

BARR ROBERT

IN THE MIDST
OF ALARMS

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TO E.B.

CHAPTER I

In the marble-floored vestibule of the Metropolitan Grand Hotel in Buffalo, Professor Stillson Renmark stood and looked about him with the anxious manner of a person unused to the gaudy splendor of the modern American house of entertainment. The professor had paused halfway between the door and the marble counter, because he began to fear that he had arrived at an inopportune time, that something unusual was going on. The hurry and bustle bewildered him.

An omnibus, partly filled with passengers, was standing at the door, its steps backed over the curbstone, and beside it was a broad, flat van, on which stalwart porters were heaving great square, iron-bound trunks belonging to commercial travelers, and the more fragile, but not less bulky, saratogas, doubtless the property of the ladies who sat patiently in the omnibus. Another vehicle which had just arrived was backing up to the curb, and the irate driver used language suitable to the occasion; for the two restive horses were not behaving exactly in the way he liked.

A man with a stentorian, but monotonous and mournful, voice was filling the air with the information that a train was about to depart for Albany, Saratoga, Troy, Boston, New York, and the East. When he came to the words "the East," his voice dropped to a sad minor key, as if the man despaired of the fate of those who took their departure in that direction. Every now and then a brazen gong sounded sharply; and one of the negroes who sat in a row on a bench along the marble-paneled wall sprang forward to the counter, took somebody's handbag, and disappeared in the direction of the elevator with the newly arrived guest following him. Groups of men stood here and there conversing, heedless of the rush of arrival and departure around them.

Before the broad and lofty plate-glass windows sat a row of men, some talking, some reading, and some gazing outside, but all with their feet on the brass rail which had been apparently put there for that purpose. Nearly everybody was smoking a cigar. A lady of dignified mien came down the hall to the front of the counter, and spoke quietly to the clerk, who bent his well-groomed head deferentially on one side as he listened to what she had to say. The men instantly made way for her. She passed along among them as composedly as if she were in her own drawing room, inclining her head slightly to one or other of her acquaintances, which salutation was gravely acknowledged by the raising of the hat and the temporary removal of the cigar from the lips.

All this was very strange to the professor, and he felt himself in a new world, with whose customs he was not familiar. Nobody paid the slightest attention to him as he stood there among it all with his satchel in his hand. As he timidly edged up to the counter, and tried to accumulate courage enough to address the clerk, a young man came forward, flung his handbag on the polished top of the counter, metaphorically brushed the professor aside, pulled the bulky register toward him, and inscribed his name on the page with a rapidity equaled only by the illegibility of the result.

"Hello, Sam!" he said to the clerk. "How's things? Get my telegram?"

"Yes," answered the clerk; "but I can't give you 27. It's been taken for a week. I reserved 85 for you, and had to hold on with my teeth to do that."

The reply of the young man was merely a brief mention of the place of torment.

"It is hot," said the clerk blandly. "In from Cleveland?"

"Yes. Any letters for me?"

"Couple of telegrams. You'll find them up in 85."

"Oh, you were cocksure I'd take that room?"

"I was cocksure you'd have to. It is that or the fifth floor. We're full. Couldn't give a better room to the President if he came."

"Oh, well, what's good enough for the President I can put up with for a couple of days."

The hand of the clerk descended on the bell. The negro sprang forward and took the "grip."

"Eighty-five," said the clerk; and the drummer and the Negro disappeared.

“Is there any place where I could leave my bag for a while?” the professor at last said timidly to the clerk.

“Your bag?”

The professor held it up in view.

“Oh, your grip. Certainly. Have a room, sir?” And the clerk’s hand hovered over the bell.

“No. At least, not just yet. You see, I’m—”

“All right. The baggage man there to the left will check it for you.”

“Any letters for Bond?” said a man, pushing himself in front of the professor. The clerk pulled out a fat bunch of letters from the compartment marked “B,” and handed the whole lot to the inquirer, who went rapidly over them, selected two that appeared to be addressed to him, and gave the letters a push toward the clerk, who placed them where they were before.

The professor paused a moment, then, realizing that the clerk had forgotten him, sought the baggage man, whom he found in a room filled with trunks and valises. The room communicated with the great hall by means of a square opening whose lower ledge was breast high. The professor stood before it, and handed the valise to the man behind this opening, who rapidly attached one brass check to the handle with a leather thong, and flung the other piece of brass to the professor. The latter was not sure but there was something to pay, still he quite correctly assumed that if there had been the somewhat brusque man would have had no hesitation in mentioning the fact; in which surmise his natural common sense proved a sure guide among strange surroundings. There was no false delicacy about the baggage man.

Although the professor was to a certain extent bewildered by the condition of things, there was still in his nature a certain dogged persistence that had before now stood him in good stead, and which had enabled him to distance, in the long run, much more brilliant men. He was not at all satisfied with his brief interview with the clerk. He resolved to approach that busy individual again, if he could arrest his attention. It was some time before he caught the speaker’s eye, as it were, but when he did so, he said:

“I was about to say to you that I am waiting for a friend from New York who may not yet have arrived. His name is Mr. Richard Yates of the—”

“Oh, Dick Yates! Certainly. He’s here.” Turning to the negro, he said: “Go down to the billiard room and see if Mr. Yates is there. If he is not, look for him at the bar.”

The clerk evidently knew Mr. Dick Yates. Apparently not noticing the look of amazement that had stolen over the professor’s face, the clerk said:

“If you wait in the reading room, I’ll send Yates to you when he comes. The boy will find him if he’s in the house; but he may be uptown.”

The professor, disliking to trouble the obliging clerk further, did not ask him where the reading room was. He inquired, instead, of a hurrying porter, and received the curt but comprehensive answer:

“Dining room next floor. Reading, smoking, and writing rooms up the hall. Billiard room, bar, and lavatory downstairs.”

The professor, after getting into the barber shop and the cigar store, finally found his way into the reading room. Numerous daily papers were scattered around on the table, each attached to a long, clumsy cleft holder made of wood; while other journals, similarly encumbered, hung from racks against the wall. The professor sat down in one of the easy leather-covered chairs, but, instead of taking up a paper, drew a thin book from his pocket, in which he was soon so absorbed that he became entirely unconscious of his strange surroundings. A light touch on the shoulder brought him up from his book into the world again, and he saw, looking down on him, the stern face of a heavily mustached stranger.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but may I ask if you are a guest of this house?”

A shade of apprehension crossed the professor's face as he slipped the book into his pocket. He had vaguely felt that he was trespassing when he first entered the hotel, and now his doubts were confirmed.

"I—I am not exactly a guest," he stammered.

"What do you mean by not exactly a guest?" continued the other, regarding the professor with a cold and scrutinizing gaze. "A man is either a guest or he is not, I take it. Which is it in your case?"

"I presume, technically speaking, I am not."

"Technically speaking! More evasions. Let me ask you, sir, as an ostensibly honest man, if you imagine that all this luxury—this—this elegance—is maintained for nothing? Do you think, sir, that it is provided for any man who has cheek enough to step out of the street and enjoy it? Is it kept up, I ask, for people who are, technically speaking, not guests?"

The expression of conscious guilt deepened on the face of the unfortunate professor. He had nothing to say. He realized that his conduct was too flagrant to admit of defense, so he attempted none. Suddenly the countenance of his questioner lit up with a smile, and he smote the professor on the shoulder.

"Well, old stick-in-the-mud, you haven't changed a particle in fifteen years! You don't mean to pretend you don't know me?"

"You can't—you can't be Richard Yates?"

"I not only can, but I can't be anybody else. I know, because I have often tried. Well, well, well, well! Stilly we used to call you; don't you remember? I'll never forget that time we sang 'Oft in the stilly night' in front of your window when you were studying for the exams. You always *were* a quiet fellow, Stilly. I've been waiting for you nearly a whole day. I was up just now with a party of friends when the boy brought me your card—a little philanthropic gathering—sort of mutual benefit arrangement, you know: each of us contributed what we could spare to a general fund, which was given to some deserving person in the crowd."

"Yes," said the professor dryly. "I heard the clerk telling the boy where he would be most likely to find you."

"Oh, you did, eh?" cried Yates, with a laugh. "Yes, Sam generally knows where to send for me; but he needn't have been so darned public about it. Being a newspaper man, I know what ought to go in print and what should have the blue pencil run through it. Sam is very discreet, as a general thing; but then he knew, of course, the moment he set eyes on you, that you were an old pal of mine."

Again Yates laughed, a very bright and cheery laugh for so evidently wicked a man.

"Come along," he said, taking the professor by the arm. "We must get you located."

They passed out into the hall, and drew up at the clerk's counter.

"I say, Sam," cried Yates, "can't you do something better for us than the fifth floor? I didn't come to Buffalo to engage in ballooning. No sky parlors for me, if I can help it."

"I'm sorry, Dick," said the clerk; "but I expect the fifth floor will be gone when the Chicago express gets in."

"Well, what can you do for us, anyhow?"

"I can let you have 518. That's the next room to yours. Really, they're the most comfortable rooms in the house this weather. Fine lookout over the lake. I wouldn't mind having a sight of the lake myself, if I could leave the desk."

"All right. But I didn't come to look at the lake, nor yet at the railroad tracks this side, nor at Buffalo Creek either, beautiful and romantic as it is, nor to listen to the clanging of the ten thousand locomotives that pass within hearing distance for the delight of your guests. The fact is that, always excepting Chicago, Buffalo is more like—for the professor's sake I'll say Hades, than any other place in America."

"Oh, Buffalo's all right," said the clerk, with that feeling of local loyalty which all Americans possess. "Say, are you here on this Fenian snap?"

“What Fenian snap?” asked the newspaper man.

“Oh! don’t you know about it? I thought, the moment I saw you, that you were here for this affair. Well, don’t say I told you, but I can put you on to one of the big guns if you want the particulars. They say they’re going to take Canada. I told ‘em that I wouldn’t take Canada as a gift, let alone fight for it. I’ve *been* there.”

Yates’ newspaper instinct thrilled him as he thought of the possible sensation. Then the light slowly died out of his eyes when he looked at the professor, who had flushed somewhat and compressed his lips as he listened to the slighting remarks on his country.

“Well, Sam,” said the newspaper man at last, “it isn’t more than once in a lifetime that you’ll find me give the go-by to a piece of news, but the fact is I’m on my vacation just now. About the first I’ve had for fifteen years; so, you see, I must take care of it. No, let the *Argus* get scooped, if it wants to. They’ll value my services all the more when I get back. No. 518, I think you said?”

The clerk handed over the key, and the professor gave the boy the check for his valise at Yates’ suggestion.

“Now, get a move on you,” said Yates to the elevator boy. “We’re going right through with you.” And so the two friends were shot up together to the fifth floor.

CHAPTER II

The sky parlor, as Yates had termed it, certainly commanded a very extensive view. Immediately underneath was a wilderness of roofs. Farther along were the railway tracks that Yates objected to; and a line of masts and propeller funnels marked the windings of Buffalo Creek, along whose banks arose numerous huge elevators, each marked by some tremendous letter of the alphabet, done in white paint against the somber brown of the big building. Still farther to the west was a more grateful and comforting sight for a hot day. The blue lake, dotted with white sails and an occasional trail of smoke, lay shimmering under the broiling sun. Over the water, through the distant summer haze, there could be seen the dim line of the Canadian shore.

“Sit you down,” cried Yates, putting both hands on the other’s shoulders, and pushing him into a chair near the window. Then, placing his finger on the electric button, he added: “What will you drink?”

“I’ll take a glass of water, if it can be had without trouble,” said Renmark.

Yates’ hand dropped from the electric button hopelessly to his side, and he looked reproachfully at the professor.

“Great Heavens!” he cried, “have something mild. Don’t go rashly in for Buffalo water before you realize what it is made of. Work up to it gradually. Try a sherry cobbler or a milk shake as a starter.”

“Thank you, no. A glass of water will do very well for me. Order what you like for yourself.”

“Thanks, I can be depended on for doing that.” He pushed the button, and, when the boy appeared, said: “Bring up an iced cobbler, and charge it to Professor Renmark, No. 518. Bring also a pitcher of ice water for Yates, No. 520. There,” he continued gleefully, “I’m going to have all the drinks, except the ice water, charged to you. I’ll pay the bill, but I’ll keep the account to hold over your head in the future. Professor Stillson Renmark, debtor to Metropolitan Grand—one sherry cobbler, one gin sling, one whisky cocktail, and so on. Now, then, Stilly, let’s talk business. You’re not married, I take it, or you wouldn’t have responded to my invitation so promptly.” The professor shook his head. “Neither am I. You never had the courage to propose to a girl; and I never had the time.”

“Lack of self-conceit was not your failing in the old days, Richard,” said Renmark quietly.

Yates laughed. “Well, it didn’t hold me back any, to my knowledge. Now I’ll tell you how I’ve got along since we attended old Scragmore’s academy together, fifteen years ago. How time does fly! When I left, I tried teaching for one short month. I had some theories on the education of our youth which did not seem to chime in with the prejudices the school trustees had already formed on the subject.”

The professor was at once all attention. Touch a man on his business, and he generally responds by being interested.

“And what were your theories?” he asked.

“Well, I thought a teacher should look after the physical as well as the mental welfare of his pupils. It did not seem to me that his duty to those under his charge ended with mere book learning.”

“I quite agree with you,” said the professor cordially.

“Thanks. Well, the trustees didn’t. I joined the boys at their games, hoping my example would have an influence on their conduct on the playground as well as in the schoolroom. We got up a rattling good cricket club. You may not remember that I stood rather better in cricket at the academy than I did in mathematics or grammar. By handicapping me with several poor players, and having the best players among the boys in opposition, we made a pretty evenly matched team at school section No. 12. One day, at noon, we began a game. The grounds were in excellent condition, and the opposition boys were at their best. My side was getting the worst of it. I was very much interested; and, when one o’clock came, I thought it a pity to call school and spoil so good and interesting a contest. The

boys were unanimously of the same opinion. The girls were happy, picnicking under the trees. So we played cricket all the afternoon.”

“I think that was carrying your theory a little too far,” said the professor dubiously.

“Just what the trustees thought when they came to hear of it. So they dismissed me; and I think my leaving was the only case on record where the pupils genuinely mourned a teacher’s departure. I shook the dust of Canada from my feet, and have never regretted it. I tramped to Buffalo, continuing to shake the dust off at every step. (Hello! here’s your drinks at last, Stilly. I had forgotten about them—an unusual thing with me. That’s all right, boy; charge it to room 518. Ah! that hits the spot on a hot day.) Well, where was I? Oh, yes, at Buffalo. I got a place on a paper here, at just enough to keep life in me; but I liked the work. Then I drifted to Rochester at a bigger salary, afterward to Albany at a still bigger salary, and of course Albany is only a few hours from New York, and that is where all newspaper men ultimately land, if they are worth their salt. I saw a small section of the war as special correspondent, got hurt, and rounded up in the hospital. Since then, although only a reporter, I am about the top of the tree in that line, and make enough money to pay my poker debts and purchase iced drinks to soothe the asperities of the game. When there is anything big going on anywhere in the country, I am there, with other fellows to do the drudgery; I writing the picturesque descriptions and interviewing the big men. My stuff goes red-hot over the telegraph wire, and the humble postage stamp knows my envelopes no more. I am acquainted with every hotel clerk that amounts to anything from New York to San Francisco. If I could save money, I should be rich, for I make plenty; but the hole at the top of my trousers pocket has lost me a lot of cash, and I don’t seem to be able to get it mended. Now, you’ve listened with your customary patience in order to give my self-esteem, as you called it, full sway. I am grateful. I will reciprocate. How about yourself?”

The professor spoke slowly. “I have had no such adventurous career,” he began. “I have not shaken Canadian dust from my feet, and have not made any great success. I have simply plodded; and am in no danger of becoming rich, although I suppose I spend as little as any man. After you were expelled—after you left the aca—”

“Don’t mutilate the good old English language, Stilly. You were right in the first place. I am not thin-skinned. You were saying after I was expelled. Go on.”

“I thought perhaps it might be a sore subject. You remember, you were very indignant at the time, and—”

“Of course I was—and am still, for that matter. It was an outrage!”

“I thought it was proved that you helped to put the pony in the principal’s room.”

“Oh, certainly. *That*. Of course. But what I detested was the way the principal worked the thing. He allowed that villain Spink to turn evidence against us, and Spink stated I originated the affair, whereas I could claim no such honor. It was Spink’s own project, which I fell in with, as I did with every disreputable thing proposed. Of course the principal believed at once that I was the chief criminal. Do you happen to know if Spink has been hanged yet?”

“I believe he is a very reputable business man in Montreal, and much respected.”

“I might have suspected that. Well, you keep your eye on the respected Spink. If he doesn’t fail some day, and make a lot of money, I’m a Dutchman. But go on. This is digression. By the way, just push that electric button. You’re nearest, and it is too hot to move. Thanks. After I was expelled—”

“After your departure I took a diploma, and for a year or two taught a class in the academy. Then, as I studied during my spare time, I got a chance as master of a grammar school near Toronto, chiefly, as I think, though the recommendation of Principal Scragmore. I had my degree by this time. Then—”

There was a gentle tap at the door.

“Come in!” shouted Yates. “Oh, it’s you. Just bring up another cooling cobbler, will you? and charge it, as before, to Professor Renmark, room 518. Yes; and then—”

“And then there came the opening in University College, Toronto. I had the good fortune to be appointed. There I am still, and there I suppose I shall stay. I know very few people, and am better acquainted with books than with men. Those whom I have the privilege of knowing are mostly studious persons, who have made, or will make, their mark in the world of learning. I have not had your advantage, of meeting statesmen who guide the destinies of a great empire.

“No; you always were lucky, Stilly. My experience is that the chaps who do the guiding are more anxious about their own pockets, or their own political advancement, than they are of the destinies. Still, the empire seems to take its course westward just the same. So old Scragmore’s been your friend, has he?”

“He has, indeed.”

“Well, he insulted me only the other day.”

“You astonish me. I cannot imagine so gentlemanly and scholarly a man as Principal Scragmore insulting anybody.”

“Oh, you don’t know him as I do. It was like this: I wanted to find out where you were, for reasons that I shall state hereafter. I cudgled my brains, and then thought of old Scrag. I wrote him, and enclosed a stamped and addressed envelope, as all unsought contributors should do. He answered—But I have his reply somewhere. You shall read it for yourself.”

Yates pulled from his inside pocket a bundle of letters, which he hurriedly fingered over, commenting in a low voice as he did so: “I thought I answered that. Still, no matter. Jingo! haven’t I paid that bill yet? This pass is run out. Must get another.” Then he smiled and sighed as he looked at a letter in dainty handwriting; but apparently he could not find the document he sought.

“Oh, well, it doesn’t matter. I have it somewhere. He returned me the prepaid envelope, and reminded me that United States stamps were of no use in Canada, which of course I should have remembered. But he didn’t pay the postage on his own letter, so that I had to fork out double. Still, I don’t mind that, only as an indication of his meanness. He went on to say that, of all the members of our class, you—*you!*—were the only one who had reflected credit on it. That was the insult. The idea of his making such a statement, when I had told him I was on the New York *Argus!* Credit to the class, indeed! I wonder if he ever heard of Brown after he was expelled. You know, of course. No? Well, Brown, by his own exertions, became president of the Alum Bank in New York, wrecked it, and got off to Canada with a clear half million. *Yes, sir.* I saw him in Quebec not six months ago. Keeps the finest span and carriage in the city, and lives in a palace. Could buy out old Scragmore a thousand times, and never feel it. Most liberal contributor to the cause of education that there is in Canada. He says education made him, and he’s not a man to go back on education. And yet Scragmore has the cheek to say that *you* were the only man in the class who reflects credit on it!”

The professor smiled quietly as the excited journalist took a cooling sip of the cobbler.

“You see, Yates, people’s opinions differ. A man like Brown may not be Principal Scragmore’s ideal. The principal may be local in his ideals of a successful man, or of one who reflects credit on his teaching.”

“Local? You bet he’s local. Too darned local for me. It would do that man good to live in New York for a year. But I’m going to get even with him. I’m going to write him up. I’ll give him a column and a half; see if I don’t. I’ll get his photograph, and publish a newspaper portrait of him. If that doesn’t make him quake, he’s a cast-iron man. Say, you haven’t a photograph of old Scrag that you can lend me, have you?”

“I have; but I won’t lend it for such a purpose. However, never mind the principal. Tell me your plans. I am at your disposal for a couple of weeks, or longer if necessary.”

“Good boy! Well, I’ll tell you how it is. I want rest and quiet, and the woods, for a week or two. This is how it happened: I have been steadily at the grindstone, except for a while in the hospital; and that, you will admit, is not much of a vacation. The work interests me, and I am always in the thick of it. Now, it’s like this in the newspaper business: Your chief is never the person to suggest that you

take a vacation. He is usually short of men and long on things to do, so if you don't worry him into letting you off, he won't lose any sleep over it. He's content to let well enough alone every time. Then there is always somebody who wants to get away on pressing business,—grandmother's funeral, and that sort of thing,—so if a fellow is content to work right along, his chief is quite content to let him. That's the way affairs have gone for years with me. The other week I went over to Washington to interview a senator on the political prospects. I tell you what it is, Stilly, without bragging, there are some big men in the States whom no one but me *can* interview. And yet old Scrag says I'm no credit to his class! Why, last year my political predictions were telegraphed all over this country, and have since appeared in the European press. No credit! By Jove, I would like to have old Scrag in a twenty-four-foot ring, with thin gloves on, for about ten minutes!"

"I doubt if he would shine under those circumstances. But never mind him. He spoke, for once, without due reflection, and with perhaps an exaggerated remembrance of your school-day offenses. What happened when you went to Washington?"

"A strange thing happened. When I was admitted to the senator's library, I saw another fellow, whom I thought I knew, sitting there. I said to the senator: 'I will come when you are alone.' The senator looked up in surprise, and said: 'I am alone.' I didn't say anything, but went on with my interview; and the other fellow took notes all the time. I didn't like this, but said nothing, for the senator is not a man to offend, and it is by not offending these fellows that I can get the information I do. Well, the other fellow came out with me, and as I looked at him I saw that he was myself. This did not strike me as strange at the time, but I argued with him all the way to New York, and tried to show him that he wasn't treating me fairly. I wrote up the interview, with the other fellow interfering all the while, so I compromised, and half the time put in what he suggested, and half the time what I wanted in myself. When the political editor went over the stuff, he looked alarmed. I told him frankly just how I had been interfered with, and he looked none the less alarmed when I had finished. He sent at once for a doctor. The doctor metaphorically took me to pieces, and then said to my chief: 'This man is simply worked to death. He must have a vacation, and a real one, with absolutely nothing to think of, or he is going to collapse, and that with a suddenness which will surprise everybody.' The chief, to my astonishment, consented without a murmur, and even upbraided me for not going away sooner. Then the doctor said to me: 'You get some companion—some man with no brains, if possible, who will not discuss politics, who has no opinion on anything that any sane man would care to talk about, and who couldn't say a bright thing if he tried for a year. Get such a man to go off to the woods somewhere. Up in Maine or in Canada. As far away from post offices and telegraph offices as possible. And, by the way, don't leave your address at the *Argus* office.' Thus it happened, Stilly, when he described this man so graphically, I at once thought of you."

"I am deeply gratified, I am sure," said the professor, with the ghost of a smile, "to be so promptly remembered in such a connection, and if I can be of service to you, I shall be very glad. I take it, then, that you have no intention of stopping in Buffalo?"

"You bet I haven't. I'm in for the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlock, bearded with moss and green in the something or other—I forget the rest. I want to quit lying on paper, and lie on my back instead, on the sward or in a hammock. I'm going to avoid all boarding houses or delightful summer resorts, and go in for the quiet of the forest."

"There ought to be some nice places along the lake shore."

"No, sir. No lake shore for me. It would remind me of the Lake Shore Railroad when it was calm, and of Long Branch when it was rough. *No*, sir. The woods, the woods, and the woods. I have hired a tent and a lot of cooking things. I'm going to take that tent over to Canada to-morrow; and then I propose we engage a man with a team to cart it somewhere into the woods, fifteen or twenty miles away. We shall have to be near a farmhouse, so that we can get fresh butter, milk, and eggs. This, of course, is a disadvantage; but I shall try to get near someone who has never even heard of New York."

"You may find that somewhat difficult."

“Oh, I don’t know. I have great hopes of the lack of intelligence in the Canadians.”

“Often the narrowest,” said the professor slowly, “are those who think themselves the most cosmopolitan.”

“Right you are,” cried Yates, skimming lightly over the remark, and seeing nothing applicable to his case in it. “Well, I’ve laid in about half a ton, more or less, of tobacco, and have bought an empty jug.”

“An empty one?”

“Yes. Among the few things worth having that the Canadians possess, is good whisky. Besides, the empty jar will save trouble at the customhouse. I don’t suppose Canadian rye is as good as the Kentucky article, but you and I will have to scrub along on it for a while. And, talking of whisky, just press the button once again.”

The professor did so, saying:

“The doctor made no remark, I suppose, about drinking less or smoking less, did he?”

“In my case? Well, come to think of it, there *was* some conversation in that direction. Don’t remember at the moment just what it amounted to; but all physicians have their little fads, you know. It doesn’t do to humor them too much. Ah, boy, there you are again. Well, the professor wants another drink. Make it a gin fizz this time, and put plenty of ice in it; but don’t neglect the gin on that account. Certainly; charge it to room 518.”

CHAPTER III

“What’s all this tackle?” asked the burly and somewhat red-faced customs officer at Fort Erie.

“This,” said Yates, “is a tent, with the poles and pegs appertaining thereto. These are a number of packages of tobacco, on which I shall doubtless have to pay something into the exchequer of her Majesty. This is a jug used for the holding of liquids. I beg to call your attention to the fact that it is at present empty, which unfortunately prevents me making a libation to the rites of good-fellowship. What my friend has in that valise I don’t know, but I suspect a gambling outfit, and would advise you to search him.”

“My valise contains books principally, with some articles of wearing apparel,” said the professor, opening his grip.

The customs officer looked with suspicion on the whole outfit, and evidently did not like the tone of the American. He seemed to be treating the customs department in a light and airy manner, and the officer was too much impressed by the dignity of his position not to resent flippancy. Besides, there were rumors of Fenian invasion in the air, and the officer resolved that no Fenian should get into the country without paying duty.

“Where are you going with this tent?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. Perhaps you can tell us. I don’t know the country about here. Say, Stilly, I’m off uptown to attend to the emptiness in this stone utensil. I’ve been empty too often myself not to sympathize with its condition. You wrestle this matter out about the tent. You know the ways of the country, whereas I don’t.”

It was perhaps as well that Yates left negotiations in the hands of his friend. He was quick enough to see that he made no headway with the officer, but rather the opposite. He slung the jar ostentatiously over his shoulder, to the evident discomfort of the professor, and marched up the hill to the nearest tavern, whistling one of the lately popular war tunes.

“Now,” he said to the barkeeper, placing the jar tenderly on the bar, “fill that up to the nozzle with the best rye you have. Fill it with the old familiar juice, as the late poet Omar saith.”

The bartender did as he was requested.

“Can you disguise a little of that fluid in any way, so that it may be taken internally without a man suspecting what he is swallowing?”

The barkeeper smiled. “How would a cocktail fill the vacancy?”

“I can suggest nothing better,” replied Yates. “If you are sure you know how to make it.”

The man did not resent this imputation of ignorance. He merely said, with the air of one who gives an incontrovertible answer:

“I am a Kentucky man myself.”

“Shake!” cried Yates briefly, as he reached his hand across the bar. “How is it you happened to be here?”

“Well, I got in to a little trouble in Louisville, and here I am, where I can at least look at God’s country.”

“Hold on,” protested Yates. “You’re making only *one* cocktail.”

“Didn’t you say one?” asked the man, pausing in the compounding.

“Bless you, I never saw one cocktail made in my life. You are with me on this.”

“Just as you say,” replied the other, as he prepared enough for two.

“Now I’ll tell you my fix,” said Yates confidentially. “I’ve got a tent and some camp things down below at the customhouse shanty, and I want to get them taken into the woods, where I can camp out with a friend. I want a place where we can have absolute rest and quiet. Do you know the country round here? Perhaps you could recommend a spot.”

“Well, for all the time I’ve been here, I know precious little about the back country. I’ve been down the road to Niagara Falls, but never back in the woods. I suppose you want some place by the lake or the river?”

“No, I don’t. I want to get clear back into the forest—if there is a forest.”

“Well, there’s a man in to-day from somewhere near Ridgeway, I think. He’s got a hay rack with him, and that would be just the thing to take your tent and poles. Wouldn’t be very comfortable traveling for you, but it would be all right for the tent, if it’s a big one.”

“That will suit us exactly. We don’t care a cent about the comfort. Roughing it is what we came for. Where will I find him?”

“Oh, he’ll be along here soon. That’s his team tied there on the side street. If he happens to be in good humor, he’ll take your things, and as like as not give you a place to camp in his woods. Hiram Bartlett’s his name. And, talking of the old Nick himself, here he is. I say, Mr. Bartlett, this gentleman was wondering if you couldn’t tote out some of his belongings. He’s going out your way.”

Bartlett was a somewhat uncouth and wiry specimen of the Canadian farmer who evidently paid little attention to the subject of dress. He said nothing, but looked in a lowering way at Yates, with something of contempt and suspicion in his glance.

Yates had one receipt for making the acquaintance of all mankind. “Come in, Mr. Bartlett,” he said cheerily, “and try one of my friend’s excellent cocktails.”

“I take mine straight,” growled Bartlett gruffly, although he stepped inside the open door. “I don’t want no Yankee mixtures in mine. Plain whisky’s good enough for any man, if he *is* a man. I don’t take no water, neither. I’ve got trouble enough.”

The bartender winked at Yates as he shoved the decanter over to the newcomer.

“Right you are,” assented Yates cordially.

The farmer did not thaw out in the least because of this prompt agreement with him, but sipped his whisky gloomily, as if it were a most disagreeable medicine.

“What did you want me to take out?” he said at last.

“A friend and a tent, a jug of whisky and a lot of jolly good tobacco.”

“How much are you willing to pay?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I’m always willing to do what’s right. How would five dollars strike you?”

The farmer scowled and shook his head.

“Too much,” he said, as Yates was about to offer more. “‘Taint worth it. Two and a half would be about the right figure. Don’no but that’s too much. I’ll think on it going home, and charge you what it’s worth. I’ll be ready to leave in about an hour, if that suits you. That’s my team on the other side of the road. If it’s gone when you come back, I’m gone, an’ you’ll have to get somebody else.”

With this Bartlett drew his coat sleeve across his mouth and departed.

“That’s him exactly,” said the barkeeper. “He’s the most cantankerous crank in the township. And say, let me give you a pointer. If the subject of 1812 comes up,—the war, you know,—you’d better admit that we got thrashed out of our boots; that is, if you want to get along with Hiram. He hates Yankees like poison.”

“And did we get thrashed in 1812?” asked Yates, who was more familiar with current topics than with the history of the past.

“Blessed if I know. Hiram says we did. I told him once that we got what we wanted from old England, and he nearly hauled me over the bar. So I give you the warning, if you want to get along with him.”

“Thank you. I’ll remember it. So long.”

This friendly hint from the man in the tavern offers a key to the solution of the problem of Yates’ success on the New York press. He could get news when no other man could. Flippant and shallow as he undoubtedly was, he somehow got into the inner confidences of all sorts of men in a way that made them give him an inkling of anything that was going on for the mere love of him;

and thus Yates often received valuable assistance from his acquaintances which other reporters could not get for money.

The New Yorker found the professor sitting on a bench by the customhouse, chatting with the officer, and gazing at the rapidly flowing broad blue river in front of them.

"I have got a man," said Yates, "who will take us out into the wilderness in about an hour's time. Suppose we explore the town. I expect nobody will run away with the tent till we come back."

"I'll look after that," said the officer; and, thanking him, the two friends strolled up the street. They were a trifle late in getting back, and when they reached the tavern, they found Bartlett just on the point of driving home. He gruffly consented to take them, if they did not keep him more than five minutes loading up. The tent and its belongings were speedily placed on the hay rack, and then Bartlett drove up to the tavern and waited, saying nothing, although he had been in such a hurry a few moments before. Yates did not like to ask the cause of the delay; so the three sat there silently. After a while Yates said as mildly as he could:

"Are you waiting for anyone, Mr. Bartlett?"

"Yes," answered the driver in a surly tone. "I'm waiting for you to go in fur that jug. I don't suppose you filled it to leave it on the counter."

"By Jove!" cried Yates, springing off, "I had forgotten all about it, which shows the extraordinary effect this country has on me already." The professor frowned, but Yates came out merrily, with the jar in his hand, and Bartlett started his team. They drove out of the village and up a slight hill, going for a mile or two along a straight and somewhat sandy road. Then they turned into the Ridge Road, as Bartlett called it, in answer to a question by the professor, and there was no need to ask why it was so termed. It was a good highway, but rather stony, the road being, in places, on the bare rock. It paid not the slightest attention to Euclid's definition of a straight line, and in this respect was rather a welcome change from the average American road. Sometimes they passed along avenues of overbranching trees, which were evidently relics of the forest that once covered all the district. The road followed the ridge, and on each side were frequently to be seen wide vistas of lower lying country. All along the road were comfortable farmhouses; and it was evident that a prosperous community flourished along the ridge.

Bartlett spoke only once, and then to the professor, who sat next to him.

"You a Canadian?"

"Yes."

"Where's *he* from?"

"My friend is from New York," answered the innocent professor.

"Humph!" grunted Bartlett, scowling deeper than ever, after which he became silent again. The team was not going very fast, although neither the load nor the road was heavy. Bartlett was muttering a good deal to himself, and now and then brought down his whip savagely on one or the other of the horses; but the moment the unfortunate animals quickened their pace he hauled them in roughly. Nevertheless, they were going quickly enough to be overtaking a young woman who was walking on alone. Although she must have heard them coming over the rocky road she did not turn her head, but walked along with the free and springy step of one who is not only accustomed to walking, but who likes it. Bartlett paid no attention to the girl; the professor was endeavoring to read his thin book as well as a man might who is being jolted frequently; but Yates, as soon as he recognized that the pedestrian was young, pulled up his collar, adjusted his necktie with care, and placed his hat in a somewhat more jaunty and fetching position.

"Are you going to offer that girl a ride?" he said to Bartlett.

"No, I'm not."

"I think that is rather uncivil," he added, forgetting the warning he had had.

"You do, eh? Well, you offer her a ride. You hired the team."

“By Jove! I will,” said Yates, placing his hand on the outside of the rack, and springing lightly to the ground.

“Likely thing,” growled Bartlett to the professor, “that she’s going to ride with the like of him.”

The professor looked for a moment at Yates, politely taking off his hat to the apparently astonished young woman, but he said nothing.

“Fur two cents,” continued Bartlett, gathering up the reins, “I’d whip up the horses, and let him walk the rest of the way.”

“From what I know of my friend,” answered the professor slowly, “I think he would not object in the slightest.”

Bartlett muttered something to himself, and seemed to change his mind about galloping his horses.

Meanwhile, Yates, as has been said, took off his hat with great politeness to the fair pedestrian, and as he did so he noticed, with a thrill of admiration, that she was very handsome. Yates always had an eye for the beautiful.

“Our conveyance,” he began, “is not as comfortable as it might be, yet I shall be very happy if you will accept its hospitalities.”

The young woman flashed a brief glance at him from her dark eyes, and for a moment Yates feared that his language had been rather too choice for her rural understanding, but before he could amend his phrase she answered briefly:

“Thank you. I prefer to walk.”

“Well, I don’t know that I blame you. May I ask if you have come all the way from the village?”

“Yes.”

“That is a long distance, and you must be very tired.” There was no reply; so Yates continued. “At least, I thought it a long distance; but perhaps that was because I was riding on Bartlett’s hay rack. There is no ‘downy bed of ease’ about his vehicle.”

As he spoke of the wagon he looked at it, and, striding forward to its side, said in a husky whisper to the professor:

“Say, Stilly, cover up that jug with a flap of the tent.”

“Cover it up yourself,” briefly replied the other; “it isn’t mine.”

Yates reached across and, in a sort of accidental way, threw the flap of the tent over the too conspicuous jar. As an excuse for his action he took up his walking cane and turned toward his new acquaintance. He was flattered to see that she was loitering some distance behind the wagon, and he speedily rejoined her. The girl, looking straight ahead, now quickened her pace, and rapidly shortened the distance between herself and the vehicle. Yates, with the quickness characteristic of him, made up his mind that this was a case of country diffidence, which was best to be met by the bringing down of his conversation to the level of his hearer’s intelligence.

“Have you been marketing?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Butter and eggs, and that sort of thing?”

“We are farmers,” she answered, “and we sell butter and eggs”—a pause—“and that sort of thing.”

Yates laughed in his light and cheery way. As he twirled his cane he looked at his pretty companion. She was gazing anxiously ahead toward a turn in the road. Her comely face was slightly flushed, doubtless with the exercise of walking.

“Now, in my country,” continued the New Yorker, “we idolize our women. Pretty girls don’t tramp miles to market with butter and eggs.”

“Aren’t the girls pretty—in your country?”

Yates made a mental note that there was not as much rurality about this girl as he had thought at first. There was a piquancy about the conversation which he liked. That she shared his enjoyment was doubtful, for a slight line of resentment was noticeable on her smooth brow.

“You bet they’re pretty! I think all American girls are pretty. It seems their birthright. When I say American, I mean the whole continent, of course. I’m from the States myself—from New York.” He gave an extra twirl to his cane as he said this, and bore himself with that air of conscious superiority which naturally pertains to a citizen of the metropolis. “But over in the States we think the men should do all the work, and that the women should—well, spend the money. I must do our ladies the justice to say that they attend strictly to their share of the arrangement.”

“It should be a delightful country to live in—for the women.”

“They all say so. We used to have an adage to the effect that America was paradise for women, purgatory for men, and—well, an entirely different sort of place for oxen.”

There was no doubt that Yates had a way of getting along with people. As he looked at his companion he was gratified to note just the faintest suspicion of a smile hovering about her lips. Before she could answer, if she had intended to do so, there was a quick clatter of hoofs on the hard road ahead, and next instant an elegant buggy, whose slender jet-black polished spokes flashed and twinkled in the sunlight, came dashing past the wagon. On seeing the two walking together the driver hauled up his team with a suddenness that was evidently not relished by the spirited dappled span he drove.

“Hello, Margaret!” he cried; “am I late? Have you walked in all the way?”

“You are just in good time,” answered the girl, without looking toward Yates, who stood aimlessly twirling his cane. The young woman put her foot on the buggy step, and sprang lightly in beside the driver. It needed no second glance to see that he was her brother, not only on account of the family resemblance between them, but also because he allowed her to get into the buggy without offering the slightest assistance, which, indeed, was not needed, and graciously permitted her to place the duster that covered his knees over her own lap as well. The restive team trotted rapidly down the road for a few rods, until they came to a wide place in the highway, and then whirled around, seemingly within an ace of upsetting the buggy; but the young man evidently knew his business, and held them in with a firm hand. The wagon was jogging along where the road was very narrow, and Bartlett kept his team stolidly in the center of the way.

“Hello, there, Bartlett!” shouted the young man in the buggy; “half the road, you know—half the road.”

“Take it,” cried Bartlett over his shoulder.

“Come, come, Bartlett, get out of the way, or I’ll run you down.”

“You just try it.”

Bartlett either had no sense of humor or his resentment against his young neighbor smothered it, since otherwise he would have recognized that a heavy wagon was in no danger of being run into by a light and expensive buggy. The young man kept his temper admirably, but he knew just where to touch the elder on the raw. His sister’s hand was placed appealingly on his arm. He smiled, and took no notice of her.

“Come, now, you move out, or I’ll have the law on you.”

“The law!” roared Bartlett; “you just try it on.”

“Should think you’d had enough of it by this time.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t, Henry!” protested the girl in distress.

“There aint no law,” yelled Bartlett, “that kin make a man with a load move out fur anything.”

“You haven’t any load, unless it’s in that jug.”

Yates saw with consternation that the jar had been jolted out from under its covering, but the happy consolation came to him that the two in the buggy would believe it belonged to Bartlett.

He thought, however, that this dog-in-the-manger policy had gone far enough. He stepped briskly forward, and said to Bartlett:

“Better drive aside a little, and let them pass.”

“You ‘tend to your own business,” cried the thoroughly enraged farmer.

“I will,” said Yates shortly, striding to the horses’ heads. He took them by the bits and, in spite of Bartlett’s maledictions and pulling at the lines, he drew them to one side, so that the buggy got by.

“Thank you!” cried the young man. The light and glittering carriage rapidly disappeared up the Ridge Road.

Bartlett sat there for one moment the picture of baffled rage. Then he threw the reins down on the backs of his patient horses, and descended.

“You take my horses by the head, do you, you good-fur-nuthin’ Yank? You do, eh? I like your cheek. Touch my horses an’ me a-holdin’ the lines! Now you hear me? Your traps comes right off here on the road. You hear me?”

“Oh, anybody within a mile can hear you.”

“Kin they? Well, off comes your pesky tent.”

“No, it doesn’t.”

“Don’t it, eh? Well, then, you’ll lick me fust; and that’s something no Yank ever did nor kin do.”

“I’ll do it with pleasure.”

“Come, come,” cried the professor, getting down on the road, “this has gone far enough. Keep quiet, Yates. Now, Mr. Bartlett, don’t mind it; he means no disrespect.”

“Don’t you interfere. You’re all right, an’ I aint got nothin’ ag’in you. But I’m goin’ to thrash this Yank within an inch of his life; see if I don’t. We met ‘em in 1812, an’ we fit ‘em an’ we licked ‘em, an’ we can do it ag’in. I’ll learn ye to take my horses by the head.”

“Teach,” suggested Yates tantalizingly.

Before he could properly defend himself, Bartlett sprang at him and grasped him round the waist. Yates was something of a wrestler himself, but his skill was of no avail on this occasion. Bartlett’s right leg became twisted around his with a steel-like grip that speedily convinced the younger man he would have to give way or a bone would break. He gave way accordingly, and the next thing he knew he came down on his back with a thud that seemed to shake the universe.

“There, darn ye!” cried the triumphant farmer; “that’s 1812 and Queenstown Heights for ye. How do you like ‘em?”

Yates rose to his feet with some deliberation, and slowly took off his coat.

“Now, now, Yates,” said the professor soothingly, “let it go at this. You’re not hurt, are you?” he asked anxiously, as he noticed how white the young man was around the lips.

“Look here, Renmark; you’re a sensible man. There is a time to interfere and a time not to. This is the time not to. A certain international element seems to have crept into this dispute. Now, you stand aside, like a good fellow, for I don’t want to have to thrash both of you.”

The professor stood aside, for he realized that, when Yates called him by his last name, matters were serious.

“Now, old chucklehead, perhaps you would like to try that again.”

“I kin do it a dozen times, if ye aint satisfied. There aint no Yank ever raised on pumpkin pie that can stand ag’in that grapevine twist.”

“Try the grapevine once more.”

Bartlett proceeded more cautiously this time, for there was a look in the young man’s face he did not quite like. He took a catch-as-catch-can attitude, and moved stealthily in a semi-circle around Yates, who shifted his position constantly so as to keep facing his foe. At last Bartlett sprang forward, and the next instant found himself sitting on a piece of the rock of the country, with a thousand humming birds buzzing in his head, while stars and the landscape around joined in a dance together. The blow was sudden, well placed, and from the shoulder.

“That,” said Yates, standing over him, “is 1776—the Revolution—when, to use your own phrase, we met ye, fit ye, and licked ye. How do you like it? Now, if my advice is of any use to you, take a broader view of history than you have done. Don’t confine yourself too much to one period. Study up the War of the Revolution a bit.”

Bartlett made no reply. After sitting there for a while, until the surrounding landscape assumed its normal condition, he arose leisurely, without saying a word. He picked the reins from the backs of the horses and patted the nearest animal gently. Then he mounted to his place and drove off. The professor had taken his seat beside the driver, but Yates, putting on his coat and picking up his cane, strode along in front, switching off the heads of Canada thistles with his walking stick as he proceeded.

CHAPTER IV

Bartlett was silent for a long time, but there was evidently something on his mind, for he communed with himself, his mutterings growing louder and louder, until they broke the stillness; then he struck the horses, pulled them in, and began his soliloquy over again. At last he said abruptly to the professor:

“What’s this Revolution he talked about?”

“It was the War of Independence, beginning in 1776.”

“Never heard of it. Did the Yanks fight us?”

“The colonies fought with England.”

“What colonies?”

“The country now called the United States.”

“They fit with England, eh? Which licked?”

“The colonies won their independence.”

“That means they licked us. I don’t believe a word of it. ‘Pears to me I’d ‘a’ heard of it; fur I’ve lived in these parts a long time.”

“It was a little before your day.”

“So was 1812; but my father fit in it, an’ I never heard him tell of this Revolution. He’d ‘a’ known, I sh’d think. There’s a nigger in the fence somewheres.”

“Well, England was rather busy at the time with the French.”

“Ah, that was it, was it? I’ll bet England never knew the Revolution was a-goin’ on till it was over. Old Napoleon couldn’t thrash ‘em, and it don’t stand to reason that the Yanks could. I thought there was some skullduggery. Why, it took the Yanks four years to lick themselves. I got a book at home all about Napoleon. He was a tough cuss.”

The professor did not feel called upon to defend the character of Napoleon, and so silence once more descended upon them. Bartlett seemed a good deal disturbed by the news he had just heard of the Revolution, and he growled to himself, while the horses suffered more than usual from the whip and the hauling back that invariably followed the stroke. Yates was some distance ahead, and swinging along at a great rate, when the horses, apparently of their own accord, turned in at an open gateway and proceeded, in their usual leisurely fashion, toward a large barn, past a comfortable frame house with a wide veranda in front.

“This is my place,” said Bartlett shortly.

“I wish you had told me a few minutes ago,” replied the professor, springing off, “so that I might have called to my friend.”

“I’m not frettin’ about him,” said Bartlett, throwing the reins to a young man who came out of the house.

Renmark ran to the road and shouted loudly to the distant Yates. Yates apparently did not hear him, but something about the next house attracted the pedestrian’s attention, and after standing for a moment and gazing toward the west he looked around and saw the professor beckoning to him. When the two men met, Yates said:

“So we have arrived, have we? I say, Stilly, she lives in the next house. I saw the buggy in the yard.”

“She? Who?”

“Why, that good-looking girl we passed on the road. I’m going to buy our supplies at that house, Stilly, if you have no objections. By the way, how is my old friend 1812?”

“He doesn’t seem to harbor any harsh feelings. In fact, he was more troubled about the Revolution than about the blow you gave him.”

“News to him, eh? Well, I’m glad I knocked something into his head.”

“You certainly did it most unscientifically.”

“How do you mean—unscientifically?”

“In the delivery of the blow. I never saw a more awkwardly delivered undercut.”

Yates looked at his friend in astonishment. How should this calm, learned man know anything about undercuts or science in blows?

“Well, you must admit I got there just the same.”

“Yes, by brute force. A sledge hammer would have done as well. But you had such an opportunity to do it neatly and deftly, without any display of surplus energy, that I regretted to see such an opening thrown away.”

“Heavens and earth, Stilly, this is the professor in a new light! What do you teach in Toronto University, anyhow? The noble art of self-defense?”

“Not exactly; but if you intend to go through Canada in this belligerent manner, I think it would be worth your while to take a few hints from me.”

“With striking examples, I suppose. By Jove! I will, Stilly.”

As the two came to the house they found Bartlett sitting in a wooden rocking chair on the veranda, looking grimly down the road.

“What an old tyrant that man must be in his home!” said Yates. There was no time for the professor to reply before they came within earshot.

“The old woman’s setting out supper,” said the farmer gruffly, that piece of information being apparently as near as he could get toward inviting them to share his hospitality. Yates didn’t know whether it was meant for an invitation or not, but he answered shortly:

“Thanks, we won’t stay.”

“Speak fur yourself, please,” snarled Bartlett.

“Of course I go with my friend,” said Renmark; “but we are obliged for the invitation.”

“Please yourselves.”

“What’s that?” cried a cheery voice from the inside of the house, as a stout, rosy, and very good-natured-looking woman appeared at the front door. “Won’t stay? *Who* won’t stay? I’d like to see anybody leave my house hungry when there’s a meal on the table! And, young men, if you can get a better meal anywhere on the Ridge than what I’ll give you, why, you’re welcome to go there next time, but this meal you’ll have here, inside of ten minutes. Hiram, that’s your fault. You always invite a person to dinner as if you wanted to wrestle with him!”

Hiram gave a guilty start, and looked with something of mute appeal at the two men, but said nothing.

“Never mind him,” continued Mrs. Bartlett. “You’re at my house; and, whatever my neighbors may say ag’in me, I never heard anybody complain of the lack of good victuals while I was able to do the cooking. Come right in and wash yourselves, for the road between here and the fort is dusty enough, even if Hiram never was taken up for fast driving. Besides, a wash is refreshing after a hot day.”

There was no denying the cordiality of this invitation, and Yates, whose natural gallantry was at once aroused, responded with the readiness of a courtier. Mrs. Bartlett led the way into the house; but as Yates passed the farmer the latter cleared his throat with an effort, and, throwing his thumb over his shoulder in the direction his wife had taken, said in a husky whisper:

“No call to—to mention the Revolution, you know.”

“Certainly not,” answered Yates, with a wink that took in the situation. “Shall we sample the jug before or after supper?”

“After, if it’s all the same to you;” adding, “out in the barn.”

Yates nodded, and followed his friend into the house.

The young men were shown into a bedroom of more than ordinary size, on the upper floor. Everything about the house was of the most dainty and scrupulous cleanliness, and an air of cheerful

comfort pervaded the place. Mrs. Bartlett was evidently a housekeeper to be proud of. Two large pitchers of cool, soft water awaited them, and the wash, as had been predicted, was most refreshing.

“I say,” cried Yates, “it’s rather cheeky to accept a man’s hospitality after knocking him down.”

“It would be for most people, but I think you underestimate your cheek, as you call it.”

“Bravo, Stilly! You’re blossoming out. That’s repartee, that is. With the accent on the rap, too. Never you mind; I think old 1812 and I will get on all right after this. It doesn’t seem to bother him any, so I don’t see why it should worry me. Nice motherly old lady, isn’t she?”

“Who? 1812?”

“No; Mrs. 1812. I’m sorry I complimented you on your repartee. You’ll get conceited. Remember that what in the newspaper man is clever, in a grave professor is rank flippancy. Let’s go down.”

The table was covered with a cloth as white and spotless as good linen can well be. The bread was genuine homemade, a term so often misused in the cities. It was brown as to crust, and flaky and light as to interior. The butter, cool from the rock cellar, was of a refreshing yellow hue. The sight of the well-loaded table was most welcome to the eyes of hungry travelers. There was, as Yates afterward remarked, “abundance, and plenty of it.”

“Come, father!” cried Mrs. Bartlett, as the young men appeared; they heard the rocking chair creak on the veranda in prompt answer to the summons.

“This is my son, gentlemen,” said Mrs. Bartlett, indicating the young man who stood in a noncommittal attitude near a corner of the room. The professor recognized him as the person who had taken charge of the horses when his father came home. There was evidently something of his father’s demeanor about the young man, who awkwardly and silently responded to the recognition of the strangers.

“And this is my daughter,” continued the good woman. “Now, what might your names be?”

“My name is Yates, and this is my friend Professor Renmark of T’ronto,” pronouncing the name of the fair city in two syllables, as is, alas! too often done. The professor bowed, and Yates cordially extended his hand to the young woman. “How do you do, Miss Bartlett?” he said, “I am happy to meet you.”

The girl smiled very prettily, and said she hoped they had a pleasant trip out from Fort Erie.

“Oh, we had,” said Yates, looking for a moment at his host, whose eyes were fixed on the tablecloth, and who appeared to be quite content to let his wife run the show. “The road’s a little rocky in places, but it’s very pleasant.”

“Now, you sit down here, and you here,” said Mrs. Bartlett; “and I do hope you have brought good appetites with you.”

The strangers took their places, and Yates had a chance to look at the younger member of the family, which opportunity he did not let slip. It was hard to believe that she was the daughter of so crusty a man as Hiram Bartlett. Her cheeks were rosy, with dimples in them that constantly came and went in her incessant efforts to keep from laughing. Her hair, which hung about her plump shoulders, was a lovely golden brown. Although her dress was of the cheapest material, it was neatly cut and fitted; and her dainty white apron added that touch of wholesome cleanliness which was so noticeable everywhere in the house. A bit of blue ribbon at her white throat, and a pretty spring flower just below it, completed a charming picture, which a more critical and less susceptible man than Yates might have contemplated with pleasure.

Miss Bartlett sat smilingly at one end of the table, and her father grimly at the other. The mother sat at the side, apparently looking on that position as one of vantage for commanding the whole field, and keeping her husband and her daughter both under her eye. The teapot and cups were set before the young woman. She did not pour out the tea at once, but seemed to be waiting instructions from her mother. That good lady was gazing with some sternness at her husband, he vainly endeavoring to look at the ceiling or anywhere but at her. He drew his open hand nervously down his face, which

was of unusual gravity even for him. Finally he cast an appealing glance at his wife, who sat with her hands folded on her lap, but her eyes were unrelenting. After a moment's hopeless irresolution Bartlett bent his head over his plate and murmured:

"For what we are about to receive, oh, make us truly thankful. Amen."

Mrs. Bartlett echoed the last word, having also bowed her head when she saw surrender in the troubled eyes of her husband.

Now, it happened that Yates, who had seen nothing of this silent struggle of the eyes, being exceedingly hungry, was making every preparation for the energetic beginning of the meal. He had spent most of his life in hotels and New York boarding houses, so that if he ever knew the adage, "Grace before meat," he had forgotten it. In the midst of his preparations came the devout words, and they came upon him as a stupefying surprise. Although naturally a resourceful man, he was not quick enough this time to cover his confusion. Miss Bartlett's golden head was bowed, but out of the corner of her eye she saw Yates' look of amazed bewilderment and his sudden halt of surprise. When all heads were raised, the young girl's still remained where it was, while her plump shoulders quivered. Then she covered her face with her apron, and the silvery ripple of a laugh came like a smothered musical chime trickling through her fingers.

"Why, *Kitty!*" cried her mother in astonishment, "whatever is the matter with you?"

The girl could no longer restrain her mirth. "You'll have to pour out the tea, mother!" She exclaimed, as she fled from the room.

"For the land's sake!" cried the astonished mother, rising to take her frivolous daughter's place, "what ails the child? I don't see what there is to laugh at."

Hiram scowled down the table, and was evidently also of the opinion that there was no occasion for mirth. The professor was equally in the dark.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Bartlett," said Yates, "that I am the innocent cause of Miss Kitty's mirth. You see, madam—it's a pathetic thing to say, but really I have had no home life. Although I attend church regularly, of course," he added with jaunty mendacity, "I must confess that I haven't heard grace at meals for years and years, and—well, I wasn't just prepared for it. I have no doubt I made an exhibition of myself, which your daughter was quick to see."

"It wasn't very polite," said Mrs. Bartlett with some asperity.

"I know that," pleaded Yates with contrition, "but I assure you it was unintentional on my part."

"Bless the man!" cried his hostess. "I don't mean you. I mean Kitty. But that girl never *could* keep her face straight. She always favored me more than her father."

This statement was not difficult to believe, for Hiram at that moment looked as if he had never smiled in his life. He sat silent throughout the meal, but Mrs. Bartlett talked quite enough for two.

"Well, for my part," she said, "I don't know what farming's coming to! Henry Howard and Margaret drove past here this afternoon as proud as Punch in their new covered buggy. Things is very different from what they was when I was a girl. Then a farmer's daughter had to work. Now Margaret's took her diploma at the ladies' college, and Arthur he's begun at the university, and Henry's sporting round in a new buggy. They have a piano there, with the organ moved out into the back room."

"The whole Howard lot's a stuck-up set," muttered the farmer.

But Mrs. Bartlett wouldn't have that. Any detraction that was necessary she felt competent to supply, without help from the nominal head of the house.

"No, I don't go so far as to say that. Neither would you, Hiram, if you hadn't lost your lawsuit about the line fence; and served you right, too, for it wouldn't have been begun if I had been at home at the time. Not but what Margaret's a good housekeeper, for she wouldn't be her mother's daughter if she wasn't that; but it does seem to me a queer way to raise farmers' children, and I only hope they can keep it up. There were no pianos nor French and German in *my* young days."

"You ought to hear her play! My lands!" cried young Bartlett, who spoke for the first time. His admiration for her accomplishment evidently went beyond his powers of expression.

Bartlett himself did not relish the turn the conversation had taken, and he looked somewhat uneasily at the two strangers. The professor's countenance was open and frank, and he was listening with respectful interest to Mrs. Bartlett's talk. Yates bent over his plate with flushed face, and confined himself strictly to the business in hand.

"I am glad," said the professor innocently to Yates, "that you made the young lady's acquaintance. I must ask you for an introduction."

For once in his life Yates had nothing to say, but he looked at his friend with an expression that was not kindly. The latter, in answer to Mrs. Bartlett's inquiries, told how they had passed Miss Howard on the road, and how Yates, with his usual kindness of heart, had offered the young woman the hospitalities of the hay rack. Two persons at the table were much relieved when the talk turned to the tent. It was young Hiram who brought about this boon. He was interested in the tent, and he wanted to know. Two things seemed to bother the boy: First, he was anxious to learn what diabolical cause had been at work to induce two apparently sane men to give up the comforts of home and live in this exposed manner, if they were not compelled to do so. Second, he desired to find out why people who had the privilege of living in large cities came of their own accord into the uninteresting country, anyhow. Even when explanations were offered, the problem seemed still beyond him.

After the meal they all adjourned to the veranda, where the air was cool and the view extensive. Mrs. Bartlett would not hear of the young men pitching the tent that night. "Goodness knows, you will have enough of it, with the rain and the mosquitoes. We have plenty of room here, and you will have one comfortable night on the Ridge, at any rate. Then in the morning you can find a place in the woods to suit you, and my boy will take an ax and cut stakes for you, and help to put up your precious tent. Only remember that when it rains you are to come to the house, or you will catch your deaths with cold and rheumatism. It will be very nice till the novelty wears off; then you are quite welcome to the front rooms upstairs, and Hiram can take the tent back to Erie the first time he goes to town."

Mrs. Bartlett had a way of taking things for granted. It never seemed to occur to her that any of her rulings might be questioned. Hiram sat gazing silently at the road, as if all this was no affair of his.

Yates had refused a chair, and sat on the edge of the veranda, with his back against one of the pillars, in such a position that he might, without turning his head, look through the open doorway into the room, where Miss Bartlett was busily but silently clearing away the tea things. The young man caught fleeting glimpses of her as she moved airily about her work. He drew a cigar from his case, cut off the end with his knife, and lit a match on the sole of his boot, doing this with an easy automatic familiarity that required no attention on his part; all of which aroused the respectful envy of young Hiram, who sat on a wooden chair, leaning forward, eagerly watching the man from New York.

"Have a cigar?" said Yates, offering the case to young Hiram.

"No, no; thank you," gasped the boy, aghast at the reckless audacity of the proposal.

"What's that?" cried Mrs. Bartlett. Although she was talking volubly to the professor, her maternal vigilance never even nodded, much less slept. "A cigar? Not likely! I'll say this for my husband and my boy: that, whatever else they may have done, they have never smoked nor touched a drop of liquor since I've known them, and, please God, they never will."

"Oh, I guess it wouldn't hurt them," said Yates, with a lack of tact that was not habitual. He fell several degrees in the estimation of his hostess.

"Hurt 'em?" cried Mrs. Bartlett indignantly. "I guess it won't get a chance to." She turned to the professor, who was a good listener—respectful and deferential, with little to say for himself. She rocked gently to and fro as she talked.

Her husband sat unbendingly silent, in a sphinxlike attitude that gave no outward indication of his mental uneasiness. He was thinking gloomily that it would be just his luck to meet Mrs. Bartlett unexpectedly in the streets of Fort Erie on one of those rare occasions when he was enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. He had the most pessimistic forebodings of what the future might have in store for him. Sometimes, when neighbors or customers "treated" him in the village, and he felt he

had taken all the whisky that cloves would conceal, he took a five-cent cigar instead of a drink. He did not particularly like the smoking of it, but there was a certain devil-may-care recklessness in going down the street with a lighted cigar in his teeth, which had all the more fascination for him because of its manifest danger. He felt at these times that he was going the pace, and that it is well our women do not know of all the wickedness there is in this world. He did not fear that any neighbor might tell his wife, for there were depths to which no person could convince Mrs. Bartlett he would descend. But he thought with horror of some combination of circumstances that might bring his wife to town unknown to him on a day when he indulged. He pictured, with a shudder, meeting her unexpectedly on the uncertain plank sidewalk of Fort Erie, he smoking a cigar. When this nightmare presented itself to him, he resolved never to touch a cigar again; but he well knew that the best resolutions fade away if a man is excited with two or three glasses of liquor.

When Mrs. Bartlett resumed conversation with the professor, Yates looked up at young Hiram and winked. The boy flushed with pleasure under the comprehensiveness of that wink. It included him in the attractive halo of crime that enveloped the fascinating personality of the man from New York. It seemed to say:

“That’s all right, but we are men of the world. *We* know.”

Young Hiram’s devotion to the Goddess Nicotine had never reached the altitude of a cigar. He had surreptitiously smoked a pipe in a secluded corner behind the barn in days when his father was away. He feared both his father and his mother, and so was in an even more embarrassing situation than old Hiram himself. He had worked gradually up to tobacco by smoking cigarettes of cane made from abandoned hoop-skirts. Crinoline was fashionable, even in the country, in those days, and ribs of cane were used before the metallic distenders of dresses came in. One hoop-skirt, whose usefulness as an article of adornment was gone, would furnish delight and smoking material for a company of boys for a month. The cane smoke made the tongue rather raw, but the wickedness was undeniable. Yates’ wink seemed to recognize young Hiram as a comrade worthy to offer incense at the shrine, and the boy was a firm friend of Yates from the moment the eyelid of the latter drooped.

The tea things having been cleared away, Yates got no more glimpses of the girl through the open door. He rose from his lowly seat and strolled toward the gate, with his hands in his pockets. He remembered that he had forgotten something, and cudged his brains to make out what it was. He gazed down the road at the house of the Howards, which naturally brought to his recollection his meeting with the young girl on the road. There was a pang of discomfiture in this thought when he remembered the accomplishments attributed to her by Mrs. Bartlett. He recalled his condescending tone to her, and recollected his anxiety about the jar. The jar! That was what he had forgotten. He flashed a glance at old Hiram, and noted that the farmer was looking at him with something like reproach in his eyes. Yates moved his head almost imperceptibly toward the barn, and the farmer’s eyes dropped to the floor of the veranda. The young man nonchalantly strolled past the end of the house.

“I guess I’ll go to look after the horses,” said the farmer, rising.

“The horses are all right, father. I saw to them,” put in his son, but the old man frowned him down, and slouched around the corner of the house. Mrs. Bartlett was too busy talking to the professor to notice. So good a listener did not fall to her lot every day.

“Here’s looking at you,” said Yates, strolling into the barn, taking a telescopic metal cup from his pocket, and clinking it into receptive shape by a jerk of the hand. He offered the now elongated cup to Hiram, who declined any such modern improvement.

“Help yourself in that thing. The jug’s good enough for me.”

“Three fingers” of the liquid gurgled out into the patented vessel, and the farmer took the jar, after a furtive look over his shoulder.

“Well, here’s luck.” The newspaper man tossed off the potion with the facility of long experience, shutting up the dish with his thumb and finger, as if it were a metallic opera hat.

The farmer drank silently from the jar itself. Then he smote in the cork with his open palm.

“Better bury it in the wheat bin,” he said morosely. “The boy might find it if you put it among the oats—feedin’ the horses, ye know.”

“Mighty good place,” assented Yates, as the golden grain flowed in a wave over the submerged jar. “I say, old man, you know the spot; you’ve been here before.”

Bartlett’s lowering countenance indicated resentment at the imputation, but he neither affirmed nor denied. Yates strolled out of the barn, while the farmer went through a small doorway that led to the stable. A moment later he heard Hiram calling loudly to his son to bring the pails and water the horses.

“Evidently preparing an *alibi*,” said Yates, smiling to himself, as he sauntered toward the gate.

CHAPTER V

“What’s up? what’s up?” cried Yates drowsily next morning, as a prolonged hammering at his door awakened him.

“Well, *you’re* not, anyhow.” He recognized the voice of young Hiram. “I say, breakfast’s ready. The professor has been up an hour.”

“All right; I’ll be down shortly,” said Yates, yawning, adding to himself: “Hang the professor!” The sun was streaming in through the east window, but Yates never before remembered seeing it such a short distance above the horizon in the morning. He pulled his watch from the pocket of his vest, hanging on the bedpost. It was not yet seven o’clock. He placed it to his ear, thinking it had stopped, but found himself mistaken.

“What an unearthly hour,” he said, unable to check the yawns. Yates’ years on a morning newspaper had made seven o’clock something like midnight to him. He had been unable to sleep until after two o’clock, his usual time of turning in, and now this rude wakening seemed thoughtless cruelty. However, he dressed, and yawned himself downstairs.

They were all seated at breakfast when Yates entered the apartment, which was at once dining room and parlor.

“Waiting for you,” said young Hiram humorously, that being one of a set of jokes which suited various occasions. Yates took his place near Miss Kitty, who looked as fresh and radiant as a spirit of the morning.

“I hope I haven’t kept you waiting long,” he said.

“No fear,” cried Mrs. Bartlett. “If breakfast’s a minute later than seven o’clock, we soon hear of it from the men-folks. They get precious hungry by that time.”

“By that time?” echoed Yates. “Then do they get up before seven?”

“Laws! what a farmer you would make, Mr. Yates!” exclaimed Mrs. Bartlett, laughing.

“Why, everything’s done about the house and barn; horses fed, cows milked—everything. There never was a better motto made than the one you learned when you were a boy, and like as not have forgotten all about:

“‘Early to bed and early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.’

I’m sorry you don’t believe in it, Mr. Yates.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Yates with some loftiness; “but I’d like to see a man get out a morning paper on such a basis. I’m healthy enough, quite as wealthy as the professor here, and everyone will admit that I’m wiser than he is; yet I never go to bed until after two o’clock, and rarely wake before noon.”

Kitty laughed at this, and young Hiram looked admiringly at the New Yorker, wishing he was as clever.

“For the land’s sake!” cried Mrs. Bartlett, with true feminine profanity, “What do you do up so late as that?”

“Writing, writing,” said Yates airily; “articles that make dynasties tremble next morning, and which call forth apologies or libel suits afterward, as the case may be.”

Young Hiram had no patience with one’s profession as a topic of conversation. The tent and its future position was the burning question with him. He mumbled something about Yates having slept late in order to avoid the hearing of the words of thankfulness at the beginning of the meal. What his parents caught of this remark should have shown them how evil communications corrupt good manners; for, big as he was, the boy had never before ventured even to hint at ridicule on such

a subject. He was darkly frowned upon by his silent father, and sharply reprimanded by his voluble mother. Kitty apparently thought it rather funny, and would like to have laughed. As it was, she contented herself with a sly glance at Yates, who, incredible as it may seem, actually blushed at young Hiram's allusion to the confusing incident of the day before.

The professor, who was a kind-hearted man, drew a herring across the scent.

"Mr. Bartlett has been good enough," said he, changing the subject, "to say we may camp in the woods at the back of the farm. I have been out there this morning, and it certainly is a lovely spot."

"We're awfully obliged, Mr. Bartlett," said Yates. "Of course Renmark went out there merely to show the difference between the ant and the butterfly. You'll find out what a humbug he is by and by, Mrs. Bartlett. He looks honest; but you wait."

"I know just the spot for the tent," cried young Hiram—"down in the hollow by the creek. Then you won't need to haul water."

"Yes, and catch their deaths of fever and ague," said Mrs. Bartlett. Malaria had not then been invented. "Take my advice, and put your tent—if you *will* put it up at all—on the highest ground you can find. Hauling water won't hurt you."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Bartlett. It shall be so. My friend uses no water—you ought to have seen his bill at the Buffalo hotel. I have it somewhere, and am going to pin it up on the outside of the tent as a warning to the youth of this neighborhood—and what water I need I can easily carry up from the creek."

The professor did not defend himself, and Mrs. Bartlett evidently took a large discount from all that Yates said. She was a shrewd woman.

After breakfast the men went out to the barn. The horses were hitched to the wagon, which still contained the tent and fittings. Young Hiram threw an ax and a spade among the canvas folds, mounted to his place, and drove up the lane leading to the forest, followed by Yates and Renmark on foot, leaving the farmer in his barnyard with a cheery good-by, which he did not see fit to return.

First, a field of wheat; next, an expanse of waving hay that soon would be ready for the scythe; then, a pasture field, in which some young horses galloped to the fence, gazing for a moment at the harnessed horses, whinnying sympathetically, off the next with flying heels wildly flung in the air, rejoicing in their own contrast of liberty, standing at the farther corner and snorting defiance to all the world; last, the cool shade of the woods into which the lane ran, losing its identity as a wagon road in diverging cow paths. Young Hiram knew the locality well, and drove direct to an ideal place for camping. Yates was enchanted. He included all that section of the country in a sweeping wave of his hand, and burst forth:

"This is the spot, the center of the grove:
There stands the oak, the monarch of the wood.
In such a place as this, at such an hour,
We'll raise a tent to ward off sun and shower."

Shakespeare improved."

"I think you are mistaken," said Renmark.

"Not a bit it. Couldn't be a better camping ground."

"Yes; I know that. I picked it out two hours ago. But you were wrong in your quotation. It is not by Shakespeare and yourself, as you seem to think."

"Isn't it? Some other fellow, eh? Well, if Shake is satisfied, I am. Do you know, Renny, I calculate that, line for line, I've written about ten times as much as Shakespeare. Do the literati recognize that fact? Not a bit of it. This is an ungrateful world, Stilly."

"It is, Dick. Now, what are you going to do toward putting up the tent?"

“Everything, my boy, everything. I know more about putting up tents than you do about science, or whatever you teach. Now, Hiram, my boy, you cut me some stakes about two feet long—stout ones. Here, professor, throw off that coat and *négligé* manner, and grasp this spade. I want some trenches dug.”

Yates certainly made good his words. He understood the putting up of tents, his experience in the army being not yet remote. Young Hiram gazed with growing admiration at Yates’ deftness and evident knowledge of what he was about, while his contempt for the professor’s futile struggle with a spade entangled in tree roots was hardly repressed.

“Better give me that spade,” he said at length; but there was an element of stubbornness in Renmark’s character. He struggled on.

At last the work was completed, stakes driven, ropes tightened, trenches dug.

Yates danced, and gave the war whoop of the country.

“Thus the canvas tent has risen,
All the slanting stakes are driven,
Stakes of oak and stakes of beechwood:
Mops his brow, the tired professor;
Grins with satisfaction, Hiram;
Dances wildly, the reporter—
Calls aloud for gin and water.

Longfellow, old man, Longfellow. Bet you a dollar on it!” And the frivolous Yates poked the professor in the ribs.

“Richard,” said the latter, “I can stand only a certain amount of this sort of thing. I don’t wish to call any man a fool, but you act remarkably like one.”

“Don’t be mealy-mouthed, Renny; call a spade a spade. By George! young Hiram has gone off and forgotten his—And the ax, too! Perhaps they’re left for us. He’s a good fellow, is young Hiram. A fool? Of course I’m a fool. That’s what I came for, and that’s what I’m going to be for the next two weeks. ‘A fool—a fool, I met a fool i’ the forest’—just the spot for him. Who could be wise here after years of brick and mortar?

“Where are your eyes, Renny,” he cried, “that you don’t grow wild when you look around you? See the dappled sunlight filtering through the leaves; listen to the murmur of the wind in the branches; hear the trickle of the brook down there; notice the smooth bark of the beech and the rugged covering of the oak; smell the wholesome woodland scents. Renmark, you have no soul, or you could not be so unmoved. It is like paradise. It is—Say, Renny, by Jove, I’ve forgotten that jug at the barn!”

“It will be left there.”

“Will it? Oh, well, if you say so.”

“I do say so. I looked around for it this morning to smash it, but couldn’t find it.”

“Why didn’t you ask old Bartlett?”

“I did; but he didn’t know where it was.”

Yates threw himself down on the moss and laughed, flinging his arms and legs about with the joy of living.

“Say, Culture, have you got any old disreputable clothes with you? Well, then, go into the tent and put them on; then come out and lie on your back and look up at the leaves. You’re a good fellow, Renny, but decent clothes spoil you. You won’t know yourself when you get ancient duds on your back. Old clothes mean freedom, liberty, all that our ancestors fought for. When you come out, we’ll settle who’s to cook and who to wash dishes. I’ve settled it already in my own mind, but I am not so selfish as to refuse to discuss the matter with you.”

When the professor came out of the tent, Yates roared. Renmark himself smiled; he knew the effect would appeal to Yates.

“By Jove! old man, I ought to have included a mirror in the outfit. The look of learned respectability, set off with the garments of a disreputable tramp, makes a combination that is simply killing. Well, you can’t spoil *that* suit, anyhow. Now sprawl.”

“I’m very comfortable standing up, thank you.”

“Get down on your back. You hear me?”

“Put me there.”

“You mean it?” asked Yates, sitting up.

“Certainly.”

“Say, Renny, beware. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I’ll forgive you for once.”

“On your head be it.”

“On my back, you mean.”

“That’s not bad, Renny,” cried Yates, springing to his feet. “Now, it will hurt. You have fair warning. I have spoken.”

The young men took sparring attitudes. Yates tried to do it gently at first, but, finding he could not touch his opponent, struck out more earnestly, again giving a friendly warning. This went on ineffectually for some time, when the professor, with a quick movement, swung around his foot with the airy grace of a dancing master, and caught Yates just behind the knee, at the same time giving him a slight tap on the breast. Yates was instantly on his back.

“Oh, I say, Renny, that wasn’t fair. That was a kick.”

“No, it wasn’t. It is merely a little French touch. I learned it in Paris. They *do* kick there, you know; and it is good to know how to use your feet as well as your fists if you are set on by three, as I was one night in the Latin Quarter.”

Yates sat up.

“Look here, Renmark; when were you in Paris?”

“Several times.”

Yates gazed at him for a few moments, then said:

“Renny, you improve on acquaintance. I never saw a Bool-var in my life. You must teach me that little kick.”

“With pleasure,” said Renmark, sitting down, while the other sprawled at full length. “Teaching is my business, and I shall be glad to exercise any talents I may have in that line. In endeavoring to instruct a New York man the first step is to convince him that he doesn’t know everything. That is the difficult point. Afterward everything is easy.”

“Mr. Stillson Renmark, you are pleased to be severe. Know that you are forgiven. This delicious sylvan retreat does not lend itself to acrimonious dispute, or, in plain English, quarreling. Let dogs delight, if they want to; I refuse to be goaded by your querulous nature into giving anything but the soft answer. Now to business. Nothing is so conducive to friendship, when two people are camping out, as a definition of the duties of each at the beginning. Do you follow me?”

“Perfectly. What do you propose?”

“I propose that you do the cooking and I wash the dishes. We will forage for food alternate days.”

“Very well. I agree to that.”

Richard Yates sat suddenly upright, looking at his friend with reproach in his eyes. “See here, Renmark; are you resolved to force on an international complication the very first day? That’s no fair show to give a man.”

“What isn’t?”

“Why, agreeing with him. There are depths of meanness in your character, Renny, that I never suspected. You know that people who camp out always object to the part assigned them by their fellow-campers. I counted on that. I’ll do anything but wash dishes.”

“Then why didn’t you say so?”

“Because any sane man would have said ‘no’ when I suggested cooking, merely *because* I suggested it. There is no diplomacy about you, Renmark. A man doesn’t know where to find you when you act like that. When you refused to do the cooking, I would have said: ‘Very well, then, I’ll do it,’ and everything would have been lovely; but now—”

Yates lay down again in disgust. There are moments in life when language fails a man.

“Then it’s settled that you do the cooking and I wash the dishes?” said the professor.

“Settled? Oh yes, if you say so; but all the pleasure of getting one’s own way by the use of one’s brains is gone. I hate to be agreed with in that objectionably civil manner.”

“Well, that point being arranged, who begins the foraging—you or I?”

“Both, Herr Professor, both. I propose to go to the house of the Howards, and I need an excuse for the first visit; therefore I shall forage to a limited extent. I go ostensibly for bread. As I may not get any, you perhaps should bring some from whatever farmhouse you choose as the scene of your operations. Bread is always handy in the camp, fresh or stale. When in doubt, buy more bread. You can never go wrong, and the bread won’t.”

“What else should I get? Milk, I suppose?”

“Certainly; eggs, butter—anything. Mrs. Bartlett will give you hints on what to get that will be more valuable than mine.”

“Have you all the cooking utensils you need?”

“I think so. The villain from whom I hired the outfit said it was complete. Doubtless he lied; but we’ll manage, I think.”

“Very well. If you wait until I change my clothes, I’ll go with you as far as the road.”

“My dear fellow, be advised, and don’t change. You’ll get everything twenty per cent. cheaper in that rig-out. Besides, you are so much more picturesque. Your costume may save us from starvation if we run short of cash. You can get enough for both of us as a professional tramp. Oh, well, if you insist, I’ll wait. Good advice is thrown away on a man like you.”

CHAPTER VI

Margaret Howard stood at the kitchen table kneading dough. The room was called the kitchen, which it was not, except in winter. The stove was moved out in spring to a lean-to, easily reached through the open door leading to the kitchen veranda.

When the stove went out or came in, it marked the approach or the departure of summer. It was the heavy pendulum whose swing this way or that indicated the two great changes of the year. No job about the farm was so much disliked by the farmer and his boys as the semiannual removal of the stove. Soot came down, stovepipes gratingly grudged to go together again; the stove was heavy and cumbersome, and many a pain in a rural back dated from the journey of the stove from outhouse to kitchen.

The kitchen itself was a one-story building, which projected back from the two-story farmhouse, giving the whole a T-shape. There was a veranda on each side of the kitchen, as well as one along the front of the house itself.

Margaret's sleeves were turned back nearly to her elbows, showing a pair of white and shapely arms. Now and then she deftly dusted the kneading board with flour to prevent the dough sticking, and as she pressed her open palms into the smooth, white, spongy mass, the table groaned protestingly. She cut the roll with a knife into lumps that were patted into shape, and placed side by side, like hillocks of snow, in the sheet-iron pan.

At this moment there was a rap at the open kitchen door, and Margaret turned round, startled, for visitors were rare at that hour of the day; besides, neighbors seldom made such a concession to formality as to knock. The young girl flushed as she recognized the man who had spoken to her the day before. He stood smiling in the doorway, with his hat in his hand. She uttered no word of greeting or welcome, but stood looking at him, with her hand on the floury table.

"Good-morning, Miss Howard," said Yates blithely; "may I come in? I have been knocking for some time fruitlessly at the front door, so I took the liberty of coming around."

"I did not hear you knock," answered Margaret. She neglected to invite him in, but he took the permission for granted and entered, seating himself as one who had come to stay. "You must excuse me for going on with my work," she added; "bread at this stage will not wait."

"Certainly, certainly. Please do not let me interrupt you. I have made my own bread for years, but not in that way. I am glad that you are making bread, for I have come to see if I can buy some."

"Really? Perhaps I can sell you some butter and eggs as well."

Yates laughed in that joyous, free-hearted manner of his which had much to do with his getting on in the world. It was difficult to remain long angry with so buoyant a nature.

"Ah, Miss Howard, I see you haven't forgiven me for that remark. You surely could not have thought I meant it. I really intended it for a joke, but I am willing to admit, now that I look back on it, that the joke was rather poor; but, then, most of my jokes are rather shopworn."

"I am afraid I lack a sense of humor."

"All women do," said Yates with easy confidence. "At least, all I've ever met."

Yates was sitting in a wooden chair, which he now placed at the end of the table, tilting it back until his shoulders rested against the wall. His feet were upon the rung, and he waved his hat back and forth, fanning himself, for it was warm. In this position he could look up at the face of the pretty girl before him, whose smooth brow was touched with just the slightest indication of a faint frown. She did not even glance at the self-confident young man, but kept her eyes fixed resolutely on her work. In the silence the table creaked as Margaret kneaded the dough. Yates felt an unaccustomed sensation of embarrassment creeping over him, and realized that he would have to re-erect the conversation on a new basis. It was manifestly absurd that a resourceful New Yorker, who had conversed unabashed

with presidents, senators, generals, and other great people of a great nation, should be put out of countenance by the unaccountable coldness of a country girl in the wilds of Canada.

“I have not had an opportunity of properly introducing myself,” he said at last, when the creaking of the table, slight as it was, became insupportable. “My name is Richard Yates, and I come from New York. I am camping out in this neighborhood to relieve, as it were, a mental strain—the result of years of literary work.”

Yates knew from long experience that the quickest and surest road to a woman’s confidence was through her sympathy. “Mental strain” struck him as a good phrase, indicating midnight oil and the hollow eye of the devoted student.

“Is your work mental, then?” asked Margaret incredulously, flashing, for the first time, a dark-eyed look at him.

“Yes,” Yates laughed uneasily. He had manifestly missed fire. “I notice by your tone that you evidently think my equipment meager. You should not judge by appearances, Miss Howard. Most of us are better than we seem, pessimists to the contrary notwithstanding. Well, as I was saying, the camping company consists of two partners. We are so different in every respect that we are the best of friends. My partner is Mr. Stillson Renmark, professor of something or other in University College, Toronto.”

For the first time Margaret exhibited some interest in the conversation.

“Professor Renmark? I have heard of him.”

“Dear me! I had no idea the fame of the professor had penetrated beyond the precincts of the university—if a university has precincts. He told me it had all the modern improvements, but I suspected at the time that was merely Renny’s brag.”

The frown on the girl’s brow deepened, and Yates was quick to see that he had lost ground again, if, indeed, he had ever gained any, which he began to doubt. She evidently did not relish his glib talk about the university. He was just about to say something deferentially about that institution, for he was not a man who would speak disrespectfully of the equator if he thought he might curry favor with his auditor by doing otherwise, when it occurred to him that Miss Howard’s interest was centered in the man, and not in the university.

“In this world, Miss Howard,” he continued, “true merit rarely finds its reward; at least, the reward shows some reluctance in making itself visible in time for man to enjoy it. Professor Renmark is a man so worthy that I was rather astonished to learn that you knew of him. I am glad for his sake that it is so, for no man more thoroughly deserves fame than he.”

“I know nothing of him,” said Margaret, “except what my brother has written. My brother is a student at the university.”

“Is he really? And what is he going in for?”

“A good education.”

Yates laughed.

“Well, that is an all-round handy thing for a person to have about him. I often wish I had had a university training. Still, it is not valued in an American newspaper office as much as might be. Yet,” he added in a tone that showed he did not desire to be unfair to a man of education, “I have known some university men who became passably good reporters in time.”

The girl made no answer, but attended strictly to the work in hand. She had the rare gift of silence, and these intervals of quiet abashed Yates, whose most frequent boast was that he could outtalk any man on earth. Opposition, or even abuse, merely served as a spur to his volubility, but taciturnity disconcerted him.

“Well,” he cried at length, with something like desperation, “let us abandon this animated discussion on the subject of education, and take up the more practical topic of bread. Would you believe, Miss Howard, that I am an expert in bread making?”

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