satisfaction in seein' how they can put a woman to."

Mrs. Dysart wobbled heavily indoors, where she creaked about unresignedly, putting things to rights. Palmerston closed his eyes and struggled with a smile that kept breaking into a noiseless laugh. He had a fair, high-bred face, and his smile emphasized its boyishness.

When the wagon rattled into the acacias west of the vineyard, he got up and sauntered toward the barn. John Dysart saw him coming, and took two or three steps toward him with his hand at the side of his mouth.

"He's deaf," he whispered with a violent facial enunciation which must have assailed the stranger's remaining senses like a yell. "I think you'll like him; he's a wonderful talker."

The newcomer was a large, seedy-looking man, with the resigned, unexpectant manner of the deaf. Dysart went around the wagon, and the visitor put up his trumpet.

"Professor Brownell," John called into it. "I want to make you acquainted with Mr. Palmerston. Mr. Palmerston is a young man from the East, a student at Cambridge – no, Oxford" —

"Ann Arbor," interrupted the young man, eagerly.

Dysart ignored the interruption. "He's out here for his health."

The stranger nodded toward the young man approvingly, and dropped the trumpet as if he had heard enough.

"How do you do, Mr. Palmerston?" he said, reaching down to clasp the young fellow's slim white hand. "I'm glad to meet a scholar in these wilds."

Palmerston blushed a helpless pink, and murmured politely. The stranger dismounted from the wagon with the awkwardness of age and avoirdupois. John Dysart stood just behind his guest, describing him as if he were a panorama: —

"I never saw his beat. He talks just like a book. He's filled me chuck-full of science on the way up. He knows all about the inside of the earth from the top crust to China. Ask him something about his machine, and get him started."

Palmerston glanced inquiringly toward the trumpet. The stranger raised it to his ear and leaned graciously toward him.

"Mr. Dysart is mistaken," called Palmerston, in the high, lifeless voice with which we all strive to reconcile the deaf to their affliction; "I am a Western man, from Ann Arbor."

"Better still, better still," interrupted the newcomer, grasping his hand again; "you'll be broader, more progressive – 'the heir of all the ages,' and so forth. I was denied such privileges in my youth. But nature is an open book, 'sermons in stones.'" He turned toward the wagon and took out a small leather valise, handling it with evident care.

Dysart winked at the young man, and pointed toward the satchel.

"Jawn," called Mrs. Dysart seethingly, from the kitchen door, "what's the trouble?"

John's facial contortions stopped abruptly, as if the mainspring had snapped. He took off his hat and scratched his head gingerly with the tip of his little finger. He had a round, bald head, with a fringe of smooth, red-brown hair below the baldness that made it look like a filbert.

"I'm coming, Emeline," he called, glancing hurriedly from the two men to the vicinity of his wife's voice, as if anxious to bisect himself mentally and leave his hospitality with his guest.

"I'll look after Professor Brownell," said Palmerston; "he can step into my tent and brush up."

Dysart's countenance cleared.

"Good," he said eagerly, starting on a quick run toward the kitchen door. When he was half-way there he turned and put up his hand again. "Draw him out!" he called in a stentorian whisper. "You'd ought to hear him talk; it's great. Get him started about his machine."

Palmerston smiled at the unnecessary admonition. The stranger had been talking all the time in a placid, brook-like manner while he felt under the wagon-seat for a second and much smaller traveling-bag. The young man possessed himself of this after having been refused the first by a gentle motion of the owner's hand. The visitor accepted his signal of invitation, and followed him toward the tent.

"Our universities and colleges are useful in their way; they no doubt teach many things that are valuable: but they are not practical; they all fail in the application of knowledge to useful ends. I am not an educated man myself, but I have known many who are, and they are all alike – shallow, superficial, visionary. They need to put away their books and sit down among the everlasting hills and think. You have done well to come out here, young man. This is good; you will grow."

He stopped at the door of the tent and took off his rusty hat. The breeze blew his long linen duster about his legs.

"Have you looked much into electrical phenomena?" he asked, putting up his trumpet.

Palmerston moved a step back, and said: "No; not at all." Then he raised his hand to possess himself of the ear-piece, and colored as he remembered that it was not a telephone. His companion seemed equally oblivious of his confusion and of his reply.

"I have made some discoveries," he went on; "I shall be pleased to talk them over with you. They will revolutionize this country." He waved his hand toward the mesa. "Every foot of this land will sometime blossom as the rose; greasewood and sage-brush will give place to the orange and the vine. Water is king in California, and there are rivers of water locked in these mountains. We must find it; yes, yes, my young friend, we must find it, and we *can* find it. I have solved that. The solution is here." He stooped and patted his satchel affectionately. "This little instrument is California's best friend. There is a future for all these valleys, wilder than our wildest dreams."

Palmerston nodded with a guilty feeling of having approved statements of which he intended merely to acknowledge the receipt, and motioned his guest into the white twilight of the tent.

"Make yourself comfortable, professor," he called. "I want to find Dysart and get my mail."

As he neared the kitchen door Mrs. Dysart's voice came to him enveloped in the sizzle of frying meat.

"Well, I don't know, Jawn; he mayn't be just the old-fashioned water-witch, but it ain't right; it's tamperin' with the secrets of the Most High, that's what I think."

"Well, now, Emeline, you hadn't ought to be hasty. He don't lay claim to anything more'n natural; he says it's all based on scientific principles. He says he can tell me just where to tunnel – Now, here's Mr. Palmerston; he's educated. I'm going to rely on him."

"Well, I'm goin' to rely on my heavenly Fawther," said Mrs. Dysart solemnly, from the quaking pantry.

Palmerston stood in the doorway, smiling. John jumped up and clapped his hand vigorously on his breast pockets.

"Well, now, there! I left your mail in the wagon in my other coat," he said, hooking his arm through the young man's and drawing him toward the barn. "Did you get him turned on?" he asked eagerly, when they were out of his wife's hearing. "How does he strike you, anyway? Doesn't he talk like a book? He wants me to help him find a claim – show him the corners, you know. He's got a daughter down at Los Angeles; she'll come up and keep house for him. He says he'll locate water on shares if I'll help him find a claim and do the tunneling. Emeline she's afraid I'll get left, but I think she'll come round. Isn't it a caution the way he talks science?"

Palmerston acknowledged that it was.

"The chances are that he is a fraud, Dysart," he said kindly; "most of those people are. I'd be very cautious about committing myself."

"Oh, I'm cautious," protested John; "that's one of my peculiarities. Emeline thinks because I look into things I'm not to be trusted. She's so quick herself she can't understand anybody that's slow

and careful. Here's your letters – quite a batch of 'em. Would you mind our putting up a cot in your tent for the professor?"

"Not at all," said the young fellow good-naturedly. "It's excellent discipline to have a deaf man about; you realize how little you have to say that's worth saying."

"That's a fact, that's a fact," said Dysart, rather too cheerfully acquiescent. "A man that can talk like that makes you ashamed to open your head."

Palmerston fell asleep that night to the placid monotone of the newcomer's voice, and awoke at daybreak to hear the same conversational flow just outside the tent. Perhaps it was Dysart's explosive "Good-morning, professor!" which seemed to have missed the trumpet and hurled itself against the canvas wall of the tent close to the sleeper's ear, that awoke him. He sat up in bed and tried to shake off the conviction that his guest had been talking all night. Dysart's greeting made no break in the cheerful optimism that filtered through the canvas.

"Last night I was an old man and dreamed dreams; this morning I am a young man and see visions. I see this thirsty plain fed by irrigating-ditches and covered with bearing orchards. I am impatient to be off on our tramp. This is an ideal spot. With five acres of orange-trees here, producing a thousand dollars per acre, one might give his entire time to scientific investigation."

"He'd want to look after the gophers some," yelled Dysart.

"I am astonished that this country is so little appreciated," continued Brownell, blindly unheeding. "It is no doubt due to the reckless statements of enthusiasts. It is a wonderful country – wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!"

There was a diminuendo in the repeated adjective that told Palmerston the speaker was moving toward the house; and it was from that direction that he heard Mrs. Dysart, a little later, assuring her visitor, in a high, depressed voice, that she hadn't found the country yet that would support anybody without elbow-grease, and she didn't expect to till it was Gawd's will to take her to her heavenly home.

John Dysart and his visitor returned from their trip in the mountains, that evening, tired, dusty, and exultant. The professor's linen duster had acquired several of those triangular rents which have the merit of being beyond masculine repair, and may therefore be conscientiously endured. He sat on the camp-chair at Palmerston's tent door, his finger-tips together and his head thrown back in an ecstasy of content.

"This is certainly the promised land," he said gravely, "a land flowing with milk and honey. Nature has done her share lavishly: soil, climate, scenery – everything but water; yes, and water, too, waiting for the brain, the hand of man, the magic touch of science – the one thing left to be conquered to give the sense of mastery, of possession. This country is ours by right of conquest." He waved his hands majestically toward the valley. "In three months we shall have a stream flowing from these mountains that will transform every foot of ground before you. These people seem worthy, though somewhat narrow. It will be a pleasure to share prosperity with them as freely as they share their poverty with me."

Palmerston glanced conversationally toward the trumpet, and his companion raised it to his ear.

"Dysart is a poor man," shouted Palmerston, "but he is the best fellow in the world. I should hate to see him risk anything on an uncertainty."

Brownell had been nodding his head backward and forward with dreamy emphasis; he now shook it horizontally, closing his eyes. "There is no uncertainty," he said, lowering his trumpet; "that is the advantage of science: you can count upon it with absolute certainty. I am glad the man is poor – very glad; it heightens the pleasure of helping him."

The young man turned away a trifle impatiently.

"A reservoir will entail some expense," the professor rambled on; "but the money will come. To him that hath shall be given."

Palmerston's face completed the quotation, but the speaker went on without opening his eyes: "When the water is once flowing out of the tunnel, capital will flow into it."



"A good deal of capital will flow into the tunnel before any water flows out of it," growled Palmerston, taking advantage of his companion's physical defect to relieve his mind.

Later in the evening Dysart drew the young man into the family conference, relying upon the sympathy of sex in the effort to allay his wife's misgivings.

"The tunnel won't cost over two dollars a foot, with what I can do myself," maintained the little man, "and the professor says we'll strike water that'll drown us out before we've gone a hundred feet. Emeline here she's afraid of it because it sounds like a meracle, but I tell her it's pure science. It isn't any more wonderful than a needle traveling toward a magnet: the machine tells where the water is, and how far off it is, something like a compass – I don't understand it, but I can see that it ain't any more meraculous than a telegraph. It's science."

"Oh, yes, I know," mourned Mrs. Dysart, who overflowed a small rocking-chair on the piazza; "there's folks that think the creation of the world in six days is nothin' but science, but they're not people for Christians to be goin' pardners with. If Gawd has put a hundred feet of dirt on top of that water, I tell Jawn he had his reasons, and I can't think it's right for anybody whose treasure ought to be laid up in heaven to go pryin' into the bowels of the earth huntin' for things that our heavenly Fawther's hid."

"But there's gold, Emeline."

"Oh, yes; I know there's gold, and I know 'the love of money is the root of all evil.' I don't say that the Lord don't reign over the inside of the earth, but I do say that people that get their minds fixed on things that's underground are liable to forget the things that are above."

"Well, now, I'm sure they hadn't ought," protested Dysart. "I'm sure 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof,' Emeline."

Mrs. Dysart sank slowly back in her chair at this unexpected thrust from her own weapon, and then rallied with a long, corpulent sigh.

"Well, I don't know. You recollect that old man was up here last winter, hammerin' around among the rocks as if the earth was a big nut that he was tryin' to crack? I talked with him long enough to find out what he was; he was an *atheist*."

Mrs. Dysart leaned forward and whispered the last word in an awe-struck tone, with her fat eyes fixed reproachfully upon her husband.

"Oh, I guess not, Emeline," pleaded John.

Mrs. Dysart shut her lips and her eyes very tight, and nodded slowly and affirmatively. "Yes, he was. He set right in that identical spot where Mr. Palmerston is a-settin', and talked about the seven theological periods of creation, and the fables of Jonah and the whale and Noah's ark, till I was all of a tremble. Mebbe that's science, Jawn, but *I* call it blaspheming'."

Dysart rested his elbows on his knees and looked over the edge of the porch as if he were gazing into the bottomless pit.

"Oh, come, now, Mrs. Dysart," Palmerston broke in cheerfully; "I'm not at all afraid of Mr. Dysart losing his faith, but I'm very much afraid of his losing his money. I wish he had as good a grip on his purse as he has on his religion."

Mrs. Dysart glanced at the young man with a look of relief to find him agreeing with her in spite of his irreverent commingling of the temporal and the spiritual.

"Well, I'm sure we've lost enough already, when it comes to that," she continued, folding her hands resignedly in her convex lap. "There was that artesian well down at San Pasqual" —

"Well, now, Emeline," her husband broke in eagerly, "that well would have been all right if the tools hadn't stuck. I think yet we'd have got water if we'd gone on."

"We'd 'a' got water if it had 'a' been our heavenly Fawther's will," announced Mrs. Dysart, with solemnity, rising slowly from her chair, which gave a little squeak of relief. "I've got to set the sponge," she went on in the same tone, as if it were some sacred religious rite. "I wish you'd talk it

over with Mr. Palmerston, Jawn, and tell him the offer you've had from this perfessor – I'm sure I don't know what he's perfessor of. He ain't a perfessor of religion – I know that."

She sent her last arrow over her wide shoulder as she passed the two men and creaked into the house. Her husband looked after her gravely.

"Now that's the way with Emeline," he said; "she's all faith, and then, again, she has no faith. Now, I'm just the other way." He rubbed his bald head in a vain attempt to formulate the obverse of his wife's character. "Well, anyway," he resumed, accepting his failure cheerfully, "the professor he wants to find a claim, as I was telling you, but he wants one that's handy to the place he's selected for the tunnel. Of course he won't say just where that is till we get the papers made out, but he gave me a kind of a general idea of it, and the land around there's all mine. He'd have to go 'way over east to find a government section that hasn't been filed on, and of course there'd be a big expense for pipe; so he offers to locate the tunnel for half the water if we get ten inches or over, and I'm to make the tunnel, and deed him twenty acres of land."

"Suppose you get less than ten inches – what then?"

"Then it's all to be mine; but I'm to deed him the land all the same."

"How many inches of water have you from your spring now?"

"About ten, as near as I can guess."

"Well, suppose he locates the tunnel so it will drain your spring; are you to have the expense of the work and the privilege of giving him half the water and twenty acres of land – is that it?"

John rubbed the back of his neck and reflected.

"The professor laughs at the idea of ten inches of water. He says we'll get at least a hundred, maybe more. You see, if we were to get that much, I'd have a lot of water to sell to the settlers below. It 'u'd be a big thing."

"So it would; but there's a big 'if' in there, Dysart. Do you know anything about this man's record?"

"I asked about him down in Los Angeles. Some folks believe in him, and some don't. They say he struck a big stream for them over at San Luis. I don't go much on what people say, anyway; I size a man up, and depend on that. I like the way the professor talks. I don't understand all of it, but he seems to have things pretty pat. Don't you think he has?"

"Yes; he has things pat enough. Most swindlers have. It's their business. Not that I think him a deliberate swindler, Dysart. Possibly he believes in himself. But I hope you'll be cautious."

"Oh, I'm cautious," asserted John. "I'd be a good deal richer man to-day if I hadn't been so cautious. I've spent a lot of time and money looking into things. I'll get there, if caution'll do it. Now, Emeline she's impulsive; she has to be held back; she never examines into anything; but I'm just the other way."

In spite of Palmerston's warning and Mrs. Dysart's fears, temporal and spiritual, negotiations between Dysart and Brownell made rapid progress. The newcomer's tent was pitched upon the twenty acres selected, and gleamed white against the mountain-side, suggesting to Palmerston's idle vision a sail becalmed upon a sage-green sea. "Dysart's ship, which will probably never come in," he said to himself, looking at it with visible indignation, one morning, as he sat at his tent door in that state of fuming indolence which the male American calls taking a rest.

"Practically there is little difference between a knave and a fool," he fretted; "it's the difference between the gun that is loaded and the one that is not: in the long run the unloaded gun does the more mischief. A self-absorbed fool is a knave. After all, dishonesty is only abnormal selfishness; it's a question of degree. Hello, Dysart!" he said aloud, as his host appeared around the tent. "How goes it?"

"Slow," said John emphatically, "slow. I'm feeling my way like a cat, and the professor he's just about as cautious as I am. We're a good team. He's been over the cañon six times, and every time that machine of his'n gives him a new idea. He's getting it down to a fine point. He wanted to go up again to-day, but I guess he can't."

"What's up?" inquired Palmerston indifferently.

"Well, his daughter wrote him she was coming this afternoon, and somebody'll have to meet her down at Malaga when the train comes in. I've just been oiling up the top-buggy, and I thought maybe if you" —

"Why, certainly," interrupted Palmerston, responding amiably to the suggestion of John's manner; "if you think the young lady will not object, I shall be delighted. What time is the train due?"

"Now, that's just what I told Emeline," said John triumphantly. "He'd liever go than not, says I; if he wouldn't then young folks has changed since I can remember. The train gets there about two o'clock. If you jog along kind of comfortable you'll be home before supper. If the girl's as smart as her father, you'll have a real nice visit."

Mrs. Dysart viewed the matter with a pessimism which was scarcely to be distinguished from conventionality.

"I think it's a kind of an imposition, Mr. Palmerston," she said, as her boarder was about to start, "sendin' you away down there for a total stranger. It's a good thing you're not bashful. Some young men would be terribly put out. I'm sure Jawn would 'a' been at your age. But my father wouldn't have sent a strange young man after one of his daughters — he knowed us too well. My, oh! just to think of it! I'd have fell all in a heap."

Palmerston ventured a hope that the young lady would not be completely unnerved.

"Oh, I'm not frettin' about *her*," said his hostess. "I don't doubt she can take care of *herself*. If she's like some of her folks, she'll talk you blind."

Palmerston drove away to hide the smile that teased the corners of his mouth.

"The good woman has the instincts of a chaperon, without the traditions," he reflected, letting his smile break into a laugh. "Her sympathy is with the weaker sex when it comes to a personal encounter. We may need her services yet, who knows?"

Malaga was a flag-station, and the shed which was supposed to shelter its occasional passengers from the heat of summer and the rain of winter was flooded with afternoon sunshine. Palmerston drove into the square shadow of the shed roof, and set his feet comfortably upon the dashboard while he waited. He was not aware of any very lively curiosity concerning the young woman for whom he was waiting. That he had formed some nebulous hypothesis of vulgarity was evidenced by his whimsical hope that her prevailing atmosphere would not be musk; aggressive perfumery of some sort seemed inevitable. He found himself wondering what trait in her father had led him to this deduction, and drifted idly about in the haze of heredity until the whistle of the locomotive warned him to withdraw his feet from their elevation and betake himself to the platform. Half a minute later the engine panted onward and the young man found himself, with uplifted hat, confronting a slender figure clad very much as he was, save for the skirt that fell in straight, dark folds to the ground.

"Miss Brownell?" inquired Palmerston smiling.

The young woman looked at him with evident surprise.

"Where is my father?" she asked abruptly.

"He was unable to come. He regretted it very much. I was so fortunate as to take his place. Allow me" — He stooped toward her satchel.

"Unable to come — is he ill?" pursued the girl, without moving.

"Oh, no," explained Palmerston hastily; "he is quite well. It was something else — some matter of business."

"Business!" repeated the young woman, with ineffable scorn.

She turned and walked rapidly toward the buggy. Palmerston followed with her satchel. She gave him a preoccupied "Thank you" as he assisted her to a seat and shielded her dress with the shabby robe.

"Do you know anything about this business of my father's?" she asked as they drove away.

"Very little; it is between him and Mr. Dysart, with whom I am boarding. Mr. Dysart has mentioned it to me." The young man spoke with evident reluctance. His companion turned her clear, untrammelled gaze upon him.

"You needn't be afraid to say what you think. Of course it is all nonsense," she said bitterly.

Palmerston colored under her intent gaze, and smiled faintly.

"I have said what I think to Mr. Dysart. Don't you really mean that I need not be afraid to say what *you* think?"

She was still looking at him, or rather at the place where he was. She turned a little more when he spoke, and regarded him as if he had suddenly materialized.

"I think it is all nonsense," she said gravely, as if she were answering a question. Then she turned away again and knitted her brows. Palmerston glanced covertly now and then at her profile, unwillingly aware of its beauty. She was handsome, strikingly, distinguishedly handsome, he said to himself; but there was something lacking. It must be femininity, since he felt the lack and was masculine. He smiled to think how much alike they must appear – he and this very gentlemanly young woman beside him. He thought of her soft felt hat and the cut of her dark-blue coat, and there arose in him a rigidly subdued impulse to offer her a cigar, to ask her if she had a daily paper about her, to – She turned upon him suddenly, her eyes full of tears.

"I am crying!" she exclaimed angrily. "How unspeakably silly!"

Palmerston's heart stopped with that nameless terror which the actual man always experiences when confronted by this phase of the ideal woman. He had been so serene, so comfortable, under the unexpected that there flashed into his mind a vague sense of injury that she should surprise him in this way with the expected. It was inconsiderate, inexcusable; then, with an inconsistency worthy of a better sex, he groped after an excuse for the inexcusable.

"You are very nervous – your journey has tired you – you are not strong," he pleaded.

"I am *not* nervous," insisted the young woman indignantly. "I have no nerves – I detest them. And I am quite as strong as you are." The young fellow winced. "It is not that. It is only because I cannot have my own way. I cannot make people do as I wish." She spoke with a heat that seemed to dry her tears.

Palmerston sank back and let the case go by default. "If you like that view of it better" —

"I like the truth," the girl broke in vehemently. "I am so tired of talk! Why must we always cover up the facts with a lot of platitudes?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Palmerston lightly. "I suppose there ought to be a skeleton of truth under all we say, but one doesn't need to rattle his bones to prove that he has them."

The girl laughed. Palmerston caught a glimpse of something reassuring in her laugh.

"It might not be cheerful," she admitted, "but it would be honest, and we might learn to like it. Besides, the truth is not always disagreeable."

"Wouldn't the monotony of candor appall us?" urged Palmerston. "Isn't it possible that our deceptions are all the individuality we have?"

"Heaven forbid!" said his companion curtly.

They drove on without speaking. The young man was obstinately averse to breaking the silence, which, nevertheless, annoyed him. He had a theory that feminine chatter was disagreeable. Just why he should feel aggrieved that this particular young woman did not talk to him he could not say. No doubt he would have resented with high disdain the suggestion that his vanity had been covertly feeding for years upon the anxiety of young women to make talk for his diversion.

"Do you think my father has closed his agreement with this man of whom you were speaking – this Mr. Dysart?" asked Miss Brownell, returning to the subject as if they had never left it.

"I am very certain he has not; at least, he had not this morning," rejoined Palmerston.

"I wish it might be prevented," she said earnestly, with a note of appeal.

"I have talked with Dysart, but my arguments fail to impress him; perhaps you may be more successful."

Palmerston was aware of responding to her tone rather than to her words. The girl shook her head.

"I can do nothing. People who have only common sense are at a terrible disadvantage when it comes to argument. I know it is all nonsense; but a great many people seem to prefer nonsense. I believe my father would die if he were reduced to bare facts."

"There is something in that," laughed Palmerston. "A theory makes a very comfortable mental garment, if it is roomy enough."

The young woman turned and glanced at him curiously, as if she could not divine what he was laughing at.

"They are like children – such people. My father is like a child. He does not live in the world; he cannot defend himself."

Palmerston's skepticism rushed into his face. The girl looked at him, and the color mounted to her forehead.

"You do not believe in him!" she broke out. "It cannot be – you cannot think – you do not know him!"

"I know very little of your father's theories, Miss Brownell," protested Palmerston. "You cannot blame me if I question them; you seem to question them yourself."

"His theories – I loathe them!" She spoke with angry emphasis. "It is not that; it is himself. I cannot bear to think that you – that any one" —

"Pardon me," interrupted Palmerston; "we were speaking of his theories. I have no desire to discuss your father."

He knew his tone was resentful. He found himself wondering whether it was an excess of egotism or of humility that made her ignore his personality.

"Why should we not discuss him?" she asked, turning her straightforward eyes upon him.

"Because" – Palmerston broke into an impatient laugh – "because we are not disembodied spirits; at least, I am not."

The girl gave him a look of puzzled incomprehension, and turned back to her own thoughts. That they were troubled thoughts her face gave abundant evidence. Palmerston waited curiously eager for some manifestation of social grace, some comment on the scenery which should lead by the winding path of young-ladyism to the Mecca of her personal tastes and preferences; should unveil that sacred estimate of herself which she so gladly shared with others, but which others too often failed to share with her.

"I wish you would tell me all you know about it," she said presently, "this proposition my father has made. He writes me very indefinitely, and sometimes it is hard for me to learn, even when I am with him, just what he is doing. He forgets that he has not told me."

The young man hesitated, weighing the difficulties that would beset him if he should attempt to explain his hesitation, seeing also the more tangible difficulties of evasion if she should turn her clear eyes upon him. It would be better for Dysart if she knew, he said to himself. They had made no secret of the transaction, and sooner or later she must hear of it from others, if not from her father. He yielded to the infection of her candor, and told her what she asked. She listened with knitted brows and an introspective glance.

"Mr. Dysart might lose his work," she commented tentatively.

Palmerston was silent.

The girl turned abruptly. "Could he lose anything else?" The color swept across her face, and her voice had a half-pathetic menace in it.

"Every business arrangement is uncertain, contains a possibility of loss."

Palmerston was defiantly aware that he had not answered her question. He emphasized his defiance by jerking the reins.

"Don't!" said the girl reproachfully. "I think his mouth is tender."

"You like horses?" inquired the young man, with a sensation of relief.

She shook her head. "No; I think not. I never notice them except when they seem uncomfortable."

"But if you didn't like them you wouldn't care."

"Oh, yes, I should. I don't like to see anything uncomfortable."

Palmerston laughed. "You have made me very uncomfortable, and you do not seem to mind. I must conclude that you have not noticed it, and that conclusion hurts my vanity."

The young woman did not turn her head.

"I try to be candid," she said, "and I am always being misunderstood. I think I must be very stupid."

Her companion began to breathe more freely. She was going to talk of herself, after all. He was perfectly at home when it came to that.

"Not at all," he said graciously; "you only make the rest of us appear stupid. We are at a disadvantage when we get what we do not expect, and none of us expect candor."

"But if we tell the truth ourselves, I don't see why we shouldn't expect it from others."

"Oh, yes, if we ourselves tell the truth."

"I think you have been telling me the truth," she said, turning her steadfast eyes upon him.

"Thank you," said Palmerston lightly. "I hope my evident desire for approval doesn't suggest a sense of novelty in my position."

Miss Brownell smiled indulgently, and then knitted her brows. "I am glad you have told me," she said; "I may not be able to help it, but it is better for me to know."

They were nearing the Dysart house, and Palmerston remembered that he had no definite instruction concerning the newcomer's destination.

"I think I will take her directly to her father's tent," he reflected, "and let Mrs. Dysart plan her own attack upon the social situation."

When he had done this and returned to his boarding-place, there was a warmth in the greeting of his worthy hostess which suggested a sense of his recent escape from personal danger.

"I'm real glad to see you safe home, Mr. Palmerston," she said amply. "I don't wonder you look fagged; the ride through the dust was hard enough without having all sorts of other things to hatchel you. I do hope you won't have that same kind of a phthisicky ketch in your breath that you had the other night after you overdone. I think it was mostly nervousness, and, dear knows, you've had enough to make you nervous to-day. I told Jawn after you was gone that I'd hate to be answerable for the consequences."

Two days later John Dysart came into Palmerston's tent, and drew a camp-stool close to the young man's side.

"I'm in a kind of a fix," he said, seating himself and fastening his eyes on the floor with an air of profound self-commiseration. "You see, this girl of Brownell's she came up where I was mending the flume yesterday, and we got right well acquainted. She seems friendly. She took off her coat and laid it on a boulder, and we set down there in our shirt-sleeves and had quite a talk. I think she means all right, but she's visionary. I can't understand it, living with a practical man like the professor. But you can't always tell. Now, there's Emeline. Emeline means well, but she lets her prejudices run away with her judgment. I guess women generally do. But, someway, this girl rather surprised me. When I first saw her I thought she looked kind of reasonable; maybe it was her cravat – I don't know."

John shook his head in a baffled way. He had taken off his hat, and the handkerchief which he had spread over his bald crown to protect it from the flies drooped pathetically about his honest face.

"What did Miss Brownell say?" asked Palmerston, flushing a little.

John looked at him absently from under his highly colored awning. "The girl? Oh, she don't understand. She wanted me to be careful. I told her I'd been careful all my life, and I wasn't likely to rush into anything now. She thinks her father's 'most too sanguine about the water, but she doesn't understand the machine – I could see that. She said she was afraid I'd lose something, and she wants me to back out right now. I'm sure I don't know what to do. I want to treat everybody right."

"Including yourself, I hope," suggested Palmerston.

"Yes, of course. I don't feel quite able to give up all my prospects just for a notion; and yet I want to do the square thing by Emeline. It's queer about women – especially Emeline. I've often thought if there was only men it would be easier to make up your mind; but still, I suppose we'd oughtn't to feel that way. They don't mean any harm."

John drew the protecting drapery from his head, and lashed his bald crown with it softly, as if in punishment for his seeming disloyalty.

"You could withdraw from the contract now without any great loss to Mr. Brownell," suggested Palmerston.

John looked at him blankly. "Why, of course he wouldn't lose anything; I'd be the loser. But I haven't any notion of doing that. I'm only wondering whether I ought to tell Emeline about the girl. You see, Emeline's kind of impulsive, and she's took a dead set against the girl because, you see, she thinks," – John leaned forward confidentially and shut one eye, as if he were squinting along his recital to see that it was in line with the facts, – "you see, she thinks – well, I don't know as I'd ought to take it on myself to say just what Emeline thinks, but I think she thinks – well, I don't know as I'd ought to say what I think she thinks, either; but you'd understand if you'd been married."

"Oh, I can understand," asserted the young man. "Mrs. Dysart's position is very natural. But I think you should tell her what Miss Brownell advises. There is no other woman near, and it will prove very uncomfortable for the young lady if your wife remains unfriendly toward her. You certainly don't want to be unjust, Dysart."

John shook his head dolorously over this extension of his moral obligations.

"No," he declared valiantly; "I want to be square with everybody; but I don't want to prejudice Emeline against the professor, and I'm afraid this would. You see, Emeline's this way – well, I don't know as I'd ought to say just how Emeline is, but you know she's an *awful good woman*!"

John leaned forward and gave the last three words a slow funereal emphasis which threatened his companion's gravity.

"Oh, I know," Palmerston broke out quickly; "Mrs. Dysart's a good woman, and she's a very smart woman, too; she has good ideas."

"Yes, yes; Emeline's smart," John made haste to acquiesce; "she's smart as far as she knows, but when she don't quite understand, then she's prejudiced. I guess women are generally prejudiced about machinery; they can't be expected to see into it: but still, if you think I'd ought to tell her what this Brownell girl says, why, I'm a-going to do it."

John got up with the air of a man harassed but determined, and went out of the tent.

The next afternoon Mrs. Dysart put on her beaded dolman and her best bonnet and panted through the tar-weed to call upon her new neighbor. Palmerston watched the good woman's departure, and awaited her return, taunting himself remorselessly meanwhile for the curiosity which prompted him to place a decoy-chair near his tent door, and exulting shamefacedly at the success of his ruse when she sank into it with the interrogative glance with which fat people always commit themselves to furniture.

"Well, I've been to see her, and I must say, for a girl that's never found grace, she's about the straightforwardest person I ever came across. I know I was prejudiced." Mrs. Dysart took off her bonnet, a sacred edifice constructed of cotton velvet, frowzy feathers, and red glass currants, and gazed at it penitentially. "That father of hers is enough to prejudice a saint. But the girl ain't to blame."

I think she must have had a prayin' mother, though she says she doesn't remember anything about her exceptin' her clothes, which does sound worldly."

Mrs. Dysart straightened out the varnished muslin leaves of her horticultural headgear, and held the structure at arm's length with a sigh of gratified sense and troubled spirit.

"I invited her to come to the mothers' meetin' down at Mrs. Stearns's in the wash with me next Thursday afternoon, and I'm goin' to have her over to dinner some day when the old perfessor's off on a tramp. I try to have Christian grace, but I can't quite go him, though I would like to see the girl brought into the fold."

Palmerston remembered the steadfast eyes of the wanderer, and wondered how they had met all this. His companion replaced the bonnet on her head, where it lurched a little, by reason of insufficient skewering, as she got up.

"Then you were pleased with Miss Brownell?" the young man broke out, rather senselessly, he knew – aware, all at once, of a desire to hear more.

Mrs. Dysart did not sit down.

"Yes," she said judicially; "for a girl without any bringin' up, and with no religious infloences, and no mother and no father to speak of, I think she's full as good as some that's had more chances. I've got to go and start a fire now," she went on, with an air of willingness but inability to continue the subject. "There's Jawn comin' after the milk-pail; I do wish he could be brought to listen to reason."

Palmerston watched the good woman as she labored down the path, her dusty skirts drawn close about her substantial ankles, and the beaded dolman glittering unfeelingly in the sun.

"I hope she has a sense of humor," he said to himself. Then he got up hastily, went into the tent, and brought out a letter, which he read carefully from the beginning to the signature scribbled in the upper corner of the first page – "Your own Bess." After that he sat quite still, letting his glance play with the mists of the valley, until Mrs. Dysart rang the supper-bell.

"If she has a sense of humor, how much she must enjoy her!" he said to himself, with the confusion of pronouns we all allow ourselves and view with such scorn in others.

When a man first awakes to the fact that he is thinking of the wrong woman, it is always with a comfortable sense of certainty that he can change his attitude of mind by a slight effort of the will. If he does not make the effort, it is only because he is long past the necessity of demonstrating himself to himself, and not from any fickleness of fancy on his own part. It was in this comfortable state of certainty that Sidney Palmerston betook himself, a few days later, to the Brownell tent, armed with a photograph which might have been marked "Exhibit A" in the case which he was trying with himself before his own conscience. If there was in his determination to place himself right with Miss Brownell any trace of solicitude for the young woman, to the credit of his modesty be it said, he had not formulated it. Perhaps there was. A belief in the general overripeness of feminine affection, and a discreet avoidance of shaking the tree upon which it grows, have in some way become a part of masculine morals, and Sidney Palmerston was still young enough to take himself seriously.

Miss Brownell had moved a table outside the tent, and was bending over a map fastened to it by thumb-tacks.

"I am trying to find out what my father is doing," she said, looking straight into Palmerston's eyes without a word of greeting. "I suppose you know they are about to begin work on the tunnel."

The young man was beginning to be a trifle tired of the tunnel. "Dysart mentioned it yesterday," he said. "May I sit down, Miss Brownell?"

She gave a little start, and went into the tent for another chair. When she reappeared, Palmerston met her at the tent door and took the camp-chair from her hand.

"I want to sit here," he said willfully, turning his back toward the table. "I don't want to talk about the tunnel; I want to turn the conversation upon agreeable things – myself, for instance."

She frowned upon him smilingly, and put her hand to her cheek with a puzzled gesture.



"Have I talked too much about the tunnel?" she asked. "I thought something might be done to stop it."

Palmerston shook his head. "You have done everything in your power. Dysart has been fairly warned. Besides, who knows?" he added rather flippantly. "They may strike a hundred inches of water, as your father predicts."

"I have not been objecting merely to rid myself of responsibility; I have never felt any. I only wanted – I hoped" – She stopped, aware of the unresponsive chill that always came at mention of her father. "I *know* he is honest."

"Of course," protested Palmerston, with artificial warmth; "and, really, I think the place for the work is well selected. I am not much of an engineer, but I went up the other day and looked about, and there are certainly indications of water. I" – he stopped suddenly, aware of his mistake.

The girl had not noticed it. "I wish I could make people over," she said, curling her fingers about her thumb, and striking the arm of her chair with the soft side of the resultant fist, after the manner of women.

Her companion laughed.

"Not every person, I hope; not this one, at least." He drew the photograph from his breast pocket and held it toward her. She took it from him, and looked at it absently an instant.

"What a pretty girl!" she said, handing it back to him. "Your sister?"

The young man flushed. "No; my fiancée."

She held out her hand and took the card again, looking at it with fresh eyes.

"A *very* pretty girl," she said. "What is her name?"

"Elizabeth Arnold."

"Where does she live?"

Palmerston mentioned a village in Michigan. His companion gave another glance at the picture, and laid it upon the arm of the chair. The young man rescued it from her indifference with a little irritable jerk. She was gazing unconsciously toward the horizon.

"Don't you intend to congratulate me?" he inquired with a nettled laugh.

She turned quickly, flushing to her forehead. "Pardon me. I said she was very pretty – I thought young men found that quite sufficient. I have never heard them talk much of girls in any other way. But perhaps I should have told you: I care very little about photographs, especially of women. They never look like them. They always make me think of paper dolls."

She halted between her sentences with an ungirlish embarrassment which Palmerston was beginning to find dangerously attractive.

"But the women themselves – you find them interesting?"

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