

ALDRICH THOMAS BAILEY

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA,
AND MY COUSIN THE
COLONEL

Thomas Aldrich

**The Queen of Sheba, and
My Cousin the Colonel**

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Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Queen of Sheba, and My Cousin the Colonel

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

I MARY

In the month of June, 1872, Mr. Edward Lynde, the assistant cashier and bookkeeper of the Nautilus Bank at Rivermouth, found himself in a position to execute a plan which he had long meditated in secret.

A statement like this at the present time, when integrity in a place of trust has become almost an anomaly, immediately suggests a defalcation; but Mr. Lynde's plan involved nothing more criminal than a horseback excursion through the northern part of the State of New Hampshire. A leave of absence of three weeks, which had been accorded him in recognition of several years' conscientious service, offered young Lynde the opportunity he had desired. These three weeks, as already hinted, fell in the month of June, when Nature in New Hampshire is in her most ravishing toilet; she has put away her winter ermine, which sometimes serves her quite into spring; she has thrown a green mantle over her brown shoulders, and is not above the coquetry of wearing a great variety of wild flowers on her bosom. With her sassafras and her sweet-brier she is in her best mood, as a woman in a fresh and becoming costume is apt to be, and almost any one might mistake her laugh for the music of falling water, and the agreeable rustle of her garments for the wind blowing through the pine forests.

As Edward Lynde rode out of Rivermouth one morning, an hour or two before anybody worth mention was moving, he was very well contented with this world, though he had his grievances, too, if he had chosen to think of them.

Masses of dark cloud still crowded the zenith, but along the eastern horizon, against the increasing blue, lay a city of golden spires and mosques and minarets—an Oriental city, indeed, such as is inhabited by poets and dreamers and other speculative persons fond of investing their small capital in such unreal estate. Young Lynde, in spite of his prosaic profession of bookkeeper, had an opulent though as yet unworked vein of romance running through his composition, and he said to himself as he gave a slight twitch to the reins, "I'll put up there to-night at the sign of the Golden Fleece, or may be I'll quarter myself on one of those rich old merchants who used to do business with the bank in the colonial days." Before he had finished speaking the city was destroyed by a general conflagration; the round red sun rose slowly above the pearl-gray ruins, and it was morning.

In his three years' residence at Rivermouth, Edward Lynde had never chanced to see the town at so early an hour. The cobble-paved street through which he was riding was a commercial street; but now the shops had their wooden eyelids shut tight, and were snoozing away as comfortably and innocently as if they were not at all alive to a sharp stroke of business in their wakeful hours. There was a charm to Lynde in this novel phase of a thoroughfare so familiar to him, and then the morning was perfect. The street ran parallel with the river, the glittering harebell-blue of which could be seen across a vacant lot here and there, or now and then at the end of a narrow lane running up from the wharves. The atmosphere had that indescribable sparkle and bloom which last only an hour or so after daybreak, and was charged with fine sea-flavors and the delicate breath of dewy meadow-land.

Everything appeared to exhale a fragrance; even the weather-beaten sign of "J. Tibbets & Son, West India Goods & Groceries," it seemed to Lynde, emitted an elusive spicy odor.

Edward Lynde soon passed beyond the limits of the town, and was ascending a steep hill, on the crest of which he proposed to take a farewell survey of the picturesque port throwing off its gauzy counterpane of sea-fog. The wind blew blithely on this hilltop; it filled his lungs and exhilarated him like champagne; he set spur to the gaunt, bony mare, and, with a flourish of his hand to the peaked roof of the Nautilus Bank, dashed off at a speed of not less than four miles an hour—for it was anything but an Arabian courser which Lynde had hired of honest Deacon Twombly. She was not a handsome animal either—yellow in tint and of the texture of an ancestral hair-trunk, with a plebeian head, and mysterious developments of muscle on the hind legs. She was not a horse for fancy riding; but she had her good points—she had a great many points of one kind and another—among which was her perfect adaptability to rough country roads and the sort of work now required of her.

"Mary ain't what you'd call a racer," Deacon Twombly had remarked while the negotiations were pending; "I don't say she is, but she's easy on the back."

This statement was speedily verified. At the end of two miles Mary stopped short and began backing, deliberately and systematically, as if to slow music in a circus. Recovering from the surprise of the halt, which had taken him wholly unawares, Lynde gathered the slackened reins firmly in his hand and pressed his spurs to the mare's flanks, with no other effect than slightly to accelerate the backward movement.

Perhaps nothing gives you so acute a sense of helplessness as to have a horse back with you, under the saddle or between shafts. The reins lie limp in your hands, as if detached from the animal; it is impossible to check him or force him forward; to turn him around is to confess yourself conquered; to descend and take him by the head is an act of pusillanimity. Of course there is only one thing to be done; but if you know what that is you possess a singular advantage over your fellow-creatures.

Finding spur and whip of no avail, Lynde tried the effect of moral suasion: he stroked Mary on the neck, and addressed her in terms that would have melted the heart of almost any other Mary; but she continued to back, slowly and with a certain grace that could have come only of confirmed habit. Now Lynde had no desire to return to Rivermouth, above all to back into it in that mortifying fashion and make himself a spectacle for the townsfolk; but if this thing went on forty or fifty minutes longer, that would be the result.

"If I cannot stop her," he reflected, "I'll desert the brute just before we get to the toll-gate. I can't think what possessed Twombly to let me have such a ridiculous animal!"

Mary showed no sign that she was conscious of anything unconventional or unlooked for in her conduct.

"Mary, my dear," said Lynde at last, with dangerous calmness, "you would be all right, or, at least, your proceeding would not be quite so flagrant a breach of promise, if you were only aimed in the opposite direction."

With this he gave a vigorous jerk at the left-hand rein, which caused the mare to wheel about and face Rivermouth. She hesitated an instant, and then resumed backing.

"Now, Mary," said the young man dryly, "I will let you have your head, so to speak, as long as you go the way I want you to."

This manoeuvre on the side of Lynde proved that he possessed qualities which, if skilfully developed, would have assured him success in the higher regions of domestic diplomacy. The ability to secure your own way and impress others with the idea that they are having THEIR own way is rare among men; among women it is as common as eyebrows.

"I wonder how long she will keep this up," mused Lynde, fixing his eye speculatively on Mary's pull-back ears. "If it is to be a permanent arrangement I shall have to reverse the saddle. Certainly, the creature is a *lusus naturae*—her head is on the wrong end! Easy on the back," he added, with a hollow laugh, recalling Deacon Twombly's recommendation. "I should say she was! I never saw an easier."

Presently Mary ceased her retrograde movement, righted herself of her own accord, and trotted off with as much submissiveness as could be demanded of her. Lynde subsequently learned that this propensity to back was an unaccountable whim which seized Mary at odd intervals and lasted from five to fifteen minutes. The peculiarity once understood not only ceased to be an annoyance to him, but became an agreeable break in the ride. Whenever her mood approached, he turned the mare round and let her back to her soul's content. He also ascertained that the maximum of Mary's speed was five miles an hour.

"I didn't want a fast horse, anyway," said Lynde philosophically. "As I am not going anywhere in particular, I need be in no hurry to get there."

The most delightful feature of Lynde's plan was that it was not a plan. He had simply ridden off into the rosy June weather, with no settled destination, no care for to-morrow, and as independent as a bird of the tourist's ordinary requirements. At the crupper of his saddle—an old cavalry saddle that had seen service in long-forgotten training-days—was attached a cylindrical valise of cowhide, containing a change of linen, a few toilet articles, a vulcanized cloth cape for rainy days, and the first volume of *The Earthly Paradise*. The two warlike holsters in front (in which Colonel Eliphalet Bangs used to carry a brace of flintlock pistols now reposing in the Historical Museum at Rivermouth) became the receptacle respectively of a slender flask of brandy and a Bologna sausage; for young Lynde had determined to sell his life dearly if by any chance of travel he came to close quarters with famine.

A broad-brimmed Panama hat, a suit of navy-blue flannel, and a pair of riding-boots completed his equipment. A field-glass in a leather case was swung by a strap over his shoulder, and in the breast pocket of his blouse he carried a small compass to guide him on his journey due north.

The young man's costume went very well with his frank, refined face, and twenty-three years. A dead-gold mustache, pointed at the ends and sweeping at a level right and left, like a swallow's wings, gave him something of a military air; there was a martial directness, too, in the glance of his clear gray eyes, undimmed as yet with looking too long on the world. There could not have been a better figure for the saddle than Lynde's—slightly above the average height, straight as a poplar, and neither too spare nor too heavy. Now and then, as he passed a farm-house, a young girl hanging out clothes in the front yard—for it was on a Monday—would pause with a shapeless snowdrift in her hand to gaze curiously at the apparition of a gallant young horseman riding by. It often happened that when he had passed, she would slyly steal to the red gate in the lichen-covered stone wall, and follow him with her palm-shaded eyes down the lonely road; and it as frequently happened that he would glance back over his shoulder at the nut-brown maid, whose closely clinging, scant drapery gave her a sculpturesque grace to which her unconsciousness of it was a charm the more.

These flashes of subtle recognition between youth and youth—these sudden mute greetings and farewells—reached almost the dimension of incidents in that first day's eventless ride. Once Lynde halted at the porch of a hip-roofed, unpainted house with green paper shades at the windows, and asked for a cup of milk, which was brought him by the nut-brown maid, who never took her flattering innocent eyes off the young man's face while he drank—sipping him as he sipped the milk; and young Lynde rode away feeling as if something had really happened.

More than once that morning he drew up by the roadside to listen to some lyrical robin on an apple-bough, or to make friends with the black-belted Durham cows and the cream-colored Alderneys, who came solemnly to the pasture wall and stared at him with big, good-natured faces. A row of them, with their lazy eyes and pink tongues and moist india-rubber noses, was as good as a play.

At noon that day our adventureless adventurer had reached Bayley's Four-Corners, where he found provender for himself and Mary at what had formerly been a tavern, in the naive stage-coach epoch. It was the sole house in the neighborhood, and was occupied by the ex-landlord, one Tobias Sewell, who had turned farmer. On finishing his cigar after dinner, Lynde put the saddle on Mary, and started forward again. It is hardly correct to say forward, for Mary took it into her head to back out

of Bayley's Four-Corners, a feat which she performed to the unspeakable amusement of Mr. Sewell and a quaint old gentleman, named Jaffrey, who boarded in the house.

"I guess that must be a suck-cuss hoss," remarked Mr. Sewell, resting his loosely jointed figure against the rail fence as he watched his departing guest.

Mary backed to the ridge of the hill up which the turnpike stretched from the ancient tavern, then recovered herself and went on.

"I never saw such an out-and-out wilful old girl as you are, Mary!" ejaculated Lynde, scarlet with mortification. "I begin to admire you."

Perhaps the covert reproach touched some finer chord of Mary's nature, or perhaps Mary had done her day's allowance of backing; whatever the case was, she indulged no further caprice that afternoon beyond shying vigorously at a heavily loaded tin-pedler's wagon, a proceeding which may be palliated by the statement of the fact that many of Mary's earlier years were passed in connection with a similar establishment.

The afterglow of sunset had faded out behind the serrated line of hills, and black shadows were assembling, like conspirators, in the orchards and under the spreading elms by the roadside, when Edward Lynde came in sight of a large manufacturing town, which presented a sufficiently bizarre appearance at that hour.

Grouped together in a valley were five or six high, irregular buildings, illuminated from basement to roof, each with a monstrous chimney from which issued a fan of party-colored flame. On one long low structure, with a double row of windows gleaming like the port-holes of a man-of-war at night, was a squat round tower that now and then threw open a vast valve at the top, and belched forth a volume of amber smoke, which curled upward to a dizzy height and spread itself out against the sky. Lying in the weird light of these chimneys, with here and there a gable or a spire suddenly outlined in vivid purple, the huddled town beneath seemed like an outpost of the infernal regions. Lynde, however, resolved to spend the night there instead of riding on farther and trusting for shelter to some farm-house or barn. Ten or twelve hours in the saddle had given him a keen appetite for rest.

Presently the roar of flues and furnaces, and the resonant din of mighty hammers beating against plates of iron, fell upon his ear; a few minutes later he rode into the town, not knowing and not caring in the least what town it was.

All this had quite the flavor of foreign travel to Lynde, who began pondering on which hotel he should bestow his patronage—a question that sometimes perplexes the tourist on arriving at a strange city. In Lynde's case the matter was considerably simplified by the circumstance that there was but a single aristocratic hotel in the place. He extracted this information from a small boy, begrimed with iron-dust, and looking as if he had just been cast at a neighboring foundry, who kindly acted as cicerone, and conducted the tired wayfarer to the doorstep of The Spread Eagle, under one of whose wings—to be at once figurative and literal—he was glad to nestle for the night.

II

IN WHICH THERE IS A FAMILY JAR

While Lynde is enjoying the refreshing sleep that easily overtook him after supper, we will reveal to the reader so much of the young man's private history as may be necessary to the narrative. In order to do this, the author, like Deacon Twombly's mare, feels it indispensable to back a little.

One morning, about three years previous to the day when Edward Lynde set forth on his aimless pilgrimage, Mr. Jenness Bowsby, the president of the Nautilus Bank at Rivermouth, received the following letter from his wife's nephew, Mr. John Flemming, a young merchant in New York—

NEW YORK, May 28, 1869.

MY DEAR UNCLE: In the course of a few days a friend of mine, Mr. Edward Lynde of this city, will call upon you and hand you a note of introduction from myself. I write this to secure for him in advance the liking and interest which I am persuaded you will not be able to withhold on closer acquaintance. I have been intimate with Edward Lynde for twelve years or more, first at the boarding-school at Flatbush, and afterwards at college. Though several years my junior, he was in the same classes with me, and, if the truth must be told, generally carried off all the honors. He is not only the most accomplished young fellow I know, but a fellow of inexhaustible modesty and amiability, and I think it was singularly malicious of destiny to pick him out as a victim, when there are so many worthless young men (the name of John Flemming will instantly occur to you) who deserve nothing better than rough treatment. You see, I am taking point-blank aim at your sympathy.

When Lynde was seven or eight years old he had the misfortune to lose his mother; his father was already dead. The child's nearest relative was an uncle, David Lynde, a rich merchant of New York, a bachelor, and a character. Old Lynde—I call him old Lynde not out of disrespect, but to distinguish him from young Lynde—was at that period in his sixtieth year, a gentleman of unsullied commercial reputation, and of regular if somewhat peculiar habits. He was at his counting-room precisely at eight in the morning, and was the last to leave in the evening, working as many hours each day as he had done in those first years when he entered as office-boy into the employment of Briggs & Livingstone—the firm at the time of which I am now writing was Lynde, Livingstone & Co. Mr. David Lynde lived in a set of chambers up town, and dined at his club, where he usually passed the evenings at chess with some brother antediluvian. A visit to the theatre, when some old English comedy or some new English ballet happened to be on the boards, was the periphery of his dissipation. What is called society saw nothing of him. He was a rough, breezy, thickset old gentleman, betrothed from his birth to apoplexy, enjoying life in his own secluded manner, and insisting on having everybody about him happy. He would strangle an old friend rather than not have him happy. A characteristic story is told of a quarrel he had with a chum of thirty or forty years' standing, Ripley Sturdevant Sen. Sturdevant came to grief in the financial panic of 1857. Lynde held a mortgage on Sturdevant's house, and insisted on cancelling it. Sturdevant refused to accept the sacrifice. They both were fiery old gentlemen, arcades ambo. High words ensued. What happened never definitely transpired; but Sturdevant was found lying across the office lounge, with a slight bruise over one eyebrow and the torn mortgage thrust into his shirt-bosom. It was conjectured that Lynde had actually knocked him down and forced the cancelled mortgage upon him!

In short, David Lynde was warm-hearted and generous to the verge of violence, but a man in every way unfitted by temperament, experience, and mode of life to undertake the guardianship of a child. To have an infant dropped into his arms was as excellent an imitation of a calamity as could well happen to him. I am told that no one could have been more sensible of this than David Lynde himself, and that there was something extremely touching in the alacrity and cheerfulness with which he assumed the novel responsibility.

Immediately after the funeral—Mrs. Lynde had resided in Philadelphia—the uncle brought the boy to New York. It was impossible to make a permanent home for young Lynde in bachelor chambers, or to dine him at the club. After a week of inconvenience and wretchedness, complicated by the sinister suspicions of his landlady, David Lynde concluded to send the orphan to boarding-school.

It was at Flatbush, Long Island, that I made the acquaintance of the forlorn little fellow. His cot was next to mine in the dormitory; we became close friends. We passed our examinations, left Flatbush at the same time, and entered college together. In the meanwhile the boy's relations with his guardian were limited to a weekly exchange of letters, those of the uncle invariably beginning with "Yours of Saturday duly at hand," and ending with "Enclosed please find." In respect to pocket-money young Lynde was a prince. My friend spent the long vacations with me at Newburgh, running down to New York occasionally to pass a day or so with the uncle. In these visits their intimacy ripened. Old Lynde was now become very proud of his bright young charge, giving him astonishing dinners at Delmonico's, taking him to Wallack's, and introducing him to the old fossils at the club as "my boy Ned."

It was at the beginning of Lynde's last term at college that his uncle retired from business, bought a house in Madison Avenue, and turned it into a sort of palace with frescoes and upholstery. There was a library for my boy Ned, a smoking-room in cherry-wood, a billiard-room in black walnut, a dining-room in oak and crimson—in brief, the beau-ideal of a den for a couple of bachelors. By Jove! it was like a club-house—the only model for a home of which poor old Lynde had any conception. Six months before Ned was graduated, the establishment was in systematic running order under the supervision of the pearl of housekeepers. Here David Lynde proposed to spend the rest of his days with his nephew, who might, for form's sake, adopt some genteel profession; if not, well and good, the boy would have money.

Now just as Ned was carrying off the first prizes in Greek and mathematics, and dreaming of the pleasant life he was to lead with his amiable old benefactor, what does that amiable old benefactor go and do but marry the housekeeper!

David Lynde knew very little of women: he had not spoken to above a dozen in his whole life; did not like them, in fact; had a mild sort of contempt for them, as persons devoid of business ability. It was in the course of nature that the first woman who thought it worth her while should twist him around her finger like a remnant of ribbon. When Ned came out of college he found himself in the arms of an unlooked-for aunt who naturally hated him at sight.

I have not the time or space, my dear uncle, to give you even a catalogue of the miseries that followed on the heels of this deplorable marriage; besides, you can imagine them. Old Lynde, loving both his wife and his nephew, was by turns violent and feeble; the wife cool, cunning, and insidious—a Vivien of forty leading Merlin by the beard. I am not prepared to contend that the nephew was always in the right, but I know he always got the worst of it, which amounts to about the same thing. At the end of eight or ten months he saw that the position was untenable, packed his trunk one night, and quitted the MENAGE—the menagerie, as he calls it.

This was three weeks ago. Having a small property of his own, some fifteen hundred dollars a year, I believe, Lynde at first thought to go abroad. It was always his dream to go abroad. But I persuaded him out of that, seeing how perilous it would be for a young fellow of his inexperience and impressible disposition to go rambling alone over the Continent. Paris was his idea. Paris would not make a mouthful of him. I have talked him out of that, I repeat, and have succeeded in convincing him that the wisest course for him to pursue is to go to some pleasant town or village within hailing distance of one of our larger cities, and spend the summer quietly. I even suggested he should make the personal acquaintance of some light employment, to help him forget the gorgeous castle of cards which has just tumbled down about his ears. In six words, I have sent him to Rivermouth.

Now, my dear uncle, I have wasted eight pages of paper and probably a hundred dollars' worth of your time, if you do not see that I am begging you to find a position for Lynde in the Nautilus Bank. After a little practice he would make a skilful accountant, and the question of salary is, as you see, of secondary importance. Manage to retain him at Rivermouth if you possibly can. David Lynde has the strongest affection for the lad, and if Vivien, whose name is Elizabeth, is not careful how she drags Merlin around by the beard, he will reassert himself in some unexpected manner. If he were to serve her as he is supposed to have served old Sturdevant, his conduct would be charitably criticised. If he lives a year he will be in a frame of mind to leave the bulk of his fortune to Ned. THEY have not quarrelled, you understand; on the contrary, Mr. Lynde was anxious to settle an allowance of five thousand a year on Ned, but Ned would not accept it. "I want uncle David's love," says Ned, "and I have it; the devil take his money."

Here you have all the points. I could not state them more succinctly and do justice to each of the parties interested. The most unfortunate party, I take it, is David Lynde. I am not sure, after all, that young Lynde is so much to be pitied. Perhaps that club-house would not have worked well for him if it had worked differently. At any rate he now has his own way to make, and I commend him to your kindness, if I have not exhausted it.

Your affectionate nephew, J. FLEMMING.

Five or six days after this letter reached Mr. Bowlsby, Mr. Edward Lynde presented himself in the directors' room of the Nautilus Bank. The young man's bearing confirmed the favorable impression which Mr. Bowlsby had derived from his nephew's letter, and though there was really no vacancy in the bank at the moment, Mr. Bowlsby lent himself to the illusion that he required a private secretary. A few weeks later a vacancy occurred unexpectedly, that of paying-teller—a position in which Lynde acquitted himself with so much quickness and accuracy, that when Mr. Trefethen, the assistant cashier, died in the December following, Lynde was promoted to his desk.

The unruffled existence into which Edward Lynde had drifted was almost the reverse of the career he had mapped out for himself, and it was a matter of mild astonishment to him at intervals that he was not discontented. He thought Rivermouth one of the most charming old spots he had ever seen or heard of, and the people the most hospitable. The story of his little family jar, taking deeper colors and richer ornamentation as it passed from hand to hand, made him at once a social success. Mr. Goldstone, one of the leading directors of the bank, invited Lynde to dinner—few persons were ever overburdened with invitations to dine at the Goldstones'—and the door of many a refined home turned willingly on its hinges for the young man. At the evening parties, that winter, Edward Lynde was considered almost as good a card as a naval officer. Miss Mildred Bowlsby, then the reigning belle, was ready to flirt with him to the brink of the Episcopal marriage service, and beyond; but the phenomenal honeymoon which had recently quartered in Lynde's family left him indisposed to take any lunar observations on his own account.

With his salary as cashier, Lynde's income was Vanderbiltish for a young man in Rivermouth. Unlike his great contemporary, he did not let it accumulate. Once a month he wrote a dutiful letter to his uncle David, who never failed to answer by telegraph, "Yours received. God bless you, Edward." This whimsical fashion of reply puzzled young Lynde quite as much as it diverted him until he learned (through his friend, John Flemming) that his aunt Vivien had extorted from the old gentleman a solemn promise not to write to his nephew.

Lynde's duties at the bank left him free every afternoon at four o'clock; his work and his leisure were equally pleasant. In summer he kept a sail-boat on the river, and in winter he had the range of a rich collection of books connected with an antiquated public reading-room. Thus very happily, if very quietly, and almost imperceptibly the months rolled round to that period when the Nautilus Bank gave Edward Lynde a three weeks' vacation, and he set forth, as we have seen, on Deacon Twombly's mare, in search of the picturesque and the peculiar, if they were to be found in the northern part of New Hampshire.

III

IN WHICH MARY TAKES A NEW DEPARTURE

It was still dark enough the next morning to allow the great chimneys to show off their colored fires effectively, when Lynde passed through the dingy main street of K—and struck into a road which led to the hill country. A short distance beyond the town, while he was turning in the saddle to observe the singular effect of the lurid light upon the landscape, a freight-train shot obliquely across the road within five rods of his horse's head, the engine flinging great flakes of fiery spume from its nostrils, and shrieking like a maniac as it plunged into a tunnel through a spur of the hills. Mary went sideways, like a crab, for the next three quarters of a mile.

To most young men the expedition which Edward Lynde had undertaken would have seemed unattractive and monotonous to the last degree; but Lynde's somewhat sedentary habits had made him familiar with his own company. When one is young and well read and amiable, there is really no better company than one's self—as a steady thing. We are in a desperate strait indeed if we chance at any age to tire of this invisible but ever-present comrade; for he is not to be thrown over during life. Before now, men have become so weary of him, so bored by him, that they have attempted to escape, by suicide; but it is a question if death itself altogether rids us of him.

In no minute of the twenty-four hours since Lynde left Rivermouth had he felt the want of other companionship. Mary, with her peculiarities, the roadside sights and sounds, the chubby children with shining morning face, on the way to school, the woodland solitudes, the farmers at work in the fields, the blue jays and the robins in the orchards, the blonde and brown girls at the cottage doors, his own buoyant, unrepentant thoughts—what need had he of company? If anything could have added to his enjoyment it would have been the possibility of being waylaid by bandits, or set upon in some desolate pass by wild animals. But, alas, the nearest approximation to a bandit that fell in his way was some shabby, spiritless tramp who passed by on the further side without lifting an eyelid; and as for savage animals, he saw nothing more savage than a monkish chipmunk here and there, who disappeared into his stonewall convent the instant he laid eyes on Lynde.

Riding along those lonely New England roads, he was more secure than if he had been lounging in the thronged avenues of a great city. Certainly he had dropped on an age and into a region sterile of adventure. He felt this, but not so sensitively as to let it detract from the serene pleasure he found in it all. From the happy glow of his mind every outward object took a rosy light; even a rustic funeral, which he came upon at a cross-road that fore-noon, softened itself into something not unpicturesque.

For three days after quitting K—Lynde pushed steadily forward. The first two nights he secured lodgings at a farm-house; on the third night he was regarded as a suspicious character, and obtained reluctant permission to stow himself in a hay-loft, where he was so happy at roughing it and being uncomfortable that he could scarcely close an eye. The amateur outcast lay dreamily watching the silver spears of moonlight thrust through the roof of the barn, and extracting such satisfaction from his cheerless surroundings as would have astonished a professional tramp. "Poverty and hardship are merely ideas after all," said Lynde to himself softly, as he drifted off in a doze. Ah, Master Lynde, playing at poverty and hardship is one thing; but if the reality is merely an idea, it is one of the very worst ideas in the world.

The young man awoke before sunrise the next morning, and started onward without attempting to negotiate for breakfast with his surly host. He had faith that some sunburnt young woman, with bowl of brown-bread and milk, would turn up farther on; if she did not, and no tavern presented itself, there were the sausage and the flask of eau-de-vie still untouched in the holsters.

The mountain air had not wholly agreed with Mary, who at this stage of the journey inaugurated a series of abnormal coughs, each one of which went near to flinging Lynde out of the saddle.

"Mary," he said, after a particularly narrow escape, "there are few fine accomplishments you haven't got except a spavin. Perhaps you've got that, concealed somewhere about your person."

He said this in a tone of airy badinage which Mary seemed to appreciate; but he gravely wondered what he could do with her, and how he should replace her, if she fell seriously ill.

For the last two days farm-houses and cultivated fields had been growing rarer and rarer, and the road rougher and wilder. At times it made a sudden detour, to avoid the outcropping of a monster stratum of granite, and in places became so narrow that the rank huckleberry-bushes swept the mare's flanks. Lynde found it advisable on the morning in question to pick his way carefully. A range of arid hills rose darkly before him, stretching east and west further than his eye could follow—rugged, forlorn hills covered with a thick prickly undergrowth, and sentinelled by phantom-like pines. There were gloomy, rocky gorges on each hand, and high-hanging crags, and where the vapor was drawn aside like a veil, in one place, he saw two or three peaks with what appeared to be patches of snow on them. Perhaps they were merely patches of bleached rock.

Long afterwards, when Edward Lynde was passing through the valley of the Arve, on the way from Geneva to Chamouni, he recollected this bit of Switzerland in America, and it brought an odd, perplexed smile to his lips.

The thousand ghostly shapes of mist which had thronged the heights, shutting in the prospect on every side, had now vanished, discovering as wild and melancholy a spot as a romantic heart could desire. There was something sinister and ironical even in the sunshine that lighted up these bleak hills. The silver waters of a spring—whose source was hidden somewhere high up among the mossy boulders—dripping silently from ledge to ledge, had the pathos of tears. The deathly stillness was broken only by the dismal caw of a crow taking abrupt flight from a blasted pine. Here and there a birch with its white satin skin glimmered spectrally among the sombre foliage.

The inarticulate sadness of the place brought a momentary feeling of depression to Lynde, who was not usually given to moods except of the lighter sort. He touched Mary sharply with the spurs and cantered up the steep.

He had nearly gained the summit of the hill when he felt the saddle slipping; the girth had unbuckled or broken. As he dismounted, the saddle came off with him, his foot still in the stirrup. The mare shied, and the rein slipped from his fingers; he clutched at it, but Mary gave a vicious toss of the head, wheeled about, and began trotting down the declivity. Her trot at once broke into a gallop, and the gallop into a full run—a full run for Mary. At the foot of the hill she stumbled, fell, rolled over, gathered herself up, and started off again at increased speed. The road was perfectly straight for a mile or two. The horse was already a small yellow patch in the distance. She was evidently on her way back to Rivermouth! Lynde watched her until she was nothing but a speck against the gray road, then he turned and cast a rueful glance on the saddle, which suddenly took to itself a satirical aspect, as it lay sprawling on the ground at his feet.

He had been wanting something to happen, and something had happened. He was unhorsed and alone in the heart of the hill country—alone in a strange and, it seemed to Lynde as he looked about him, uninhabited region.

IV

THE ODD ADVENTURE WHICH BEFELL YOUNG LYNDE IN THE HILL COUNTRY

It had all happened so suddenly that one or two minutes passed before Edward Lynde took in the full enormity of Mary's desertion. A dim smile was still hovering about his lips when the yellow speck that was Mary faded into the gray distance; then his countenance fell. There was no sign of mortal habitation visible from the hillside where he stood; the farm at which he had spent the night was five miles away; his stiff riding-boots were ill-adapted to pedestrianism. The idea of lugging that heavy saddle five miles over a mountain road caused him to knit his brows and look very serious indeed. As he gave the saddle an impatient kick, his eyes rested on the Bologna sausage, one end of which protruded from the holster; then there came over him a poignant recollection of his Lenten supper of the night before and his no breakfast at all of that morning. He seated himself on the saddle, unwrapped the sausage, and proceeded to cut from it two or three thin slices.

"It might have been much worse," he reflected, as he picked off with his penknife the bits of silver foil which adhered to the skin of the sausage; "if Mary had decamped with the commissary stores, that would have been awkward." Lynde devoured the small pieces of pressed meat with an appetite born of his long fast and the bracing upland air.

"Talk about *pate de foie gras*!" he exclaimed, with a sweep of his arm, as if he were disdainfully waving back a menial bearing a tray of Strasbourg pates; "if I live to return to Rivermouth I will have Bologna sausage three times a day for the rest of my life."

A cup of the ice-cold water which bubbled up from a boss of cresses by the roadside completed his Spartan breakfast. His next step was to examine his surroundings. "From the top of this hill," said Lynde, "I shall probably be able to see where I am, if that will be any comfort to me."

It was only fifty or sixty rods to the crown of the hill, where the road, viewed from below, seemed abruptly to come to an end against the sky. On gaining the summit, Lynde gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise and delight. At his feet in the valley below, in a fertile plain walled in on all sides by the emerald slopes, lay the loveliest village that ever was seen. Though the road by which he had approached the eminence had been narrow and steep, here it widened and descended by gentle gradations into the valley, where it became the main street of the village—a congregation of two or possibly three hundred houses, mostly cottages with gambrel and lean-to roofs. At the left of the village, and about an eighth of a mile distant, was an imposing red brick building with wings and a pair of octagon towers. It stood in a forest of pines and maples, and appeared to be enclosed by a high wall of masonry. It was too pretentious for an almshouse, too elegant for a prison; it was as evidently not a school-house, and it could not be an arsenal. Lynde puzzled over it a moment, and then returned for his saddle, which he slung across his back, holding it by a stirrup-strap brought over either shoulder.

"If Mary has got a conscience," muttered Lynde, "it would prick her if she could see me now. I must be an affecting spectacle. In the village they won't know whether I am the upper or the lower half of a centaur. They won't know whether to rub me down and give me a measure of oats, or to ask me in to breakfast."

The saddle with its trappings probably weighed forty pounds, and Lynde was glad before he had accomplished a third of the way to the village to set down his burden and rest awhile. On each side of him now were cornfields, and sloping orchards peopled with those grotesque, human-like apple-trees which seem twisted and cramped by a pain possibly caught from their own acidulous fruit. The cultivated land terminated only where the village began. It was not so much a village as a garden—a garden crowded with flowers of that bright metallic tint which distinguishes the flora of northern climes. Through the centre of this Eden ran the wide main street, fringed with poplars and

elms and chestnuts. No polluting brewery or smoky factory, with its hideous architecture, marred the idyllic beauty of the miniature town—for everything which is not a city is a town in New England. The population obviously consisted of well-to-do persons, with outlying stock-farms or cranberry meadows, and funds snugly invested in ships and railroads.

In out-of-the-way places like this is preserved the greater part of what we have left of the hard shrewd sense and the simpler manner of those homespun old worthies who planted the seed of the Republic. In our great cities we are cosmopolitans; but here we are Americans of the primitive type, or as nearly as may be. It was unimportant settlements like the one we are describing that sent their quota of stout hearts and flintlock muskets to the trenches on Bunker Hill. Here, too, the valorous spirit which had been slumbering on its arm for half a century started up at the first shot fired against Fort Sumter. Over the chimney-place of more than one cottage in such secluded villages hangs an infantry or a cavalry sword in its dented sheath, looked at to-day by wife or mother with the tenderly proud smile that has mercifully taken the place of tears.

Beyond the town, on the hillside which Edward Lynde had just got within the focus of his field-glass, was the inevitable cemetery. On a grave here and there a tiny flag waved in the indolent June breeze. If Lynde had been standing by the head-stones, he could have read among the inscriptions such unlocal words as Malvern Hill, Andersonville, Ball's Bluff, and Gettysburg, and might have seen the withered Decoration Day wreaths which had been fresh the month before.

Lynde brought his glass to bear on the red brick edifice mentioned, and fell to pondering it again.

"I'll be hanged if I don't think it's a nunnery," he said. By and by he let his gaze wander back to the town, in which he detected an appearance of liveliness and bustle not usual in New England villages, large or small. The main street was dotted with groups of men and women; and isolated figures, to which perhaps the distance lent a kind of uncanny aspect, were to be seen hurrying hither and thither.

"It must be some local celebration," thought Lynde. "Rural oratory and all that sort of thing. That will be capital!"

He had returned the glass to its leather case, and was settling it well on his hip, when he saw a man approaching. It was a heavily built old gentleman in a suit of black alpaca, somewhat frayed and baggy at the knees, but still respectable. He carried his hat in his hand, fanning himself with it from time to time, as if overcome by heat and the fatigue of walking. A profusion of snow-white hair, parted in the middle, swept down on either side of a face remarkable—if it was remarkable for anything—for its benign and simple expression. There was a far-off, indescribable something about this person, as though he had existed long ago and once had a meaning, but was now become an obsolete word in the human dictionary. His wide placid brows and the double chin which asserted itself above his high neckcloth gave him a curious resemblance to portraits of Dr. Franklin.

"The country parson," said Lynde to himself. "Venerable and lovely old character. I'll speak to him."

The old gentleman, with his head slightly thrown back, had his eyes fixed intently on some object in the sky, and was on the point of passing Lynde without observing him, when the young man politely lifted his hat, and said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but will you be kind enough to tell me the name of the town yonder?"

The old gentleman slowly brought his eyes down from the sky, fixed them vacantly upon Lynde, and made no response. Presuming him to be deaf, Lynde repeated his question in a key adapted to the exigency. Without a change in his mild, benevolent expression, and in a voice whose modulations were singularly musical, the old gentleman exclaimed, "Go to the devil!" and passed on.

The rejoinder was so unexpected, the words themselves were so brusque, while the utterance was so gentle and melodious, that Lynde refused to credit his ears. Could he have heard aright? Before

he recovered from his surprise the gentleman in black was far up the slope, his gaze again riveted on some remote point in the zenith.

"It wasn't the country parson after all," said Lynde, with a laugh; "it was the village toper. He's an early bird—I'll say that for him—to have secured his intoxicating worm at this hour of the morning."

Lynde picked up the saddle and resumed his march on the town in the happy valley. He had proceeded only a little way when he perceived another figure advancing towards him—a figure not less striking than that of the archaic gentleman, but quite different. This was a young girl, of perhaps seventeen, in a flowing dress of some soft white stuff, gathered at the waist by a broad red ribbon. She was without hat or shawl, and wore her hair, which was very long and very black, hanging loosely down her shoulders, in exaggeration of a style of coiffure that afterwards came into fashion. She was moving slowly and in the manner of a person not accustomed to walking. She was a lady—Lynde saw that at a glance—probably some city-bred bird of passage, resting for the summer in this vale of health. His youthful vanity took alarm as he reflected what a comical picture he must present with that old saddle on his back. He would have dumped it into the barberry-bushes if he could have done so unobserved; but it was now too late.

On perceiving Lynde, the girl arrested her steps a moment irresolutely, and then came directly towards him. As she drew nearer Lynde was conscious of being dazzled by a pair of heavily fringed black eyes, large and lustrous, set in an oval face of exquisite pallor. The girl held a dandelion in one hand, twirling it by the end of its long, snake-like stem as she approached. She was close upon him now; for an instant he caught the wind of the flower as it swiftly described a circle within an inch of his cheek. The girl paused in front of him, and drawing herself up to her full height said haughtily—

"I am the Queen of Sheba."

Then she glided by him with a quickened pace and a suddenly timid air. Lynde was longer recovering himself, this time. He stood rooted to the ground, stupidly watching the retreating gracious form of the girl, who half turned once and looked back at him. Then she vanished over the ridge of the hill, as the old gentleman had done. Was she following him? Was there any connection between those two? Perhaps he was the village clergyman. Could this be his daughter? What an unconventional costume for a young lady to promenade in—for she was a lady down to her finger-nails! And what an odd salutation!

"The Queen of Sheba!" he repeated wonderingly. "What could she mean by that? She took me for some country bumpkin, with this confounded saddle, and was laughing at me. I never saw a girl at once so—so audacious and modest, or so lovely. I didn't know there was anything on earth so lovely as that girl."

He had caught only an instantaneous glimpse of her face, but he had seen it with strange distinctness, as one sees an object by a flash of lightning; and he still saw it, as one seems still to see the object in the after-darkness. Every line of the features lived in his eyes, even an almost indistinguishable scar there was on the girl's right cheek near the temple. It was not a flaw, that faint scar; it seemed somehow to heighten her loveliness, as an accent over a word sometimes gives it one knows not what of piquancy.

"Evidently she lives in the town or in the neighborhood. Shall I meet her again, I wonder? I will stay here a week or a month if—What nonsense! I must have distinguished myself, staring at her like a gawk. When she said she was the Queen of Sheba, I ought instantly to have replied—what in the deuce is it I ought to have replied? How can a man be witty with a ton of sole-leather pressing on his spine!"

Edward Lynde, with the girl and her mocking words in his mind, and busying himself with all the clever things he might have said and did not say, mechanically traversed the remaining distance to the village.

The street which had seemed thronged when he viewed it from the slope of the hill was deserted; at the farther end he saw two or three persons hurrying along, but there were no indications whatever of the festival he had conjectured. Indeed, the town presented the appearance of a place smitten by a pestilence. The blinds of the lower casements of all the houses were closed; he would have supposed them unoccupied if he had not caught sight of a face pressed against the glass of an upper window here and there. He thought it singular that these faces instantly withdrew when he looked up. Once or twice he fancied he heard a distant laugh, and the sound of voices singing drunkenly somewhere in the open air.

Some distance up the street a tall liberty-pole sustaining a swinging sign announced a tavern. Lynde hastened thither; but the tavern, like the private houses, appeared tenantless; the massive pine window-shutters were barred and bolted. Lynde mounted the three or four low steps leading to the piazza, and tried the front door, which was locked. With the saddle still on his shoulders, he stepped into the middle of the street to reconnoitre the premises. A man and two women suddenly showed themselves at an open window in the second story. Lynde was about to address them when the man cried out—

"Oh, you're a horse, I suppose. Well, there isn't any oats for you here. You had better trot on!"

Lynde did not relish this pleasantry; it struck him as rather insolent; but he curbed his irritation, and inquired as politely as he could if a horse or any kind of vehicle could be hired in the village.

The three persons in the window nodded to one another significantly, and began smiling in a constrained manner, as if there were something quite preposterous in the inquiry. The man, a corpulent, red-faced person, seemed on the point of suffocating with merriment.

"Is this a public house?" demanded Lynde severely.

"That's as may be," answered the man, recovering his breath, and becoming grave.

"Are you the proprietor?"

"That's jest what I am."

"Then I require of you the accommodation which is the right of every traveller. Your license does not permit you to turn any respectable stranger from your door."

"Now, my advice to you," said the man, stepping back from the window,

"my advice to you is to trot. You can't get in here. If you try to,

I'll pepper you as sure as you live, though I wouldn't like to do it.

So trot right along!"

The man had a gun in his hands; he clutched it nervously by the stock; his countenance worked strangely, and his small, greenish eyes had a terrified, defiant expression. Indisputably, the tavern-keeper looked upon Lynde as a dangerous person, and was ready to fire upon him if he persisted in his demands.

"My friend," said Lynde through his set teeth, "if I had you down here

I'd give you a short lesson in manners."

"I dare say! I dare say!" cried the man, flourishing the shot-gun excitedly.

Lynde turned away disgusted and indignant; but his indignation was neutralized by his astonishment at this incomprehensible brutality. He had no resource but to apply to some private house and state his predicament. As that luckless saddle had excited the derision of the girl, and drawn down on him the contumely of the tavern-keeper, he looked around for some safe spot in which to deposit it before it brought him into further disgrace. His linen and all his worldly possessions, except his money, which he carried on his person, were in the valise; he could not afford to lose that.

The sun was high by this time, and the heat would have been intolerable if it had not been for a merciful breeze which swept down from the cooler atmosphere of the hills. Lynde wasted half an hour or more seeking a hiding-place for the saddle. It had grown a grievous burden to him; at every step it added a pound to its dead weight. He saw no way of relieving himself of it. There it was perched upon his shoulders, like the Old Man of the Sea on the back of Sindbad the Sailor. In sheer

despair Lynde flung down his load on the curb-stone at a corner formed by a narrow street diagonally crossing the main thoroughfare, which he had not quitted. He drew out his handkerchief and wiped the heavy drops of perspiration from his brows. At that moment he was aware of the presence of a tall, cadaverous man of about forty, who was so painfully pinched and emaciated that a sympathetic shiver ran over Lynde as he glanced at him. He was as thin as an exclamation point. It seemed to Lynde that the man must be perishing with cold even in that burning June sunshine. It was not a man, but a skeleton.

"Good heavens, sir!" cried Lynde. "Tell me where I am! What is the name of this town?"

"Constantinople."

"Constan"—

"—tinople," added the man briskly. "A stranger here?"

"Yes," said Lynde abstractedly. He was busy running over an imaginary map of the State of New Hampshire in search of Constantinople.

"Good!" exclaimed the anatomy, rustling his dry palms together, "I'll employ you."

"You'll employ me? I like that!"

"Certainly. I'm a ship-builder."

"I didn't know they built vessels a hundred miles from the coast," said

Lynde.

"I am building a ship—don't say I'm not!"

"Of course I know nothing about it."

"A marble ship."

"A ship to carry marble?"

"No, a ship made of marble; a passenger ship. We have ships of iron, why not of marble?" he asked fiercely.

"Oh, the fellow is mad!" said Lynde to himself, "as mad as a loon; everybody here is mad, or I've lost my senses. So you are building a marble ship?" he added aloud, good-naturedly. "When it is finished I trust you will get all the inhabitants of this town into it, and put to sea at once."

"Then you'll help me!" cried the man enthusiastically, with his eyes gleaming in their sunken sockets. More than ever he looked like a specimen escaped from some anatomical museum.

"I do not believe I can be of much assistance," answered Lynde, laughing. "I have had so little experience in constructing marble vessels, you see. I fear my early education has been fearfully neglected. By the bye," continued the young man, who was vaguely diverted by his growing interest in the monomaniac, "how do you propose to move your ship to the seaboard?"

"In the simplest manner—a double railroad track—twenty-four engines—twelve engines on each side to support the hull."

"That WOULD be a simple way."

Edward Lynde laughed again, but not heartily. He felt that this marble ship was a conception of high humor and was not without its pathetic element. The whimsicality of the idea amused him, but the sad earnestness of the nervous, unstrung visionary at his side moved his compassion.

"Dear me," he mused, "may be all of us are more or less engaged in planning a marble ship, and perhaps the happiest are those who, like this poor soul, never awake from their delusion. Matrimony was uncle David's marble ship—he launched his! Have I one on the ways, I wonder?"

Lynde broke with a shock from his brief abstraction. His companion had disappeared, and with him the saddle and valise. Lynde threw a hasty glance up the street, and started in pursuit of the naval-architect, who was running with incredible swiftness and bearing the saddle on his head with as much ease as if it had been a feather.

The distance between the two men, some sixty or seventy yards, was not the disadvantage that made pursuit seem hopeless. Lynde had eaten almost nothing since the previous noon; he had been carrying that cumbersome saddle for the last two or three hours; he was out of breath, and it was

impossible to do much running in his heavy riding-boots. The other man, on the contrary, appeared perfectly fresh; he wore light shoes, and had not a superfluous ounce of flesh to carry. He was all bone and sinew; the saddle resting upon his head was hardly an impediment to him. Lynde, however, was not going to be vanquished without a struggle; though he recognized the futility of pursuit, he pushed on doggedly. A certain tenacious quality in the young man imperatively demanded this of him.

"The rascal has made off with my dinner," he muttered between his clinched teeth. "That completes the ruin Mary began. If I should happen to catch up with him, I trust I shall have the moral strength not to knock his head off—his skull off; it isn't a head."

Lynde's sole hope of overtaking him, and it was a very slender hope, was based on the possibility that the man might fall and disable himself; but he seemed to have the sure-footedness as well as the lightness of a deer. When Lynde reached the outskirts of the village, on the road by which he had entered, the agile ship-builder was more than halfway up the hill. Lynde made a fresh spurt here, and lost his hat; but he had no time to turn back for it. Every instant widened the space between the two runners, as one of them noticed with disgust. At the top of the ascent the man halted a moment to take breath, and then disappeared behind the ridge. He was on the down grade now, and of course gaining at each stride on his pursuer, who was still toiling upward. Lynde did not slacken his pace, however; he had got what runners call their second wind. With lips set, elbows pressed against his sides, and head thrown forward, he made excellent time to the brow of the hill, where he suddenly discovered himself in the midst of a crowd of men and horses.

For several seconds Lynde was so dazed and embarrassed that he saw nothing; then his eyes fell upon the girl with the long hair and the white gown. She was seated sidewise on a horse without saddle, and the horse was Mary. A strapping fellow was holding the animal by the head-stall.

"By Jove!" cried Lynde, springing forward joyfully, "that's my mare!"

He was immediately seized by two men who attempted to pass a cord over his wrists. Lynde resisted so desperately that a third man was called into requisition, and the three succeeded in tying his hands and placing him upon a saddle vacated by one of the riders. All this occupied hardly a minute.

"Will you go along quietly," said one of the men roughly, "or will you be carried?"

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Lynde, with the veins standing out on his forehead.

He received no reply from any of the group, which seemed to be composed of farmers and laboring-hands, with two or three persons whose social status did not betray itself. Directly behind the girl and, like her, mounted on a horse led by a couple of rustics, was the white-haired old gentleman who had repulsed Lynde so rudely. Lynde noticed that his hands were also secured by cords, an indignity which in no wise altered the benevolent and satisfied expression of his face. Lynde's saddle and valise were attached to the old gentleman's horse. Lynde instinctively looked around for the ship-builder. There he was, flushed and sullen, sitting on a black nag as bony and woe-begone as himself, guarded by two ill-favored fellows. Not only were the ship-builder's arms pinioned, but his feet were bound by a rope fastened to each ankle and passed under the nag's belly. It was clear to Lynde that he himself, the old clergyman, and the girl were the victims of some dreadful misconception, possibly brought about by the wretch who had purloined the saddle.

"Gentlemen!" cried Lynde, as the party began to advance, "I protest against this outrage so far as I am concerned, and I venture to protest on the part of the lady. I am convinced that she is incapable of any act to warrant such treatment. I—I know her slightly," he added, hesitating.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, folding her hands demurely in her lap, "and I know you, too, very well. You are my husband."

This announcement struck Lynde speechless. The rough men exchanged amused glances, and the ship-builder gave vent to a curious dry laugh. Lynde could have killed him. The party moved on. Up to this moment the young man had been boiling with rage; his rage now yielded place to amazement. What motive had prompted the girl to claim that relationship? Was it a desperate appeal to him for protection? But brother, or cousin, or friend would have served as well. Her impulsive

declaration, which would be at once disproved, might result in serious complications for him and her. But it had not been an impulsive declaration; she had said it very calmly, and, he fancied, with just the lightest touch of coquetry, "You are my husband!" For several minutes Lynde did not dare to let his eyes wander in her direction. She was a pace or so in the rear at his right. To see her he would be obliged to turn slightly; this he presently did, with a movement as if settling himself more easily in the saddle. The girl's loose hair was blown like a black veil over her face, putting her into mourning; she was steadying herself with one hand resting on Mary's mane; her feet were crossed, and a diminutive slipper had fallen from one of them. There was something so helpless and appealing in the girl's attitude that Lynde was touched.

"May I speak with you, sir?" he said, addressing himself to a man whom somebody had called Morton, and who appeared to issue the orders for the party. The man came to Lynde's side.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, explain this! Who is that young woman?"

"You said you knew her," returned the man, not unpleasantly.

"Indeed I said so," replied Lynde, reddening. "What has happened? What has she done, what have I done, what has the old clergyman done, that we should be seized like murderers on the public highway?"

"Be quiet now," said the man, laying his hand soothingly on Lynde's arm, and looking at him steadily. "Everything will be satisfactorily explained by and by."

Lynde's indignation blazed up again.

"I can assure you, sir," he cried, as the man returned to his former position, "that the result of the explanation will be far from satisfactory to you. I shall hold to strict account every man who has had a hand in this business. I demand to be brought before a magistrate, or a justice of the peace, if there is one in this God-forsaken country."

No attention was paid to Lynde's fresh outbreak. Some one picked up his hat and set it on the back of his head, giving him quite a rakish air. His dignity suffered until the wind took the hat again. The party proceeded in silence, halting once to tighten a girth, and another time to wait for a straggler. If the men spoke to one another it was in subdued tones or whispers. Two of the horsemen trotted on a hundred yards in advance, like skirmishers thrown out in front of an attacking force. There was something in all this mysterious precaution and reticence which bewildered and exasperated Lynde, who noted every detail. Mary, in a transient spasm of backing, had fallen to the rear; the young man could no longer see the girl, but ever before his eyes was the piteous, unslipped little foot with its arched instep.

The party was now at the base of the declivity. Instead of following the road to the village, the horses turned abruptly into a bridle-path branching off to the left, and in the course of a few minutes passed through an iron-spiked gateway in a high brick wall surrounding the large red structure which had puzzled Lynde on first discovering the town. The double gates stood wide open and were untended; they went to, however, with a clang, and the massive bolts were shot as soon as the party had entered. In the courtyard Lynde was hastily assisted from the horse; he did not have an opportunity to observe what became of the other three prisoners. When his hands were freed he docilely allowed himself to be conducted up a flight of stone steps and into the vestibule of the building, and thence, through a long corridor, to a small room in which his guard left him. The door closed with a spring not practicable from the inside, as Lynde ascertained on inspection.

The chamber was not exactly a cell; it resembled rather the waiting-room of a penitentiary. The carpet, of a tasteless, gaudy pattern, was well worn, and the few pieces of hair-cloth furniture, a sofa, a table, and chairs, had a stiff, official air. A strongly barred window gave upon a contracted garden—one of those gardens sometimes attached to prisons, with mathematically cut box borders, and squares of unhealthy, party-colored flowers looking like gangs of convicts going to meals. On his arrival at the place Edward Lynde had offered no resistance, trusting that some sort of judicial

examination would promptly set him at liberty. Faint from want of food, jaded by his exertions, and chafing at the delay, he threw himself upon the sofa, and waited.

There was a great deal of confusion in the building. Hurried footsteps came and went up and down the passages; now and then he heard approaching voices, which tantalizingly passed on, or died away before reaching his door. Once a shrill shriek—a woman's shriek—rang through the corridor and caused him to spring to his feet.

After the lapse of an hour that had given Lynde some general idea of eternity, the door was hastily thrown open, and a small, elderly, blue-eyed gentleman, followed by a man of gigantic stature, entered the chamber.

"My dear sir," cried the gentleman, making a courteous, deprecatory gesture with his palms spread outward, "we owe you a million apologies. There has been a most lamentable mistake!"

"A mistake!" said Lynde haughtily. "Mistake is a mild term to apply to an outrage."

"Your indignation is just; still it was a mistake, and one I would not have had happen for the world. I am Dr. Pendegrast, the superintendent of this asylum."

"This is an asylum!"

"An asylum for the insane," returned Dr. Pendegrast. "I do not know how to express my regret at what has occurred. I can only account for the unfortunate affair, and throw myself upon your generosity. Will you allow me to explain?"

Lynde passed his hand over his forehead in a bewildered way. Then he looked at the doctor suspiciously; Lynde's late experience had shaken his faith in the general sanity of his species. "Certainly," he said, "I would like to have this matter explained to me; for I'll be hanged if I understand it. This is an asylum?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are the superintendent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then—naturally—you are not a lunatic?"

"Certainly not!" said the doctor, starting.

"Very well; I didn't know. I am listening to you, sir."

"Early this morning," said Dr. Pendegrast, somewhat embarrassed by Lynde's singular manner, "a number of patients whom we had always considered tractable seized the attendants one by one at breakfast, and, before a general alarm could be given, locked them in the cells. Some of us were still in our bedrooms when the assault began and were there overpowered. We chanced to be short-handed at the time, two of the attendants being ill, and another absent. As I say, we were all seized—the women attendants and nurses as well—and locked up. Higgins here, my head-man, they put into a strait-jacket."

"Yes, sir," spoke up Higgins for himself, "they did so!"

"Me," continued Dr. Pendegrast, smiling, "they confined in the padded chamber."

Lynde looked at him blankly.

"A chamber with walls thickly cushioned, to prevent violent patients from inflicting injury on themselves," explained the doctor. "I, you see, was considered a very bad case indeed! Meanwhile, Morton, the under-keeper, was in the garden, and escaped; but unfortunately, in his excitement, he neglected to lock the main gate after him. Morton gave the alarm to the people in the village, who, I am constrained to say, did not behave handsomely. Instead of coming to our relief and assisting to restore order, which might easily have been done even then, they barricaded themselves in their houses, in a panic. Morton managed to get a horse, and started for G—In the meantime the patients who had made the attack liberated the patients still in confinement, and the whole rushed in a body out of the asylum and spread themselves over the village."

"That must have been the crowd I saw in the streets when I sighted the town," said Lynde, thinking aloud.

"If you saw persons in the street," returned the doctor, "they were not the townsfolk. They kept very snug, I assure you. But permit me to finish, Mr."—

"My name is Lynde."

"Morton," continued the doctor, bowing, "having secured several volunteers before reaching G—, decided to return with what force he had, knowing that every instant was precious. On his way back he picked up three of the poor wanderers, and, unluckily, picked up you."

"He should not have committed such a stupid error," said Lynde, clinging stoutly to his grievance. "He ought to have seen that I was not an inmate of the asylum."

"An attendant, my dear Mr. Lynde, is not necessarily familiar with all the patients; he may know only those in his special ward. Besides, you were bare-headed and running, and seemed in a state of great cerebral excitement."

"I was chasing a man who had stolen my property."

"Morton and the others report that you behaved with great violence."

"Of course I did. I naturally resented being seized and bound."

"Your natural violence confirmed them in their natural suspicion, you see. Assuredly they were to blame; but the peculiar circumstances must plead for them."

"But when I spoke to them calmly and rationally"—

"My good sir," interrupted the doctor, "if sane people always talked as rationally and sensibly as some of the very maddest of my poor friends sometimes do, there would be fewer foolish things said in the world. What remark is that the great poet puts into the mouth of Polonius, speaking of Hamlet? 'How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of.' My dear Mr. Lynde, it was your excellent good sense that convicted you! By the way, I believe you claimed the horse which Morton found adrift on the road."

"Yes, sir, it was mine; at least I was riding it this morning when the saddle-girth broke, and the mare got away from me."

"Then of course that was your saddle Blaisdell was running off with."

"Blaisdell?"

"One of our most dangerous patients, in fact, the only really dangerous patient at present in the establishment. Yet you should hear HIM talk sometimes! To-day, thank God, he happened to be in his ship-building mood. Otherwise—I dare not think what he might have done. I should be in despair if he had not been immediately retaken. Oddly enough, all the poor creatures, except three, returned to the asylum of their own will, after a brief ramble through the village."

"And the white-haired old gentleman who looked like a clergyman, is he mad?"

"Mackenzie? Merely idiotic," replied the doctor, with the cool professional air.

"And the young girl," asked Lynde hesitatingly, "is she"—

"A very sad case," interrupted Dr. Pendegrast, with a tenderer expression settling upon his countenance. "The saddest thing in the world."

"Insane?"

"Hopelessly so, I fear."

A nameless heaviness fell upon Lynde's heart. He longed to ask other questions, but he did not know how to shape them. He regretted that subsequently.

"And now, Mr. Lynde," said the doctor, "in your general pardon I wish you to include my unavoidable delay in coming or sending to you. When you were brought here I was still in durance vile, and Higgins was in his strait-jacket. On being released, my hands were full, as you can suppose. Moreover, I did not learn at once of your detention. The saddle and the valise caused me to suspect that a blunder had been committed. I cannot adequately express my regrets. In ten minutes," continued Dr. Pendegrast, turning a fat gold watch over on its back in the palm of his hand, where it looked like

a little yellow turtle, "in ten minutes dinner will be served. Unless you do me the honor to dine with me, I shall not believe in the sincerity of your forgiveness."

"Thanks," said Lynde dejectedly. "I fully appreciate your thoughtfulness; I am nearly famished, but I do not think I could eat a mouthful here. Excuse me for saying it, but I should have to remain here permanently if I were to stay another hour. I quite forgive Mr. Morton and the others," Lynde went on, rising and giving the doctor his hand; "and I forgive you also, since you insist upon being forgiven, though I do not know for what. If my horse, and my traps, and my hat—really, I don't see how they could have helped taking me for a lunatic—can be brought together, I will go and dine at the tavern."

Half an hour afterward Edward Lynde dismounted at the steps of the rustic hotel. The wooden shutters were down now, and the front door stood hospitably open. A change had come over the entire village. There were knots of persons at the street corners and at garden gates, discussing the event of the day. There was also a knot of gossips in the hotel barroom to whom the landlord, Mr. Zeno Dodge, was giving a thrilling account of an attack made on the tavern by a maniac who had fancied himself a horse!

"The critter," cried Mr. Dodge dramatically, "was on the p'int of springin' up the piazzy, when Martha handed me the shot-gun."

Mr. Dodge was still in a heroic attitude, with one arm stretched out to receive the weapon and his eye following every movement of a maniac obligingly personated by the cuspidor between the windows, when Lynde entered. Mr. Dodge's arm slowly descended to his side, his jaw fell, and the narrative broke off short.

Lynde requested dinner in a private room, and Mr. Dodge deposed the maid in order to bring in the dishes himself and scrutinize his enigmatical guest. In serving the meal the landlord invented countless pretexts to remain in the room. After a while Lynde began to feel it uncomfortable to have those sharp green eyes continually boring into the back of his head.

"Yes," he exclaimed wearily, "I am the man."

"I thought you was. Glad to see you, sir," said Mr. Dodge politely.

"This morning you took me for an escaped lunatic?"

"I did so—fust-off."

"A madman who imagined himself a horse?"

"That's what I done," said Mr. Dodge contritely, "an' no wonder, with that there saddle. They're a very queer lot, them crazy chaps. There's one on 'em up there who calls himself Abraham Lincoln, an' then there's another who thinks he's a telegraph wire an' hes messages runnin' up an' down him continually. These is new potatoes, sir—early rosers. There's no end to their cussed kinks. When I see you prancin' round under the winder with that there saddle, I says at once to Martha, 'Martha, here's a lunny!'"

"A very natural conclusion," said Lynde meekly.

"Wasn't it now?"

"And if you had shot me to death," said Lynde, helping himself to another chop, "I should have been very much obliged to you."

Mr. Dodge eyed the young man dubiously for a dozen seconds or so.

"Comin'! comin'!" cried Mr. Dodge, in response to a seemingly vociferous call which had failed to reach Lynde's ear.

When Edward Lynde had finished dinner, Mary was brought to the door. Under the supervision of a group of spectators assembled on the piazza, Lynde mounted, and turned the mare's head directly for Rivermouth. He had no heart to go any farther due north. The joyousness had dropped out of the idle summer journey. He had gone in search of the picturesque and the peculiar; he had found them—and he wished he had not.

V CINDERELLA'S SLIPPER

On the comb of the hill where his adventure had begun and culminated—it seemed to him now like historic ground—Edward Lynde reined in Mary, to take a parting look at the village nestled in the plain below. Already the afternoon light was withdrawing from the glossy chestnuts and drooping elms, and the twilight—it crept into the valley earlier than elsewhere—was weaving its half invisible webs under the eaves and about the gables of the houses. But the two red towers of the asylum reached up into the mellow radiance of the waning sun, and stood forth boldly. They were the last objects his gaze rested upon, and to them alone his eyes sent a farewell.

"Poor little thing! poor little Queen of Sheba!" he said softly. Then the ridge rose between him and the village, and shut him out forever.

Nearly a mile beyond the spot where Mary had escaped from him that morning, Edward Lynde drew up the mare so sharply that she sunk back on her haunches. He dismounted in haste, and stooping down, with the rein thrown over one arm, picked up an object lying in the middle of the road under the horse's very hoofs.

It was on a Tuesday morning that Lynde reentered Rivermouth, after an absence of just eight days. He had started out fresh and crisp as a new bank-note, and came back rumpled and soiled and tattered, like that same note in a state to be withdrawn from circulation. The shutters were up at all the shop-windows in the cobble-paved street, and had the appearance of not having been taken down since he left. Everything was unchanged, yet it seemed to Lynde that he had been gone a year.

On Wednesday morning when Mr. Bowlsby came down to the bank he was slightly surprised at seeing the young cashier at his accustomed desk. To Mr. Bowlsby's brief interrogations then, and to Miss Mildred Bowlsby's more categorical questions in the evening, Lynde offered no very lucid reason for curtailing his vacation. Travelling alone had not been as pleasant as he anticipated; the horse was a nuisance to look after; and then the country taverns were snuffy and unendurable. As to where he had been and what he had seen—he must have seen something and been somewhere in eight days—his answers were so evasive that Miss Mildred was positive something distractingly romantic had befallen the young man.

"If you must know," he said, one evening, "I will tell you where I went."

"Tell me, then!"

"I went to Constantinople."

Miss Mildred found that nearly impertinent.

There was, too, an alteration in Lynde's manner which cruelly helped to pique her curiosity. His frank, half satirical, but wholly amiable way—an armor that had hitherto rendered him invulnerable to Miss Mildred's coquettish shafts—was wanting; he was less ready to laugh than formerly, and sometimes in the midst of company he fell into absent-minded moods. Instead of being the instigator and leader of picnics up the river, he frequently pleaded bank duties as an excuse for not joining such parties. "He is not at all as nice as he used to be," was Miss Mildred's mental summing up of Lynde a fortnight after his return.

He was, in fact, unaccountably depressed by his adventure in the hill country; he could not get it out of his mind. The recollection of details which he had not especially remarked at the time came to him in the midst of his work at the bank. Sometimes when he turned off the gas at night, or just as he was falling asleep, the sharp, attenuated figure of the ship-builder limned itself against the blackness of the chamber, or the old gentleman's vacuous countenance in its frame of silver hair peered in through the hangings of the bed. But more frequently it was the young girl's face that haunted Lynde. He saw her as she came up the sunny road, swinging the flower in her hand, and looking like one of Fra Angelico's seraphs or some saint out of an illuminated mediaeval missal; then he saw her seated

on the horse, helpless and piteous with the rude, staring men about her. If he dreamed, it was of her drawing herself up haughtily and saying, "I am the Queen of Sheba." On two or three nights, when he had not been dreaming, he was startled out of his slumber by a voice whispering close to his ear: "I know you, too, very well. You are my husband."

Mr. Bowlsby and his daughter were the only persons in Rivermouth to whom Lynde could have told the story of his journey. He decided not to confide it to either, since he felt it would be vain to attempt to explain the sombre effect which the whole affair had had on him.

"I do not understand what makes me think of that poor girl all the time," mused Lynde one day, as he stood by the writing-table in his sitting-room. "It can't be this that keeps her in my mind."

He took up a slipper which was lying on the table in the midst of carved pipes and paper-weights and odds and ends. It was a very small slipper, nearly new, with high pointed heel and a square jet buckle at the instep: evidently of foreign make, and cut after the arch pattern of the slippers we see peeping from the flowered brocade skirts of Sir Peter Lely's full-length ladies. It was such an absurd shoe, a toy shoe, a child might have worn it!

"It cannot be this," said Lynde.

And yet it was that, more or less. Lynde had taken the slipper from his valise the evening he got home, and set it on the corner of the desk, where it straightway made itself into a cunning ornament. The next morning he put it into one of the drawers; but the table looked so barren and commonplace without it that presently the thing was back again. There it had remained ever since.

It met his eye every morning when he opened the door of his bedroom; it was there when he came home late at night, and seemed to be sitting up for him, in the reproachful, feminine fashion. When he was writing his letters, there it was, with a prim, furtive air of looking on. It was not like a mere slipper; it had traits and an individuality of its own; there were moments when the jet beads in the buckle sparkled with a sort of intelligence. Sitting at night, reading under the drop-light, Lynde often had an odd sensation as if the little shoe would presently come tripping across the green table-cloth towards him. He had a hundred fanciful humors growing out of that slipper. Sometimes he was tempted to lock it up or throw it away. Sometimes he would say to himself, half mockingly and half sadly, "That is your wife's slipper;" then he would turn wholly sad, thinking how tragic that would be if it were really so.

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