

BRET HARTE

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THE SIERRAS

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CHAPTER I

Where the great highway of the Sierras nears the summit, and the pines begin to show sterile reaches of rock and waste in their drawn-up files, there are signs of occasional departures from the main road, as if the weary traveller had at times succumbed to the long ascent, and turned aside for rest and breath again. The tired eyes of many a dusty passenger on the old overland coach have gazed wistfully on those sylvan openings, and imagined recesses of primeval shade and virgin wilderness in their dim perspectives. Had he descended, however, and followed one of these diverging paths, he would have come upon some rude wagon track, or "logslide," leading from a clearing on the slope, or the ominous saw-mill, half hidden in the forest it was slowly decimating. The woodland hush might have been broken by the sound of water passing over some unseen dam in the hollow, or the hiss of escaping steam and throb of an invisible engine in the covert.

Such, at least, was the experience of a young fellow of five-and-twenty, who, knapsack on back and stick in hand, had turned aside from the highway and entered the woods one pleasant afternoon in July. But he was evidently a deliberate pedestrian,

and not a recent deposit of the proceeding stage-coach; and although his stout walking-shoes were covered with dust, he had neither the habitual slouch and slovenliness of the tramp, nor the hurried fatigue and growing negligence of an involuntary wayfarer. His clothes, which were strong and serviceable, were better fitted for their present usage than the ordinary garments of the Californian travellers, which were too apt to be either above or below their requirements. But perhaps the stranger's greatest claim to originality was the absence of any weapon in his equipment. He carried neither rifle nor gun in his hand, and his narrow leathern belt was empty of either knife or revolver.

A half-mile from the main road, which seemed to him to have dropped out of sight the moment he had left it, he came upon a half-cleared area, where the hastily-cut stumps of pines, of irregular height, bore an odd resemblance to the broken columns of some vast and ruined temple. A few fallen shafts, denuded of their bark and tessellated branches, sawn into symmetrical cylinders, lay beside the stumps, and lent themselves to the illusion. But the freshly-cut chips, so damp that they still clung in layers to each other as they had fallen from the axe, and the stumps themselves, still wet and viscous from their drained life-blood, were redolent of an odor of youth and freshness.

The young man seated himself on one of the logs and deeply inhaled the sharp balsamic fragrance—albeit with a slight cough and a later hurried respiration. This, and a certain drawn look about his upper lip, seemed to indicate, in spite of his strength

and color, some pulmonary weakness. He, however, rose after a moment's rest with undiminished energy and cheerfulness, readjusted his knapsack, and began to lightly pick his way across the fallen timber. A few paces on, the muffled whir of machinery became more audible, with the lazy, monotonous command of "Gee thar," from some unseen ox-driver. Presently, the slow, deliberately-swaying heads of a team of oxen emerged from the bushes, followed by the clanking chain of the "skids" of sawn planks, which they were ponderously dragging with that ostentatious submissiveness peculiar to their species. They had nearly passed him when there was a sudden hitch in the procession. From where he stood he could see that a projecting plank had struck a pile of chips and become partly imbedded in it. To run to the obstruction and, with a few dexterous strokes and the leverage of his stout stick, dislodge the plank was the work not only of the moment but of an evidently energetic hand. The teamster looked back and merely nodded his appreciation, and with a "Gee up! Out of that, now!" the skids moved on.

"Much obliged, there!" said a hearty voice, as if supplementing the teamster's imperfect acknowledgment.

The stranger looked up. The voice came from the open, sashless, shutterless window of a rude building—a mere shell of boards and beams half hidden in the still leafy covert before him. He had completely overlooked it in his approach, even as he had ignored the nearer throbbing of the machinery, which was so violent as to impart a decided tremor to the slight edifice, and to

shake the speaker so strongly that he was obliged while speaking to steady himself by the sashless frame of the window at which he stood. He had a face of good-natured and alert intelligence, a master's independence and authority of manner, in spite of his blue jean overalls and flannel shirt.

"Don't mention it," said the stranger, smiling with equal but more deliberate good-humor. Then, seeing that his interlocutor still lingered a hospitable moment in spite of his quick eyes and the jarring impatience of the machinery, he added hesitatingly, "I fancy I've wandered off the track a bit. Do you know a Mr. Bradley—somewhere here?"

The stranger's hesitation seemed to be more from some habitual conscientiousness of statement than awkwardness. The man in the window replied, "I'm Bradley."

"Ah! Thank you: I've a letter for you—somewhere. Here it is." He produced a note from his breast-pocket. Bradley stooped to a sitting posture in the window. "Pitch it up." It was thrown and caught cleverly. Bradley opened it, read it hastily, smiled and nodded, glanced behind him as if to implore further delay from the impatient machinery, leaned perilously from the window, and said,—

"Look here! Do you see that silver-fir straight ahead?"

"Yes."

"A little to the left there's a trail. Follow it and skirt along the edge of the canyon until you see my house. Ask for my wife—that's Mrs. Bradley—and give her your letter. Stop!" He drew a

carpenter's pencil from his pocket, scrawled two or three words across the open sheet and tossed it back to the stranger. "See you at tea! Excuse me—Mr. Mainwaring—we're short-handed—and—the engine—" But here he disappeared suddenly.

Without glancing at the note again, the stranger quietly replaced it in his pocket, and struck out across the fallen trunks towards the silver-fir. He quickly found the trail indicated by Bradley, although it was faint and apparently worn by a single pair of feet as a shorter and private cut from some more travelled path. It was well for the stranger that he had a keen eye or he would have lost it; it was equally fortunate that he had a mountaineering instinct, for a sudden profound deepening of the blue mist seen dimly through the leaves before him caused him to slacken his steps. The trail bent abruptly to the right; a gulf fully two thousand feet deep was at his feet! It was the Great Canyon.

At the first glance it seemed so narrow that a rifle-shot could have crossed its tranquil depths; but a second look at the comparative size of the trees on the opposite mountain convinced him of his error. A nearer survey of the abyss also showed him that instead of its walls being perpendicular they were made of successive ledges or terraces to the valley below. Yet the air was so still, and the outlines so clearly cut, that they might have been only the reflections of the mountains around him cast upon the placid mirror of a lake. The spectacle arrested him, as it arrested all men, by some occult power beyond the mere attraction of beauty or magnitude; even the teamster never passed it without

the tribute of a stone or broken twig tossed into its immeasurable profundity.

Reluctantly leaving the spot, the stranger turned with the trail that now began to skirt its edge. This was no easy matter, as the undergrowth was very thick, and the foliage dense to the perilous brink of the precipice. He walked on, however, wondering why Bradley had chosen so circuitous and dangerous a route to his house, which naturally would be some distance back from the canyon. At the end of ten minutes' struggling through the "brush," the trail became vague, and, to all appearances, ended. Had he arrived? The thicket was as dense as before; through the interstices of leaf and spray he could see the blue void of the canyon at his side, and he even fancied that the foliage ahead of him was more symmetrical and less irregular, and was touched here and there with faint bits of color. To complete his utter mystification, a woman's voice, very fresh, very youthful, and by no means unmusical, rose apparently from the circumambient air. He looked hurriedly to the right and left, and even hopelessly into the trees above him.

"Yes," said the voice, as if renewing a suspended conversation, "it was too funny for anything. There were the two Missouri girls from Skinner's, with their auburn hair ringleted, my dear, like the old 'Books of Beauty'—in white frocks and sashes of an unripe greenish yellow, that puckered up your mouth like persimmons. One of them was speechless from good behavior, and the other—well! the other was so energetic she called out the figures before

the fiddler did, and shrieked to my vis-a-vis to dance up to the entire stranger—meaning ME, if you please.”

The voice appeared to come from the foliage that overhung the canyon, and the stranger even fancied he could detect through the shimmering leafy veil something that moved monotonously to and fro. Mystified and impatient, he made a hurried stride forward, his foot struck a wooden step, and the next moment the mystery was made clear. He had almost stumbled upon the end of a long veranda that projected over the abyss before a low, modern dwelling, till then invisible, nestling on its very brink. The symmetrically-trimmed foliage he had noticed were the luxuriant Madeira vines that hid the rude pillars of the veranda; the moving object was a rocking-chair, with its back towards the intruder, that disclosed only the brown hair above, and the white skirts and small slippered feet below, of a seated female figure. In the mean time, a second voice from the interior of the house had replied to the figure in the chair, who was evidently the first speaker:—

“It must have been very funny; but as long as Jim is always bringing somebody over from the mill, I don’t see how I can go to those places. You were lucky, my dear, to escape from the new Division Superintendent last night; he was insufferable to Jim with his talk of his friend the San Francisco millionaire, and to me with his cheap society airs. I do hate a provincial fine gentleman.”

The situation was becoming embarrassing to the intruder.

At the apparition of the woman, the unaffected and simple directness he had previously shown in his equally abrupt contact with Bradley had fled utterly; confused by the awkwardness of his arrival, and shocked at the idea of overhearing a private conversation, he stepped hurriedly on the veranda.

“Well? go on!” said the second voice impatiently. “Well, who else was there? WHAT did you say? I don’t hear you. What’s the matter?”

The seated figure had risen from her chair, and turned a young and pretty face somewhat superciliously towards the stranger, as she said in a low tone to her unseen auditor, “Hush! there is somebody here.”

The young man came forward with an awkwardness that was more boyish than rustic. His embarrassment was not lessened by the simultaneous entrance from the open door of a second woman, apparently as young as and prettier than the first.

“I trust you’ll excuse me for—for—being so wretchedly stupid,” he stammered, “but I really thought, you know, that—that—I was following the trail to—to—the front of the house, when I stumbled in—in here.”

Long before he had finished, both women, by some simple feminine intuition, were relieved and even prepossessed by his voice and manner. They smiled graciously. The later-comer pointed to the empty chair. But with his habit of pertinacious conscientiousness the stranger continued, “It was regularly stupid, wasn’t it?—and I ought to have known better. I should

have turned back and gone away when I found out what an ass I was likely to be, but I was—afraid—you know, of alarming you by the noise.”

“Won’t you sit down?” said the second lady, pleasantly.

“Oh, thanks! I’ve a letter here—I”—he transferred his stick and hat to his left hand as he felt in his breast-pocket with his right. But the action was so awkward that the stick dropped on the veranda. Both women made a movement to restore it to its embarrassed owner, who, however, quickly anticipated them. “Pray don’t mind it,” he continued, with accelerated breath and heightened color. “Ah, here’s the letter!” He produced the note Bradley had returned to him. “It’s mine, in fact—that is, I brought it to Mr. Bradley. He said I was to give it to—to—to—Mrs. Bradley.” He paused, glancing embarrassedly from the one to the other.

“I’m Mrs. Bradley,” said the prettiest one, with a laugh. He handed her the letter. It ran as follows:—

“DEAR BRADLEY—Put Mr. Mainwaring through as far as he wants to go, or hang him up at The Lookout, just as he likes. The Bank’s behind him, and his hat’s chalked all over the Road; but he don’t care much about being on velvet. That ain’t his style—and you’ll like him. He’s somebody’s son in England. B.”

Mrs. Bradley glanced simply at the first sentence. “Pray sit down, Mr. Mainwaring,” she said gently; “or, rather, let me first introduce my cousin—Miss Macy.”

“Thanks,” said Mainwaring, with a bow to Miss Macy, “but

I—I—I—think,” he added conscientiously, “you did not notice that your husband had written something across the paper.”

Mrs. Bradley smiled, and glanced at her husband’s indorsement—“All right. Wade in.” “It’s nothing but Jim’s slang,” she said, with a laugh and a slightly heightened color. “He ought not to have sent you by that short cut; it’s a bother, and even dangerous for a stranger. If you had come directly to US by the road, without making your first call at the mill,” she added, with a touch of coquetry, “you would have had a pleasanter walk, and seen US sooner. I suppose, however, you got off the stage at the mill?”

“I was not on the coach,” said Mainwaring, unfastening the strap of his knapsack. “I walked over from Lone Pine Flat.”

“Walked!” echoed both women in simultaneous astonishment.

“Yes,” returned Mainwaring simply, laying aside his burden and taking the proffered seat. “It’s a very fine bit of country.”

“Why, it’s fifteen miles,” said Mrs. Bradley, glancing horror-stricken at her cousin. “How dreadful! And to think Jim could have sent you a horse to Lone Pine. Why, you must be dead!”

“Thanks, I’m all right! I rather enjoyed it, you know.”

“But,” said Miss Macy, glancing wonderingly at his knapsack, “you must want something, a change—or some refreshment—after fifteen miles.”

“Pray don’t disturb yourself,” said Mainwaring, rising hastily, but not quickly enough to prevent the young girl from slipping past him into the house, whence she rapidly returned with a

decanter and glasses.

“Perhaps Mr. Mainwaring would prefer to go into Jim’s room and wash his hands and put on a pair of slippers?” said Mrs. Bradley, with gentle concern.

“Thanks, no. I really am not tired. I sent some luggage yesterday by the coach to the Summit Hotel,” he said, observing the women’s eyes still fixed upon his knapsack. “I dare say I can get them if I want them. I’ve got a change here,” he continued, lifting the knapsack as if with a sudden sense of its incongruity with its surroundings, and depositing it on the end of the veranda.

“Do let it remain where it is,” said Mrs. Bradley, greatly amused, “and pray sit still and take some refreshment. You’ll make yourself ill after your exertions,” she added, with a charming assumption of matronly solicitude.

“But I’m not at all deserving of your sympathy,” said Mainwaring, with a laugh. “I’m awfully fond of walking, and my usual constitutional isn’t much under this.”

“Perhaps you were stronger than you are now,” said Mrs. Bradley, gazing at him with a frank curiosity that, however, brought a faint deepening of color to his cheek.

“I dare say you’re right,” he said suddenly, with an apologetic smile. “I quite forgot that I’m a sort of an invalid, you know, travelling for my health. I’m not very strong here,” he added, lightly tapping his chest, that now, relieved of the bands of his knapsack, appeared somewhat thin and hollow in spite of his broad shoulders. His voice, too, had become less clear and

distinct.

Mrs. Bradley, who was still watching him, here rose potentially. "You ought to take more care of yourself," she said. "You should begin by eating this biscuit, drinking that glass of whiskey, and making yourself more comfortable in Jim's room until we can get the spare room fixed a little."

"But I am not to be sent to bed—am I?" asked Mainwaring, in half-real, half-amused consternation.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mrs. Bradley, with playful precision. "But for the present we'll let you off with a good wash and a nap afterwards in that rocking-chair, while my cousin and I make some little domestic preparations. You see," she added with a certain proud humility, "we've got only one servant—a Chinaman, and there are many things we can't leave to him."

The color again rose in Mainwaring's cheek, but he had tact enough to reflect that any protest or hesitation on his part at that moment would only increase the difficulties of his gentle entertainers. He allowed himself to be ushered into the house by Mrs. Bradley, and shown to her husband's room, without perceiving that Miss Macy had availed herself of his absence to run to the end of the veranda, mischievously try to lift the discarded knapsack to her own pretty shoulder, but, failing, heroically stagger with it into the passage and softly deposit it at his door. This done, she pantingly rejoined her cousin in the kitchen.

"Well," said Mrs. Bradley, emphatically. "DID you ever?"

Walking fifteen miles for pleasure—and with such lungs!”

“And that knapsack!” added Louise Macy, pointing to the mark in her little palm where the strap had imbedded itself in the soft flesh.

“He’s nice, though; isn’t he?” said Mrs. Bradley, tentatively.

“Yes,” said Miss Macy, “he isn’t, certainly, one of those provincial fine gentlemen you object to. But DID you see his shoes? I suppose they make the miles go quickly, or seem to measure less by comparison.”

“They’re probably more serviceable than those high-heeled things that Captain Greyson hops about in.”

“But the Captain always rides—and rides very well—you know,” said Louise, reflectively. There was a moment’s pause.

“I suppose Jim will tell us all about him,” said Mrs. Bradley, dismissing the subject, as she turned her sleeves back over her white arms, preparatory to grappling certain culinary difficulties.

“Jim,” observed Miss Macy, shortly, “in my opinion, knows nothing more than his note says. That’s like Jim.”

“There’s nothing more to know, really,” said Mrs. Bradley, with a superior air. “He’s undoubtedly the son of some Englishman of fortune, sent out here for his health.”

“Hush!”

Miss Macy had heard a step in the passage. It halted at last, half irresolutely, before the open door of the kitchen, and the stranger appeared with an embarrassed air.

But in his brief absence he seemed to have completely

groomed himself, and stood there, the impersonation of close-cropped, clean, and wholesome English young manhood. The two women appreciated it with cat-like fastidiousness.

“I beg your pardon; but really you’re going to let a fellow do something for you,” he said, “just to keep him from looking like a fool. I really can do no end of things, you know, if you’ll try me. I’ve done some camping-out, and can cook as well as the next man.”

The two women made a movement of smiling remonstrance, half coquettish, and half superior, until Mrs. Bradley, becoming conscious of her bare arms and the stranger’s wandering eyes, colored faintly, and said with more decision:—

“Certainly not. You’d only be in the way. Besides, you need rest more than we do. Put yourself in the rocking-chair in the veranda, and go to sleep until Mr. Bradley comes.”

Mainwaring saw that she was serious, and withdrew, a little ashamed at his familiarity into which his boyishness had betrayed him. But he had scarcely seated himself in the rocking-chair before Miss Macy appeared, carrying with both hands a large tin basin of unshelled peas.

“There,” she said pantingly, placing her burden in his lap, “if you really want to help, there’s something to do that isn’t very fatiguing. You may shell these peas.”

“SHELL them—I beg pardon, but how?” he asked, with smiling earnestness.

“How? Why, I’ll show you—look.”

She frankly stepped beside him, so close that her full-skirted dress half encompassed him and the basin in a delicious confusion, and, leaning over his lap, with her left hand picked up a pea-cod, which, with a single movement of her charming little right thumb, she broke at the end, and stripped the green shallow of its tiny treasures.

He watched her with smiling eyes; her own, looking down on him, were very bright and luminous. "There; that's easy enough," she said, and turned away.

"But—one moment, Miss—Miss—?"

"Macy," said louise.

"Where am I to put the shells?"

"Oh! throw them down there—there's room enough."

She was pointing to the canyon below. The veranda actually projected over its brink, and seemed to hang in mid air above it. Mainwaring almost mechanically threw his arm out to catch the incautious girl, who had stepped heedlessly to its extreme edge.

"How odd! Don't you find it rather dangerous here?" he could not help saying. "I mean—you might have had a railing that wouldn't intercept the view and yet be safe?"

"It's a fancy of Mr. Bradley's," returned the young girl carelessly. "It's all like this. The house was built on a ledge against the side of the precipice, and the road suddenly drops down to it."

"It's tremendously pretty, all the same, you know," said the young man thoughtfully, gazing, however, at the girl's rounded chin above him.

“Yes,” she replied curtly. “But this isn’t working. I must go back to Jenny. You can shell the peas until Mr. Bradley comes home. He won’t be long.”

She turned away, and re-entered the house. Without knowing why, he thought her withdrawal abrupt, and he was again feeling his ready color rise with the suspicion of either having been betrayed by the young girl’s innocent fearlessness into some unpardonable familiarity, which she had quietly resented, or of feeling an ease and freedom in the company of these two women that were inconsistent with respect, and should be restrained.

He, however, began to apply himself to the task given to him with his usual conscientiousness of duty, and presently acquired a certain manual dexterity in the operation. It was “good fun” to throw the cast-off husks into the mighty unfathomable void before him, and watch them linger with suspended gravity in mid air for a moment—apparently motionless—until they either lost themselves, a mere vanishing black spot in the thin ether, or slid suddenly at a sharp angle into unknown shadow. How deuced odd for him to be sitting here in this fashion! It would be something to talk of hereafter, and yet,—he stopped—it was not at all in the line of that characteristic adventure, uncivilized novelty, and barbarous freedom which for the last month he had sought and experienced. It was not at all like his meeting with the grizzly last week while wandering in a lonely canyon; not a bit in the line of his chance acquaintance with that notorious ruffian, Spanish Jack, or his witnessing with his own eyes that actual lynching

affair at Angels. No! Nor was it at all characteristic, according to his previous ideas of frontier rural seclusion—as for instance the Pike County cabin of the family where he stayed one night, and where the handsome daughter asked him what his Christian name was. No! These two young women were very unlike her; they seemed really quite the equals of his family and friends in England,—perhaps more attractive,—and yet, yes, it was this very attractiveness that alarmed his inbred social conservatism regarding women. With a man it was very different; that alert, active, intelligent husband, instinct with the throbbing life of his saw-mill, creator and worker in one, challenged his unqualified trust and admiration.

He had become conscious for the last minute or two of thinking rapidly and becoming feverishly excited; of breathing with greater difficulty, and a renewed tendency to cough. The tendency increased until he instinctively put aside the pan from his lap and half rose. But even that slight exertion brought on an accession of coughing. He put his handkerchief to his lips, partly to keep the sound from disturbing the women in the kitchen, partly because of a certain significant taste in his mouth which he unpleasantly remembered. When he removed the handkerchief it was, as he expected, spotted with blood. He turned quickly and re-entered the house softly, regaining the bedroom without attracting attention. An increasing faintness here obliged him to lie down on the bed until it should pass.

Everything was quiet. He hoped they would not discover his

absence from the veranda until he was better; it was deucedly awkward that he should have had this attack just now—and after he had made so light of his previous exertions. They would think him an effeminate fraud, these two bright, active women and that alert, energetic man. A faint color came into his cheek at the idea, and an uneasy sense that he had been in some way foolishly imprudent about his health. Again, they might be alarmed at missing him from the veranda; perhaps he had better have remained there; perhaps he ought to tell them that he had concluded to take their advice and lie down. He tried to rise, but the deep blue chasm before the window seemed to be swelling up to meet him, the bed slowly sinking into its oblivious profundity. He knew no more.

He came to with the smell and taste of some powerful volatile spirit, and the vague vision of Mr. Bradley still standing at the window of the mill and vibrating with the machinery; this changed presently to a pleasant lassitude and lazy curiosity as he perceived Mr. Bradley smile and apparently slip from the window of the mill to his bedside. “You’re all right now,” said Bradley, cheerfully.

He was feeling Mainwaring’s pulse. Had he really been ill and was Bradley a doctor?

Bradley evidently saw what was passing in his mind. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said gayly. “I’m not a doctor, but I practise a little medicine and surgery on account of the men at the mill, and accidents, you know. You’re all right now; you’ve lost a little

blood: but in a couple of weeks in this air we'll have that tubercle healed, and you'll be as right as a trivet."

"In a couple of weeks!" echoed Mainwaring, in faint astonishment. "Why, I leave here to-morrow."

"You'll do nothing of the kind" said Mrs. Bradley, with smiling peremptoriness, suddenly slipping out from behind her husband. "Everything is all perfectly arranged. Jim has sent off messengers to your friends, so that if you can't come to them, they can come to you. You see you can't help yourself! If you WILL walk fifteen miles with such lungs, and then frighten people to death, you must abide by the consequences."

"You see the old lady has fixed you," said Bradley, smiling; "and she's the master here. Come, Mainwaring, you can send any other message you like, and have who and what you want here; but HERE you must stop for a while."

"But did I frighten you really?" stammered Mainwaring, faintly, to Mrs. Bradley.

"Frighten us!" said Mrs. Bradley. "Well, look there!"

She pointed to the window, which commanded a view of the veranda. Miss Macy had dropped into the vacant chair, with her little feet stretched out before her, her cheeks burning with heat and fire, her eyes partly closed, her straw hat hanging by a ribbon round her neck, her brown hair clinging to her ears and forehead in damp tendrils, and an enormous palm-leaf fan in each hand violently playing upon this charming picture of exhaustion and abandonment.

“She came tearing down to the mill, bare-backed on our half-broken mustang, about half an hour ago, to call me ‘to help you,’” explained Bradley. “Heaven knows how she managed to do it!”

CHAPTER II

The medication of the woods was not overestimated by Bradley. There was surely some occult healing property in that vast reservoir of balmy and resinous odors over which The Lookout beetled and clung, and from which at times the pure exhalations of the terraced valley seemed to rise. Under its remedial influence and a conscientious adherence to the rules of absolute rest and repose laid down for him, Mainwaring had no return of the hemorrhage. The nearest professional medical authority, hastily summoned, saw no reason for changing or for supplementing Bradley's intelligent and simple treatment, although astounded that the patient had been under no more radical or systematic cure than travel and exercise. The women especially were amazed that Mainwaring had taken "nothing for it," in their habitual experience of an unfettered pill-and-elixir-consuming democracy. In their knowledge of the thousand "panaceas" that filled the shelves of the general store, this singular abstention of their guest seemed to indicate a national peculiarity.

His bed was moved beside the low window, from which he could not only view the veranda but converse at times with its occupants, and even listen to the book which Miss Macy, seated without, read aloud to him. In the evening Bradley would linger by his couch until late, beguiling the tedium of

his convalescence with characteristic stories and information which he thought might please the invalid. For Mainwaring, who had been early struck with Bradley's ready and cultivated intelligence, ended by shyly avoiding the discussion of more serious topics, partly because Bradley impressed him with a suspicion of his own inferiority, and partly because Mainwaring questioned the taste of Bradley's apparent exhibition of his manifest superiority. He learned accidentally that this mill-owner and backwoodsman was a college-bred man; but the practical application of that education to the ordinary affairs of life was new to the young Englishman's traditions, and grated a little harshly on his feelings. He would have been quite content if Bradley had, like himself and fellows he knew, undervalued his training, and kept his gifts conservatively impractical. The knowledge also that his host's education naturally came from some provincial institution unlike Oxford and Cambridge may have unconsciously affected his general estimate. I say unconsciously, for his strict conscientiousness would have rejected any such formal proposition.

Another trifle annoyed him. He could not help noticing also that although Bradley's manner and sympathy were confidential and almost brotherly, he never made any allusion to Mainwaring's own family or connections, and, in fact, gave no indication of what he believed was the national curiosity in regard to strangers. Somewhat embarrassed by this indifference, Mainwaring made the occasion of writing some letters home an

opportunity for laughingly alluding to the fact that he had made his mother and his sisters fully aware of the great debt they owed the household of The Lookout.

“They’ll probably all send you a round robin of thanks, except, perhaps, my next brother, Bob.”

Bradley contented himself with a gesture of general deprecation, and did not ask WHY Mainwaring’s young brother should contemplate his death with satisfaction. Nevertheless, some time afterwards Miss Macy remarked that it seemed hard that the happiness of one member of a family should depend upon a calamity to another. “As for instance?” asked Mainwaring, who had already forgotten the circumstance. “Why, if you had died and your younger brother succeeded to the baronetcy, and become Sir Robert Mainwaring,” responded Miss Macy, with precision. This was the first and only allusion to his family and prospective rank. On the other hand, he had—through naive and boyish inquiries, which seemed to amuse his entertainers—acquired, as he believed, a full knowledge of the history and antecedents of the Bradley household. He knew how Bradley had brought his young wife and her cousin to California and abandoned a lucrative law practice in San Francisco to take possession of this mountain mill and woodland, which he had acquired through some professional service.

“Then you are a barrister really?” said Mainwaring, gravely.

Bradley laughed. “I’m afraid I’ve had more practice—though not as lucrative a one—as surgeon or doctor.”

“But you’re regularly on the rolls, you know; you’re entered as Counsel, and all that sort of thing?” continued Mainwaring, with great seriousness.

“Well, yes,” replied Bradley, much amused. “I’m afraid I must plead guilty to that.”

“It’s not a bad sort of thing,” said Mainwaring, naively, ignoring Bradley’s amusement. “I’ve got a cousin who’s gone in for the law. Got out of the army to do it—too. He’s a sharp fellow.”

“Then you DO allow a man to try many trades—over there,” said Miss Macy, demurely.

“Yes, sometimes,” said Mainwaring, graciously, but by no means certain that the case was at all analogous.

Nevertheless, as if relieved of certain doubts of the conventional quality of his host’s attainments, he now gave himself up to a very hearty and honest admiration of Bradley. “You know it’s awfully kind of him to talk to a fellow like me who just pulled through, and never got any prizes at Oxford, and don’t understand the half of these things,” he remarked confidentially to Mrs. Bradley. “He knows more about the things we used to go in for at Oxford than lots of our men, and he’s never been there. He’s uncommonly clever.”

“Jim was always very brilliant,” returned Mrs. Bradley, indifferently, and with more than even conventionally polite wifely deprecation; “I wish he were more practical.”

“Practical! Oh, I say, Mrs. Bradley! Why, a fellow that can go

in among a lot of workmen and tell them just what to do—an all-round chap that can be independent of his valet, his doctor, and his—banker! By Jove—THAT’S practical!”

“I mean,” said Mrs. Bradley, coldly, “that there are some things that a gentleman ought not to be practical about nor independent of. Mr. Bradley would have done better to have used his talents in some more legitimate and established way.”

Mainwaring looked at her in genuine surprise. To his inexperienced observation Bradley’s intelligent energy and, above all, his originality, ought to have been priceless in the eyes of his wife—the American female of his species. He felt that slight shock which most loyal or logical men feel when first brought face to face with the easy disloyalty and incomprehensible logic of the feminine affections. Here was a fellow, by Jove, that any woman ought to be proud of, and—and—he stopped blankly. He wondered if Miss Macy sympathized with her cousin.

Howbeit, this did not affect the charm of their idyllic life at The Lookout. The precipice over which they hung was as charming as ever in its poetic illusions of space and depth and color; the isolation of their comfortable existence in the tasteful yet audacious habitation, the pleasant routine of daily tasks and amusements, all tended to make the enforced quiet and inaction of his convalescence a lazy recreation. He was really improving; more than that, he was conscious of a certain satisfaction in this passive observation of novelty that was healthier and

perhaps TRUER than his previous passion for adventure and that febrile desire for change and excitement which he now felt was a part of his disease. Nor were incident and variety entirely absent from this tranquil experience. He was one day astonished at being presented by Bradley with copies of the latest English newspapers, procured from Sacramento, and he equally astonished his host, after profusely thanking him, by only listlessly glancing at their columns. He estopped a proposed visit from one of his influential countrymen; in the absence of his fair entertainers at their domestic duties, he extracted infinite satisfaction from Foo-Yup, the Chinese servant, who was particularly detached for his service. From his invalid coign of vantage at the window he was observant of all that passed upon the veranda, that al-fresco audience-room of The Lookout, and he was good-humoredly conscious that a great many eccentric and peculiar visitors were invariably dragged thither by Miss Macy, and goaded into characteristic exhibition within sight and hearing of her guest, with a too evident view, under the ostentatious excuse of extending his knowledge of national character or mischievously shocking him.

“When you are strong enough to stand Captain Gashweiler’s opinions of the Established Church and Chinamen,” said Miss Macy, after one of these revelations, “I’ll get Jim to bring him here, for really he swears so outrageously that even in the broadest interests of international understanding and good-will neither Mrs. Bradley nor myself could be present.”

On another occasion she provokingly lingered before his window for a moment with a rifle slung jauntily over her shoulder. "If you hear a shot or two don't excite yourself, and believe we're having a lynching case in the woods. It will be only me. There's some creature—confess, you expected me to say 'critter'—hanging round the barn. It may be a bear. Good-by." She missed the creature,—which happened to be really a bear,—much to Mainwaring's illogical satisfaction. "I wonder why," he reflected, with vague uneasiness, "she doesn't leave all that sort of thing to girls like that tow-headed girl at the blacksmith's."

It chanced, however, that this blacksmith's tow-headed daughter, who, it may be incidentally remarked, had the additional eccentricities of large black eyes and large white teeth, came to the fore in quite another fashion. Shortly after this, Mainwaring being able to leave his room and join the family board, Mrs. Bradley found it necessary to enlarge her domestic service, and arranged with her nearest neighbor, the blacksmith, to allow his daughter to come to The Lookout for a few days to "do the chores" and assist in the housekeeping, as she had on previous occasions. The day of her advent Bradley entered Mainwaring's room, and, closing the door mysteriously, fixed his blue eyes, kindling with mischief, on the young Englishman.

"You are aware, my dear boy," he began with affected gravity, "that you are now living in a land of liberty, where mere artificial distinctions are not known, and where Freedom from her mountain heights generally levels all social positions. I think

you have graciously admitted that fact.”

“I know I’ve been taking a tremendous lot of freedom with you and yours, old man, and it’s a deuced shame,” interrupted Mainwaring, with a faint smile.

“And that nowhere,” continued Bradley, with immovable features, “does equality exist as perfectly as above yonder unfathomable abyss, where you have also, doubtless, observed the American eagle proudly soars and screams defiance.”

“Then that was the fellow that kept me awake this morning, and made me wonder if I was strong enough to hold a gun again.”

“That wouldn’t have settled the matter,” continued Bradley, imperturbably. “The case is simply this: Miss Minty Sharpe, that blacksmith’s daughter, has once or twice consented, for a slight emolument, to assist in our domestic service for a day or two, and she comes back again to-day. Now, under the aegis of that noble bird whom your national instincts tempt you to destroy, she has on all previous occasions taken her meals with us, at the same table, on terms of perfect equality. She will naturally expect to do the same now. Mrs. Bradley thought it proper, therefore, to warn you, that, in case your health was not quite equal to this democratic simplicity, you could still dine in your room.”

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