

Scott John Reed

In Her Own Right



John Scott

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I BROKEN

“The expected has happened, I see,” said Macloud, laying aside the paper he had been reading, and raising his hand for a servant.

“I thought it was the unexpected that happens,” Hungerford drawled, languidly. “What do you mean?”

“Royster & Axtell have been thrown into bankruptcy. Liabilities of twenty million, assets problematical.”

“You don’t say!” ejaculated Hungerford, sitting up sharply. “Have they caught any of our friends?”

“All who dealt with them, I reckon.”

“Too bad! Too bad! – Well, they didn’t catch me.”

“Oh, no! you’re not caught!” said Macloud. “Your father was wise enough to put your estate into Government threes, with a trustee who had no power to change the investment.”

“And I’m thankful he did,” Hungerford answered. “It saves me all trouble; I need never look at the stock report, don’t you know; Government bonds are always the same. – I suppose it’s a reflection on my ability, but that is of small consequence. I don’t care what people think, so long as I have the income and no trouble. If I had control of my capital, I might have lost all of it with Royster & Axtell, who knows?”

Macloud shook his head.

“It isn’t likely,” he commented, “you wouldn’t have had it to lose.”

Hungerford’s momentarily vague look suddenly became knowing.

“You mean I would have lost it long ago?” he asked. “Oh, I say, old man, you’re a bit hard on me. I may not have much head for business, but I’m not altogether a fool, don’t you know.”

“Glad to know it,” laughed Macloud, as he arose and sauntered away.

Hungerford drew out his cigarettes and thoughtfully lighted one.

“I wonder – did he mean I am or I am not?” he said. “I wonder. I shall have to ask him some time. – Boy! a Scotch and soda.”

Meanwhile, Macloud passed into the Club-house and, mounting the stairs to the second floor, knocked sharply at a door in the north-west corner of the corridor.

“Come in,” called a voice. – “Who is it? – Oh! it’s you, Macloud. Make yourself at home – I’ll be out in a moment.”

There was the noise of splashing water, accompanied by sundry exclamations and snorts, followed by a period of silence; and, then, from the bath room, emerged Croyden clad in robe, slippers and a smile.

“Help yourself,” he said, pointing to the smoking materials. He filled a pipe, lit it carefully, blew a few whiffs to the ceiling and watched them slowly dissipate.

“Well, it’s come,” he remarked: “Royster & Axtell have smashed clean.”

“Not clean,” said Macloud. “It is going to be the most criminal failure this town has ever known.”

“I mean they have busted wide open – and I’m one of the suckers.”

“You are going to have plenty of company, among your friends,” Macloud answered.

"I suppose so – but I hope none of them is hit quite so bad." He blew another cloud of smoke and watched it fade. "The truth is, Colin, I'm done for."

"What!" exclaimed Macloud. "You don't mean you are cleaned out?"

The other nodded. "That's about it... I've a few thousand left – enough to pay laundry bills, and to board on Hash Alley for a few months a year. Oh! I was a sucker, all right! – I was so easy it makes me ashamed to have saved *anything* from the wreck. I've a notion to go and offer it to them, now."

There were both bitterness and relief in his tones; bitterness over the loss, relief that the worst, at last, had happened.

For a while, there was silence. Croyden turned away and began to dress; Macloud sat looking out on the lawn in front, where a foursome were playing the home hole, and another waiting until they got off the green.

Presently, the latter spoke.

"How did it happen, old man?" he asked – "that is, if you care to tell."

Croyden laughed shortly. "It isn't pleasant to relate how one has been such an addle-pated ass –"

"Then, forgive me. – I didn't mean to –"

"Nonsense! I understand – moreover, it will ease my mortification to confide in one who won't attempt to sympathize. I don't care for sympathy, I don't deserve it, and what's more, I won't have it."

"Don't let that worry you," Macloud answered. "You won't be oppressed by any rush of sympathy. No one is who gets pinched in the stock market. We all go in, and – sooner or later, generally sooner – we all get burnt – and we all think every one but ourselves got only what was due him. No, my boy, there is no sympathy running loose for the lamb who has been shorn. And you don't need to expect it from your friends of the Heights. They believe only in success. The moment you're fleeced, they fling you aside. They fatten off the carcasses of others – yours and mine and their own brothers. Friendship does not enter into the game. They will eat your bread and salt to-night, and dance on your financial corpse to-morrow. The only respect they have is for money, and clothes, and show; and the more money, and the more show the greater their deference – while they last – and the farther the fall when they fail. The women are as bad as the men, in a smaller way. They will blacken one another's reputation with an ease and zest that is simply appalling, and laugh in your face while doing it. I'm speaking generally, there are exceptions, of course, but they only prove the rule. Yet, what can you expect, where aristocracy is based on one's bank account, and the ability to keep the other fellows from laying violent hands on it. It reminds one of the Robbers of the Rhine! Steal everything within reach and give up nothing. Oh! it is a fine system of living! – Your pardon! I forgot myself."

"It is good to have you forget yourself occasionally," said Croyden – "especially, when your views chime with mine – recently acquired, I admit. I began to see it about a month ago, when I slowed down on expenditures. I thought I could notice an answering chill in the grill-room."

"Like enough. You must spend to get on. They have no use for one who doesn't. You have committed the unpardonable sin: had a fortune and lost it. And they never forgive – unless you make another fortune; then they will welcome you back, and lay plans to take it, also."

"You paint a pretty picture!" Croyden laughed.

Macloud shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell me of Royster & Axtell," he said.

"There isn't a great deal to tell," Croyden replied, coming around from the dressing table, and drawing on his vest as he came. "It is five years since my father died and left me sole heir to his estate. In round numbers, it aggregated half a million dollars – all in stocks and bonds, except a little place down on the Eastern Shore which he took, some years before he died, in payment of a debt due him. Since my mother's demise my father had led the life of quiet and retirement in a small city. I went through college, was given a year abroad, took the law course at Harvard, and settled down to the business of getting a practice. Then the pater died, suddenly. Five hundred thousand

was a lot of money in that town. Too much to settle there, I thought. I abandoned the law, and came to Northumberland. The governor had been a non-resident member of the Northumberland Club, which made it easy for me to join. I soon found, however, that what had seemed ample wealth in the old town, did not much more than make ends meet, here – provided I kept up my end. I was about the poorest one in the set I affected, so, naturally, I went into the stock market. Royster was the particular broker of the gang and the first year I did very well. – You think it was intended?” (As Macloud smiled.) “Well, I don’t doubt now you’re right. The next year I began to lose. Then Royster put me into that Company of his down in Virginia – the Virginia Improvement Company, you know. He took me down, in a special car, showed me how much he himself had in it, how much would be got out of it, offered to let me in on the ground floor, and made it look so rosy, withal, that I succumbed. Two hundred thousand was buried there. An equal amount I had lent them, at six per cent., shortly after I came to Northumberland – selling the securities that yielded only four per cent. to do it. That accounts for four hundred thousand – gone up the flume. Eighty thousand I lost in stocks. The remainder, about twenty thousand, I still have. By some error I can’t account for, they did not get away with it, too. – Such is the tale of a foolish man,” he ended.

“Will you make any effort to have Royster prosecuted?” Macloud asked.

“No – I’ve been pretty much of a baby, but I’m not going to cry over milk that’s spilt.”

“It’s not all spilt – some of it will be recovered.”

“My dear Macloud, there won’t be enough money recovered to buy me cigarettes for one evening. Royster has hypothecated and rehypothecated securities until no man can trace his own, even if it would help him to do so. You said it would *likely* prove a disgraceful failure. I am absolutely sure of it.”

Macloud beat a tattoo on the window-ledge.

“What do you think of doing?” he said – “or haven’t you got to it, yet – or don’t you care to tell?”

“I’ve got to it,” replied Croyden; “and I don’t care to tell – anyone but you, Colin. I can’t stay here – ”

“Not on twelve hundred a year, certainly – unless you spend the little principal you have left, and, then, drop off for good.”

“Which would be playing the baby act, sure enough.”

Macloud nodded.

“It would,” he said; “but, sometimes, men don’t look at it that way. They cannot face the loss of caste. They prefer to drop overboard by *accident*.”

“There isn’t going to be any dropping overboard by accident in mine,” replied Croyden. “What I’ve decided to do is this: I shall disappear. I have no debts, thank God! so no one will care to take the trouble to search for me. I shall go down to Hampton, to the little property that was left me on the Eastern Shore, there to mark time, either until I can endure it, or until I can pick out some other abode. I’ve a bunch of expensive habits to get rid of quickly, and the best place for that, it seems to me, is a small town where they are impossible, as well as unnecessary.”

“Ever lived in a small town?” Macloud inquired.

“None smaller than my old home. I suppose it will be very stupid, after the life here, but beggars can’t be choosers.”

“I’m not so sure it will be very stupid,” said Macloud. “It depends on how much you liked this froth and try, we have here. The want to and can’t – the aping the ways and manners of those who have had wealth for generations, and are well-born, beside. Look at them!” with a fling of his arm, that embraced the Club-house and its environs. – “One generation old in wealth, one generation old in family, and about six months old, some of them scarcely that, in breeding. There are a few families which belong by right of birth – and, thank God! they show it. But they are shouldered aside by the others, and don’t make much of a show. The climbers hate them, but are too much awed by their lineage to crowd them out, entirely. A nice lot of aristocrats! The majority of them are puddlers of

the iron mills, and the peasants of Europe, come over so recently the soil is still clinging to their clothes. Down on the Eastern Shore you will find it very different. They ask one, who you *are*, never how much money you have. Their aristocracy is one of birth and culture. You may be reduced to manual labor for a livelihood, but you belong just the same. You have had a sample of the money-changers and their heartless methods – and it has left a bitter taste in your mouth. I think you will welcome the change. It will be a new life, and, in a measure, a quiet life, but there are compensations to one to whom life holds more than garish living and ostentatious show.”

“You know the people of the Eastern Shore?” asked Croyden.

“No! – but I know the people of the Western Shore, and they come from the same stock – and it’s good stock, mighty good stock! Moreover, you are not burying yourself so deep – Baltimore is just across the Bay, and Philadelphia and New York are but a few hours distant – less distant than this place is, indeed.”

“I looked up the time-tables!” laughed Croyden. “My present knowledge of Hampton is limited to the means and methods of getting away.”

“And getting to it,” appended Macloud. “When do you go?”

“To-morrow night.”

“Hum – rather sudden, isn’t it?”

“I’ve seen it coming for a month, so I’ve had time to pay my small accounts, arrange my few affairs, and be prepared to flit on a moment’s notice. I should have gone a week ago, but I indulged myself with a few more days of the old life. Now, I’m off to-morrow night.”

“Shall you go direct to Hampton?”

“Direct to Hampton, via New York,” said Croyden. “There probably won’t anyone care enough even to inquire for me, but I’m not taking the chance.”

Macloud watched him with careful scrutiny. Was it serious or was it assumed? Had this seemingly sudden resolve only the failure of Royster & Axtell behind it, or was there a woman there, as well? Was Elaine Cavendish the real reason? There could be no doubt of Croyden’s devotion to her – and her more than passing regard for him. Was it because he could not, or because he would not – or both? Croyden was practically penniless – she was an only child, rich in her own right, and more than rich in prospect —

“Will you dine with me, this evening?” asked Macloud.

“Sorry, old man, but I’m due at the Cavendishes’ – just a pick-up by telephone. I shall see you, again, shan’t I?”

“I reckon so,” was the answer. “I’m down here for the night. Have breakfast with me in the morning – if I’m not too early a bird, at eight o’clock.”

“Good! for two on the side piazza!” exclaimed Croyden.

“I’ll speak to François,” said Macloud, arising. “So long.”

Croyden slowly straightened his tie and drew on his coat.

“Macloud is a square chap,” he reflected. “I’ve had a lot of so-called friends, here, but he is the only one who still rings true. I may imagine it, but I’m sure the rest are beginning to shy off. Well, I shan’t bother them much longer – they can prepare for a new victim.”

He picked up his hat and went downstairs, making his way out by the front entrance, so as to miss the crowd in the grill-room. He did not want the trouble of speaking or of being spoken to. He saw Macloud, as he passed – out on the piazza beyond the porte-cochere, and he waved his hand to him. Then he signalled the car, that had been sent from Cavencliffe for him, and drove off to the Cavendishes.

II

GOOD-BYE

The Cavendishes were of those who (to quote Macloud's words) "did belong and, thank God, showed it." Henry Cavendish had married Josephine Marquand in the days before there were any idle-rich in Northumberland, and when the only leisure class were in jail. Now, when the idea, that it was respectable not to work, was in the ascendancy, he still went to his office with unfailing regularity – and the fact that the Tuscarora Trust Company paid sixty per cent. on its capital stock, and sold in the market (when you could get it) at three thousand dollars a share, was due to his ability and shrewd financiering as president. It was because he refused to give up the active management even temporarily, that they had built their summer home on the Heights, where there was plenty of pure air, unmixed with the smoke of the mills and trains, and with the Club near enough to give them its life and gayety when they wished.

The original Cavendish and the original Marquand had come to Northumberland, as officers, with Colonel Harmer and his detachment of Regulars, at the close of the Revolution, had seen the possibilities of the place, and, after a time, had resigned and settled down to business. Having brought means with them from Philadelphia, they quickly accumulated more, buying up vast tracts of Depreciation lands and numerous In-lots and Out-lots in the original plan of the town. These had never been sold, and hence it was, that, by the natural rise in value from a straggling forest to a great and thriving city, the Cavendish and the Marquand estates were enormously valuable. And hence, also, the fact that Elaine Cavendish's grandparents, on both sides of the house, were able to leave her a goodly fortune, absolutely, and yet not disturb the natural descent of the bulk of their possessions.

Having had wealth for generations, the Cavendishes were as natural and unaffected in their use of it, as the majority of their neighbors were tawdry and flashy. They did things because they wanted to do them, not because someone else did them. And they did not do things that others did, and never thought what the others might think.

Because an iron-magnate, with only dollars for ballast, had fifteen bath pools of Sienna marble in his flaunting, gaudy "chateau," and was immediately aped by the rest of the rattle-brained, moved the Cavendishes not at all. Because the same bounder gave a bathing-suit party (with the ocean one hundred and fifty miles away), at which prizes were bestowed on the man and woman who dared wear the least clothes, while the others of the *nouveaux riches* applauded and marvelled at his audacity and originality, simply made the Cavendishes stay away. Because another mushroom millionaire bought books for his library by the foot, had gold mangers and silver stalls for his horses, and adorned himself with diamonds like an Indian Rajah, were no incentives to the Cavendishes to do likewise. They pursued the even tenor of the well-bred way.

Cavenclyffe was a great, roomy country-house, in the Colonial style, furnished in chintz and cretonnes, light and airy, with wicker furniture and bird's-eye maple throughout, save in the dining-room, where there was the slenderest of old Hepplewhite. Wide piazzas flanked the house on every side, screened and awninged from the sun and wind and rain. A winding driveway between privet hedges, led up from the main road half a mile away, through a maze of giant forest trees amid which the place was set.

Croyden watched it, thoughtfully, as the car spun up the avenue. He saw the group on the piazza, the waiting man-servant, the fling upward of a hand in greeting by a white robed figure. And he sighed.

"My last welcome to Cavenclyffe!" he muttered. "It's a bully place, and a bully girl – and, I think, I had a chance, if I hadn't been such a fool."

Elaine Cavendish came forward a little way to greet him. And Croyden sighed, again, as – with the grace he had learned as a child from his South Carolina mother, he bent for an instant over her hand. He had never known how handsome she was, until this visit – and he had come to say good-bye!

“You were good to come,” she said.

“It was good of you to ask me,” he replied.

The words were trite, but there was a note of intenseness in his tones that made her look sharply at him – then, away, as a trace of color came faintly to her cheek.

“You know the others,” she said, perfunctorily.

And Croyden smiled in answer, and greeted the rest of the guests.

There were but six of them: Mrs. Chichester, a young matron, of less than thirty, whose husband was down in Panama explaining some contract to the Government Engineers; Nancy Wellesly, a rather petite blonde, who was beginning to care for her complexion and other people’s reputations, but was a square girl, just the same; and Charlotte Brundage, a pink and white beauty, but the crack tennis and golf player of her sex at the Club and a thorough good sport, besides.

The men were: Harold Hungerford, who was harmlessly negative and inoffensively polite; Roderick Colloden, who, after Macloud, was the most popular man in the set, a tall, red haired chap, who always seemed genuinely glad to meet anyone in any place, and whose handshake gave emphasis to it. He had not a particularly good memory for faces, and the story is still current in the Club of how, when he had been presented to a newcomer four times in one week, and had always told him how glad he was to meet him, the man lost patience and blurted out, that he was damn glad to know it, but, if Colloden would recognize him the next time they met, he would be more apt to believe it. The remaining member of the party was Montecute Mattison. He was a small man, with peevisly pinched features, that wore an incipient smirk when in repose, and a hyena snarl when in action. He had no friends and no intimates. He was the sort who played dirty golf in a match: deliberately moving on the green, casting his shadow across the hole, talking when his opponent was about to drive, and anything else to disconcert. In fact, he was a dirty player in any game – because it was natural. He would not have been tolerated a moment, even at the Heights, if he had not been Warwick Mattison’s son, and the heir to his millions. He never made an honest dollar in his life, and could not, if he tried, but he was Assistant-Treasurer of his father’s company, did an hour’s work every day signing the checks, and drew fifteen thousand a year for it. A man’s constant inclination was to smash him in the face – and the only reason he escaped was because it would have been like beating a child. One man had, when Mattison was more than ordinarily offensive, laid him across his knee, and, in full sight of the Club-house, administered a good old-fashioned spanking with a golf club. Him Montecute thereafter let alone. The others did not take the trouble, however. They simply shrugged their shoulders, and swore at him freely and to his face.

At present, he was playing the devoted to Miss Brundage and hence his inclusion in the party. She cared nothing for him, but his money was a thing to be considered – having very little of her own – and she was doing her best to overcome her repugnance sufficiently to place him among the eligibles.

Mattison got through the dinner without any exhibition of ill nature, but, when the women retired, it came promptly to the fore.

The talk had turned on the subject of the Club Horse Show. It was scheduled for the following month, and was quite the event of the Autumn, in both a social and an equine sense. The women showed their gowns and hosiery, the men their horses and equipment, and how appropriately they could rig themselves out – while the general herd stood around the ring gaping and envious.

Presently, there came a momentary lull in the conversation and Mattison remarked:

“I see Royster & Axtell went up to-day. I reckon,” with an insinuating laugh, “there will be some entries withdrawn.”

“Men or horses?” asked Hungerford.

“Both – and men who haven’t horses, as well,” with a sneering glance at Croyden.

“Why, bless me! he’s looking at you, Geoffrey!” Hungerford exclaimed.

“I am not responsible for the direction of Mr. Mattison’s eyes,” Croyden answered with assumed good nature.

Mattison smiled, maliciously.

“Is it so bad as that?” he queried. “I knew, of course, you were hit, but I hoped it was only for a small amount.”

“Shut up, Mattison!” exclaimed Colloden. “If you haven’t any appreciation of propriety, you can at least keep quiet.”

“Oh, I don’t know – ”

“Don’t you?” said Colloden, quietly, reaching across and grasping him by the collar. “Think again, —*and think quickly!*”

A sickly grin, half of surprise and half of anger, overspread Mattison’s face.

“Can’t you take a little pleasantry?” he asked.

“We don’t like your pleasantries any more than we like you, and that is not at all. Take my advice and mend your tongue.” He shook him, much as a terrier does a rat, and jammed him back into his chair. “Now, either be good or go home,” he admonished.

Mattison was weak with anger – so angry, indeed, that he was helpless either to stir or to make a sound. The others ignored him – and, when he was a little recovered, he got up and went slowly from the room.

“It wasn’t a particularly well bred thing to do,” observed Colloden, “but just the same it was mighty pleasant. If it were not for the law, I’d have broken his neck.”

“He isn’t worth the exertion, Roderick,” Croyden remarked. “But I’m obliged, old man. I enjoyed it.”

When they rejoined the ladies on the piazza, a little later, Mattison had gone.

After a while, the others went off in their motors, leaving Croyden alone with Miss Cavendish. Hungerford had offered to drop him at the Club, but he had declined. He would enjoy himself a little longer – would give himself the satisfaction of another hour with her, before he passed into outer darkness.

He had gone along in his easy, bachelor way, without a serious thought for any woman, until six months ago. Then, Elaine Cavendish came home, after three years spent in out-of-the-way corners of the globe, and, straightway, bound him to her chariot wheels.

At least, so the women said – who make it their particular business to observe – and they never make mistakes. They can tell when one is preparing to fall in love, long before he knows himself. Indeed, there have been many men drawn into matrimony, against their own express inclination, merely by the accumulation of initiative engendered by impertinent meddlers. They want none of it, they even fight desperately against it, but, in the end, they succumb.

And Geoffrey Croyden would have eventually succumbed, of his own desires, however, had Elaine Cavendish been less wealthy, and had his affairs been more at ease. Now, he thanked high Heaven he had not offered himself. She might have accepted him; and think of all the heart-burnings and pain that would now ensue, before he went out of her life!

“What were you men doing to Montecute Mattison?” she asked presently. “He appeared perfectly furious when he came out, and he went off without a word to anyone – even Charlotte Brundage was ignored.”

“He and Colloden had a little difficulty – and Mattison left us,” Croyden answered. “Didn’t he stop to say good-night?”

She shook her head. “He called something as he drove off – but I think he was swearing at his man.”

“He needed something to swear at, I fancy!” Croyden laughed.

“What did Roderick do?” she asked.

“Took him by the collar and shook him – and told him either to go home or be quiet.”

“And he went home – I see.”

“Yes – when he had recovered himself sufficiently. I thought, at first, his anger was going to choke him.”

“Imagine big, good-natured Roderick stirred sufficiently to lay hands on any one!” she laughed.

“But imagine him *when* stirred,” he said.

“I hadn’t thought of him in that way,” she said, slowly – “Ough!” with a little shiver, “it must have been terrifying – what had Mattison done to him?”

“Nothing – Mattison is too much of a coward ever to *do* anything.”

“What had he said, then?”

“Oh, some brutality about one of Colloden’s friends, I think,” Croyden evaded. “I didn’t quite hear it – and we didn’t discuss it afterward.”

“I’m told he is a scurrilous little beast, with the men,” she commented; “but, I must say, he is always polite to me, and reasonably charitable. Indeed, to-night is the only deliberately bad manners he has ever exhibited.”

“He knows the men won’t hurt him,” said Croyden, “whereas the women, if he showed his ill nature to them, would promptly ostracize him. He is a canny bounder, all right.” He made a gesture of repugnance. “We have had enough of Mattison – let us find something more interesting – yourself, for instance.”

“Or yourself!” she smiled. “Or, better still, neither. Which reminds me – Miss Southard is coming to-morrow; you will be over, of course?”

“I’m going East to-morrow night,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

“But she is to stay two weeks – you will be back before she leaves, won’t you?”

“I fear not – I may go on to London.”

“Before you return here?”

“Yes – before I return here.”

“Isn’t this London idea rather sudden?” she asked.

“I’ve been anticipating it for some time,” sending a cloud of cigarette smoke before his face. “But it grew imminent only to-day.”

When the smoke faded, her eyes were looking questioningly into his. There was something in his words that did not ring quite true. It was too sudden to be genuine, too unexpected. It struck her as vague and insincere. Yet there was no occasion to mistrust – it was common enough for men to be called suddenly to England on business. —

“When do you expect to return?” she asked.

“I do not know,” he said, reading something that was in her mind. “If I must go, the business which takes me will also fix my return.”

A servant approached.

“What is it, Hudson?” she asked.

“The telephone, Miss Cavendish. Pride’s Crossing wishes to talk with you.”

Croyden arose – it was better to make the farewell brief – and accompanied her to the doorway.

“Good-bye,” he said, simply.

“You must go?” she asked.

“Yes – there are some things that must be done to-night.”

She gave him another look.

“Good-bye, then – and *bon voyage*,” she said, extending her hand.

He took it – hesitated just an instant – lifted it to his lips – and, then, without a word, swung around and went out into the night.

The next day – at noon – when, her breakfast finished, she came down stairs, a scare headline in the morning’s paper, lying in the hall, met her eyes.

SUICIDE!

Royster Found Dead in His Bath-room!

The Penalty of Bankruptcy!

ROYSTER & AXTELL FAIL!

Many Prominent Persons Among the Creditors

She seized the paper, and nervously ran her eyes down the columns until they reached the list of those involved. —

Yes! Croyden's name was among them! That was what had taken him away!
And Croyden read it, too, as he sped Eastward toward the unknown life.

III CLARENDON

Croyden left Northumberland in the morning – and his economy began with the ride East: he went on Day Express instead of on the Limited, thereby saving the extra fare. At Philadelphia he sent his baggage to the Bellevue-Stratford; later in the evening, he had it returned to the station, and checked it, himself, to Hampton – to avoid the possibility of being followed by means of his luggage.

He did not imagine that any one would go to the trouble to trace him, but he was not taking any chances. He wanted to cut himself away, utterly, from his former life, to be free of everyone he had ever known. It was not likely he would be missed.

Some one would say: “I haven’t seen Croyden lately,” would be answered: “I think he went abroad suddenly – about the time of the Royster & Axtell failure,” and, with that, he would pass out of notice. If he were to return, any time within the next five years, he would be met by a languid: “Been away, somewhere, haven’t you? I thought I hadn’t noticed you around the Club, lately.” – And that would be the extent of it.

One is not missed in a big town. His going and his coming are not watched. There is no time to bother with another’s affairs. Everyone has enough to do to look after his own. The curiosity about one’s neighbors – what he wears, what he eats, what he does, every item in his daily life – that is developed by idleness, thrives in littleness, and grows to perfection in scandal and innuendo – belongs solely to the small town. If one comes down street with a grip – instantly: So and so is “going away” – speculation as to why? – where? – what? One puts on a new suit, it is observed and noted. – A pair of new shoes, ditto. – A new necktie, ditto. Every particular of his life is public property, is inspected for a motive, and, if a motive cannot be discovered, one is supplied – usually mean and little, the latter unctuously preferred.

All this Croyden was yet to learn, however.

He took the night’s express on the N. Y., P. & N., whence, at Hampton Junction, he transferred to a branch line. For twenty miles the train seemed to crawl along, burrowing into the sand hills and out again into sand, and in and out again, until, at length, with much whistling and escaping steam, they wheezed into the station and stopped.

There were a dozen white men, with slouch hats and nondescript clothing, standing aimlessly around, a few score of negroes, and a couple of antique carriages with horses to match. The white men looked at the new arrival, listlessly, and the negroes with no interest at all – save the two who were porters for the rival hotels. They both made for Croyden and endeavored to take his grip.

He waved them away.

“I don’t want your hotel, boys,” he said. “But if you can tell me where Clarendon is, I will be obliged.”

“Cla’endon! seh? yass, seh,” said one, “right out at de een’ o’ de village, seh – dis street tek’s yo dyar, seh, sho nuf.”

“Which end of the village?” Croyden asked.

“Dis een’, seh, de fust house beyon’ Majah Bo’den’s, seh.”

“How many blocks is it?”

“Blocks, seh!” said the negro. “Tain’t no blocks – it’s jest de fust place beyon’ Majah Bo’den’s.”

Croyden laughed. “Here,” he said, “you take my bag out to Clarendon – I’ll walk till I find it.”

“Yass, seh! yass, seh! I’ll do it, seh! but yo bettah ride, seh!”

“No!” said Croyden, looking at the vehicle. “It’s safer to walk.”

He tossed the negro a quarter and turned away.

“Thankee, seh, thankee, seh, I’ll brings it right out, seh.”

Croyden went slowly down the street, while the crowd stared after him, and the shops emptied their loafers to join them in the staring. He was a strange man – and a well-dressed man – and they all were curious.

Presently, the shops were replaced by dwellings of the humbler sort, then they, in turn, by more pretentious residences – with here and there a new one of the Queen Anne type. Croyden did not need the information, later vouchsafed, that they belong to *new* people. It was as unmistakable as the houses themselves.

About a mile from the station, he passed a place built of English brick, covered on the sides by vines, and shaded by huge trees. It stood well back from the street and had about it an air of aristocracy and exclusiveness.

“I wonder if this is the Bordens’?” said Croyden looking about him for some one to ask – “Ah!”

Down the path from the house was coming a young woman. He slowed down, so as to allow her to reach the entrance gates ahead of him. She was pretty, he saw, as she neared – very pretty! – positively beautiful! dark hair and —

He took off his hat.

“I beg your pardon!” he said. “Is this Mr. Borden’s?”

“Yes – this is Major Borden’s,” she answered, with a deliciously soft intonation, which instantly stirred Croyden’s Southern blood.

“Then Clarendon is the next place, is it not?”

She gave him the quickest glance of interest, as she replied in the affirmative.

“Colonel Duval is dead, however,” she added – “a caretaker is the only person there, now.”

“So I understood.” There was no excuse for detaining her longer. “Thank you, very much!” he ended, bowed slightly, and went on.

It is ill bred and rude to stare back at a woman, but, if ever Croyden had been tempted, it was now. He heard her footsteps growing fainter in the distance, as he continued slowly on his way. Something behind him seemed to twitch at his head, and his neck was positively stiff with the exertion necessary to keep it straight to the fore.

He wanted another look at that charming figure, with the mass of blue black hair above it, and the slender silken ankles and slim tan-shod feet below. He remembered that her eyes were blue, and that they met him through long lashes, in a languidly alluring glance; that she was fair; and that her mouth was generous, with lips full but delicate – a face, withal, that clung in his memory, and that he proposed to see again – and soon.

He walked on, so intent on his visual image, he did not notice that the Borden place was behind him now, and he was passing the avenue that led into Clarendon.

“Yass, seh! hyar yo is, marster! – hyar’s Clarendon,” called the negro, hastening up behind him with his bag.

Croyden turned into the walk – the black followed.

“Cun’l Duval’s done been daid dis many a day, seh,” he said. “Folks sez ez how it’s owned by some city fellah, now. Mebbe yo knows ’im, seh?”

Croyden did not answer, he was looking at the place – and the negro, with an inquisitively curious eye, relapsed into silence.

The house was very similar to the Bordens’ – unpretentious, except for the respectability that goes with apparent age, vine clad and tree shaded. It was of generous proportions, without being large – with a central hall, and rooms on either side, that rose to two stories, and was topped by a pitch-roof. There were no piazzas at front or side, just a small stoop at the doorway, from which paths branched around to the rear.

“I done ’speck, seh, yo go roun’ to de back,” said the negro, as Croyden put his foot on the step. “Ole Mose ’im live dyar. I’ll bring ’im heah, ef yo wait, seh.”

“Who is old Mose – the caretaker?” said Croyden.

The place was looked after by a real estate man of the village, and neither his father nor he had bothered to do more than meet the accounts for funds. The former had preferred to let it remain unoccupied, so as to have it ready for instant use, if he so wished, and Croyden had done the same.

"He! Mose he's Cun'l Duval's body-survent, seh. Him an' Jos'phine – Jos'phine he wif', seh – dey looks arfter de place sence de ole Cun'l died."

Croyden nodded. "I'll go back."

They followed the right hand path, which seemed to be more used than its fellow. The servants' quarters were disclosed at the far end of the lot.

Before the tidiest of them, an old negro was sitting on a stool, dreaming in the sun. At Croyden's appearance, he got up hastily, and came forward – gray-haired, and bent.

"Survent, seh!" he said, with the remains of what once must have been a wonderfully graceful bow, and taking in the stranger's attire with a single glance. "I'se ole Mose. Cun'l Duval's boy – seh, an' I looks arfter de place, now. De Cun'l he's daid, yo knows, seh. What can I do fur yo, seh?"

"I'm Mr. Croyden," said Geoffrey.

"Yass, seh! yass, seh!" the darky answered, inquiringly.

It was evident the name conveyed no meaning to him.

"I'm the new owner, you know – since Colonel Duval died," Croyden explained.

"Hi! yo is!" old Mose exclaimed, with another bow. "Well, praise de Lawd! I sees yo befo' I dies. So yo's de new marster, is yo? I'm pow'ful glad yo's come, seh! pow'ful glad. What mout yo name be, seh?"

"Croyden!" replied Geoffrey. "Now, Moses, will you open the house and let me in?"

"Yo seen Marster Dick?" asked the darky.

"You mean the agent? No! Why do you ask?"

"Coz why, seh – I'm beggin' yo pa'den, seh, but Marster Dick sez, sez he, 'Don' nuvver lets no buddy in de house, widout a writin' from me.' I ain' doubtin' yo, seh, 'deed I ain', but I ruther hed de writin'."

"You're perfectly right," Croyden answered. "Here, boy! – do you know Mr. Dick? Well, go down and tell him that Mr. Croyden is at Clarendon, and ask him to come out at once. Or, stay, I'll give you a note to him."

He took a card from his pocketbook, wrote a few lines on it, and gave it to the negro.

"Yass, seh! Yass, seh!" said the porter, and, dropping the grip where he stood, he vanished.

Old Mose dusted the stool with his sleeve, and proffered it.

"Set down, seh!" with another bow. "Josh won' be long."

Croyden shook his head.

"I'll lie here," he answered, stretching himself out on the grass. "You were Colonel Duval's body-servant, you say."

"Yass, seh! from de time I wuz so 'igh. I don' 'member when I warn' he body-survent. I follows 'im all th'oo de war, seh, an' I wuz wid 'im when he died." Tears were in the darky's eyes. "Hit's purty nigh time ole Mose gwine too."

"And when he died, you stayed and looked after the old place. That was the right thing to do," said Croyden. "Didn't Colonel Duval have any children?"

"No, seh. De Cun'l nuvver married, cuz Miss Penelope – "

He caught himself. "I toles yo 'bout hit some time, seh, mebbe!" he ended cautiously – talking about family matters with strangers was not to be considered.

"I should like to hear some time," said Croyden, not seeming to notice the darky's reticence. "When did the Colonel die?"

"Eight years ago cum corn plantin' time, seh. He jes' wen' right off quick like, when de mis'ry hit 'im in de chist – numonya, de doctors call'd it. De Cun'l guv de place to a No'thern gent'man,

whar was he 'ticular frien', and I done stay on an' look arfter hit. He nuvver been heah. Hi! listen to dis nigger! yo's de gent'mans, mebbe."

"I am his son," said Croyden, amused.

"An' yo owns Cla'endon, now, seh? What yo goin' to do wid it?"

"I'm going to live here. Don't you want to look after me?"

"Goin' to live heah! – yo means it, seh?" the darky asked, in great amazement.

Croyden nodded. "Provided you will stay with me – and if you can find me a cook. Who cooks your meals?"

"Lawd, seh! find yo a cook. Didn' Jos'phine cook fur de Cun'l all he life – Jos'phine, she my wife, seh – she jest gone nex' do', 'bout some'n." He got up – "I calls her, seh."

Croyden stopped him.

"Never mind," he said; "she will be back, presently, and there is ample time. Any one live in these other cabins?"

"No, seh! we's all wha' left. De udder niggers done gone 'way, sence de Cun'l died, coz deah war nothin' fur dem to do no mo', an' no buddy to pays dem. – Dyar is Jos'phine, now, sir, she be hear torectly. An' heah comes Marster Dick, hisself."

Croyden arose and went toward the front of the house to meet him.

The agent was an elderly man; he wore a black broadcloth suit, shiny at the elbows and shoulder blades, a stiff white shirt, a wide roomy collar, bound around by a black string tie, and a broad-brimmed drab-felt hat. His greeting was as to one he had known all his life.

"How do you do, Mr. Croyden!" he exclaimed. "I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, sir." He drew out a key and opened the front door. "Welcome to Clarendon, sir, welcome! Let us hope you will like it enough to spend a little time here, occasionally."

"I'm sure I too hope so," returned Croyden; "for I am thinking of making it my home."

"Good! Good! It's an ideal place!" exclaimed the agent. "It's convenient to Baltimore; and Philadelphia, and New York, and Washington aren't very far away. Exactly what the city people who can afford it, are doing now, – making their homes in the country. Hampton's a town, but it's country to you, sir, when compared to Northumberland – open the shutters, Mose, so we can see... This is the library, with the dining-room behind it, sir – and on the other side of the hall is the drawing-room. Open it, Mose, we will be over there presently. You see, sir, it is just as Colonel Duval left it. Your father gave instructions that nothing should be changed. He was a great friend of the Colonel, was he not, sir?"

"I believe he was," said Croyden. "They met at the White Sulphur, where both spent their summers – many years before the Colonel died."

"There, hangs the Colonel's sword – he carried it through the war, sir – and his pistols – and his silk-sash, and here, in the corner, is one of his regimental guidons – and here his portrait in uniform – handsome man, wasn't he? And as gallant and good as he was handsome. Maryland lost a brave son, when he died, sir."

"He looks the soldier," Croyden remarked.

"And he was one, sir – none better rode behind Jeb Stuart – and never far behind, sir, never far behind!"

"He was in the cavalry?"

"Yes, sir. Seventh Maryland Cavalry – he commanded it during the last two years of the war – went in a lieutenant and came out its colonel. A fine record, sir, a fine record! Pity it is, he had none to leave it to! – he was the last of his line, you know, the last of the line – not even a distant cousin to inherit."

Croyden looked up at the tall, slender man in Confederate gray, with clean-cut aristocratic features, wavy hair, and long, drooping mustache. What a figure he must have been at the head of

his command, or leading a charge across the level, while the guns of the Federals belched smoke, and flame and leaden death.

"They offered him a brigade," the agent was saying, "but he declined it, preferring to remain with his regiment."

"What did he do when the war was over?" Croyden asked.

"Came home, sir, and resumed his law practice. Like his great leader, he accepted the decision as final. He didn't spend the balance of his life living in the past."

"And why did he never marry? Surely, such a man" (with a wave of his hand toward the portrait) "could have picked almost where he chose!"

"No one ever just knew, sir – it had to do with Miss Borden, – the sister of Major Borden, sir, who lives on the next place. They were sweethearts once, but something or somebody came between them – and thereafter, the Colonel never seemed to think of love. Perhaps, old Mose knows it, and if he comes to like you, sir, he may tell you the story. You understand, sir, that Colonel Duval is Mose's old master, and that every one stands or falls, in his opinion, according as they measure up to him. I hope you intend to keep him, sir – he has been a faithful caretaker, and there is still good service in him – and his wife was the Colonel's cook, so she must have been competent. She would never cook for anyone, after he died. She thought she belonged to Clarendon, sort of went with the place, you understand. Just stayed and helped Mose take care of it. She doubtless will resume charge of the kitchen again, without a word. It's the way of the old negroes, sir. The young ones are pretty worthless – they've got impudent, and independent and won't work, except when they're out of money. Excuse me, I ramble on –"

"I'm much interested," said Croyden; "as I expect to live here, I must learn the ways of the people."

"Well, let Mose boss the niggers for you, at first; he understands them, he'll make them stand around. Come over to the drawing-room, sir, I want you to see the furniture, and the family portraits... There, sir, is a set of twelve genuine Hepplewhite chairs – no doubt about it, for the invoice is among the Colonel's papers. I don't know much about such things, but a man was through here, about a year ago, and, would you believe it, when he saw the original invoice and looked at the chairs, he offered me two thousand dollars for them. Of course, as I had been directed by your father to keep everything as the Colonel had it, I just laughed at him. You see, sir, they have the three feathers, and are beautifully carved, otherwise. And, here, is a lowboy, with the shell and the fluted columns, and the cabriole legs, carved on the knees, and the claw and ball feet. He offered two hundred dollars for it. And this sofa, with the lion's claw and the eagle's wing, he wanted to buy it, too. In fact, sir, he wanted to buy about everything in the house – including the portraits. There are two by Peale and one by Stuart – here are the Peales, sir – the lady in white, and the young officer in Continental uniform; and this is the Stuart – the gentleman in knee breeches and velvet coat. I think he is the same as the one in uniform, only later in life. They are the Colonel's grandparents, sir: Major Daniel Duval, of the Tenth Maryland Line, and his wife; she was a Miss Paca – you know the family, of course, sir. The Major's commission, sir, hangs in the hall, between the Colonel's own and his father's – he was an officer in the Mexican war, sir. It was a fighting family, sir, a fighting family – and a gentle one as well. 'The bravest are the tenderest, the loving are the daring.'"

There was enough of the South Carolinian of the Lowlands in Croyden, to appreciate the Past and to honor it. He might not know much concerning Hepplewhite nor the beauty of his lines and carving, and he might be woefully ignorant of his own ancestors, having been bred in a State far removed from their nativity, for he had never given a thought to the old things, whether of furniture or of forebears – they were of the inanimate; his world had to do only with the living and what was incidental to it. The Eternal Now was the Fetich and the God of Northumberland, all it knew and all it lived for – and he, with every one else, had worshipped at its shrine.

It was different here, it seemed! and the spirit of his long dead mother, with her heritage of aristocratic lineage, called to him, stirring him strangely, and his appreciation, that was sleeping and not dead, came slowly back to life. The men in buff-and-blue, in small-clothes, in gray, the old commissions, the savour of the past that clung around them, were working their due. For no man of culture and refinement – nay, indeed, if he have but their veneer – can stand in the presence of an honorable past, of ancestors distinguished and respected, whether they be his or another's, and be unmoved.

“And you say there are none to inherit all these things?” Croyden exclaimed. “Didn't the original Duval leave children?”

The agent shook his head. “There was but one son to each generation, sir – and with the Colonel there was none.”

“Then, having succeeded to them by right of purchase, and with no better right outstanding, it falls to me to see that they are not shamed by the new owner. Their portraits shall remain undisturbed either by collectors or by myself. Moreover, I'll look up my own ancestors. I've got some, down in South Carolina and up in Massachusetts, and if their portraits be in existence, I'll add reproductions to keep the Duvals company. Ancestors by inheritance and ancestors by purchase. The two of them ought to keep me straight, don't you think?” he said, with a smile.

IV PARMENTER'S BEQUEST

Croyden, with Dick as guide and old Mose as forerunner and shutter-opener, went through the house, even unto the garret.

As in the downstairs, he found it immaculate. Josephine had kept everything as though the Colonel himself were in presence. The bed linen, the coverlids, the quilts, the blankets were packed in trunks, the table-linen and china in drawers and closets. None of them was new – practically the entire furnishing antedated 1830, and much of them 1800 – except that, here and there, a few old rugs of oriental weaves, relieved the bareness of the hardwood floors.

The one concession to modernism was a bath-room, but its tin tub and painted iron wash-stand, with the plumbing concealed by wainscoting, proclaimed it, alas, of relatively ancient date. And, for a moment, Croyden contrasted it with the shower, the porcelain, and the tile, of his Northumberland quarters, and shivered, ever so slightly. It would be the hardest to get used to, he thought. As yet, he did not know the isolation of the long, interminably long, winter evenings, with absolutely nothing to do and no place to go – and no one who could understand.

At length, when they were ready to retrace their steps to the lower floor, old Mose had disappeared.

"Gone to tell his wife that the new master has come," said Dick. "Let us go out to the kitchen."

And there they found her – bustling around, making the fire, her head tied up in a bandana, her sleeves rolled to the shoulders. She turned, as they entered, and dropped them an old-fashioned curtsy.

"Josephine!" said Dick, "here is Mr. Croyden, the new master. Can you cook for him, as well as you did for Colonel Duval?"

"Survent, marster," she said to Croyden, with another curtsy – then, to the agent, "Kin I cooks, Marster Dick! Kin I cooks? Sut'n'y, I kin. Don' yo t'inks dis nigger's forgot – jest yo waits, Marster Croyden, I shows yo, seh, sho' nuf – jest gives me a little time to get my han' in, seh."

"You won't need much time," Dick commented. "The Colonel considered her very satisfactory, sir, very satisfactory, indeed. And he was a competent judge, sir, a very competent judge."

"Oh, we'll get along," said Croyden, with a smile at Josephine. "If you could please Colonel Duval, you will more than please me."

"Thankee, seh!" she replied, bobbing down again. "I sho' tries, seh."

"Have you had any experience with negro servants?" Dick asked, as they returned to the library.

"No," Croyden responded: "I have always lived at a Club."

"Well, Mose and his wife are of the old times – you can trust them, thoroughly, but there is one thing you'll have to remember, sir: they are nothing but overgrown children, and you'll have to discipline them accordingly. They don't know what it is to be impertinent, sir; they have their faults, but they are always respectful."

"Can I rely on them to do the buying?"

"I think so, sir, the Colonel did, I know. If you wish, I'll send you a list of the various stores, and all you need do is to pay the bills. Is there anything else I can do now, sir?"

"Nothing," said Croyden. "And thank you very much for all you have done."

"How about your baggage – can I send it out? No trouble, sir, I assure you, no trouble. I'll just give your checks to the drayman, as I pass. By the way, sir, you'll want the telephone in, of course. I'll notify the Company at once. And you needn't fear to speak to your neighbors; they will take it as it's meant, sir. The next on the left is Major Borden's, and this, on the right, is Captain Tilghman's, and across the way is Captain Lashiel's, and Captain Carrington's, and the house yonder, with the huge oaks in front, is Major Markoe's."

“Sort of a military settlement,” smiled Croyden.

“Yes, sir – some of them earned their title in the war, and some of them in the militia and some just inherited it from their pas. Sort of handed down in the family, sir. The men will call on you, promptly, too. I shouldn’t wonder some of them will be over this evening.”

Croyden thought instantly of the girl he had seen coming out of the Borden place, and who had directed him to Clarendon.

“Would it be safe to speak to the good-looking girls, too – those who are my neighbors?” he asked, with a sly smile.

“Certainly, sir; if you tell them your name – and don’t try to flirt with them,” Dick added, with a laugh. “Yonder is one, now – Miss Carrington,” nodding toward the far side of the street.

Croyden turned. – It was she! the girl of the blue-black hair and slender silken ankles.

“She’s Captain Carrington’s granddaughter,” Dick went on with the Southerner’s love for the definite in genealogy. “Her father and mother both died when she was a little tot, sir, and they – that is, the grandparents, sir – raised her. That’s the Carrington place she’s turning in at. Ah – ”

The girl glanced across and, recognizing Dick (and, it must be admitted, her Clarendon inquirer as well), nodded.

Both men took off their hats. But Croyden noticed that the older man could teach him much in the way it should be done. He did it shortly, sharply, in the city way; Dick, slowly, deferentially, as though it were an especial privilege to uncover to her.

“Miss Carrington is a beauty!” Croyden exclaimed, looking after her. “Are there more like her, in Hampton?”

“I’m too old, sir, to be a competent judge,” returned Dick, “but I should say we have several who trot in the same class. I mean, sir – ”

“I understand!” laughed Croyden. “It’s no disrespect in a Marylander, I take it, when he compares the ladies with his race-horses.”

“It’s not, sir! At least, that’s the way we of the older generation feel; our ladies and our horses run pretty close together. But that spirit is fast disappearing, sir! The younger ones are becoming – commercialized, if you please. It’s dollars first, and *then* the ladies, with them – and the horses nowhere. Though I don’t say it’s not wise. Horses and the war have almost broken us, sir. We lost the dollars, or forgot about them and they lost themselves, whichever way it was, sir. It’s right that our sons should start on a new track and run the course in their own way – Yes, sir,” suddenly recollecting himself, “Miss Carrington’s a pretty girl, and so’s Miss Tayloe and Miss Lashiel and a heap more. Indeed, sir, Hampton is famed on the Eastern Sho’ for her women. I’ll attend to your baggage, and the telephone, sir, and if there is anything else I can do, pray command me. Drop in and see me when you get up town. Good day, sir, good day.” And removing his hat with a bow just a little less deferential than the one he had given to Miss Carrington, he proceeded up the street, leisurely and deliberately, as though the world were waiting for him.

“And he is a real estate agent!” reflected Croyden. “The man who, according to our way of thinking, is the acme of hustle and bustle and business, and schemes to trap the unwary. Truly, the Eastern Shore has much to learn – or we have much to unlearn! Well, I have tried the one – and failed. Now, I’m going to try the other. It seems to promise a quiet life, at least.”

He turned, to find Moses in the doorway, waiting.

“Marster Croyden,” he said, “shall I puts yo satchel an’ things in de Cun’l’s room, seh?”

Croyden nodded. He did not know which was the Colonel’s room, but it was likely to be the best in the house, and, moreover, it was well to follow him wherever he could.

“And see that my luggage is taken there, when the man brings it,” he directed – “and tell Josephine to have luncheon at one and dinner at seven.”

The darky hesitated.

“De Cun’l hed dinner in de middle o’ de day, seh,” he said, as though Croyden had inadvertently erred.

And Croyden appreciating the situation, answered:

“Well, you see, Moses, I’ve been used to the other way and I reckon you will have to change to suit me.”

“Yass, seh! yass, seh! I tell Jose. Lunch is de same as supper, I s’pose, seh?”

Croyden had to think a moment.

“Yes,” he said, “that will answer – like a light supper.”

“There may be an objection, after all, to taking over Colonel Duval’s old servants,” he reflected. “It may be difficult to persuade them that he is no longer the master. I run the chance of being ruled by a dead man.”

Presently his luggage arrived, and he went upstairs to unpack. Moses looked, in wonder, at the wardrobe trunk, with every suit on a separate hanger, the drawers for shirts and linen, the apartments for hats, and collars, and neckties, and the shoes standing neatly in a row below.

“Whar’s de use atak’in de things out t’al, Marster Croyden!” he exclaimed.

“So as to put the trunk away.”

“Sho’! I mo’nt a kno’d hit. Hit’s mons’us strange, seh, whar yo mon’t a’ kno’d ef yo’d only stop to t’ink. F’ instance, I mon’t a kno’d yo’d cum back to Clarendon, seh, some day, cuz yo spends yo money on hit. Heh!”

Then a bell tinkled softly from below.

“Dyar’s dinner – I means lunch, seh,” said Moses. “Scuse me, seh.”

“And I’m ready for it,” said Croyden, as he went to the iron wash-stand, and then slowly down stairs to the dining-room.

From some place, Moses had resurrected a white coat, yellow with its ten years’ rest, and was waiting to receive him. He drew out Croyden’s chair, as only a family servant of the olden times can do it, and bowed him into his place.

The table was set exactly as in Colonel Duval’s day, and very prettily set, Croyden thought, with napery spotless, and china that was thin and fine. The latter, if he had but known it, was Lowestoft and had served the Duvals, on that very table, for much more than a hundred years.

There was cold ham, and cold chicken, lettuce with mayonnaise, deviled eggs, preserves, with hot corn bread and tea. When Croyden had about finished a leisurely meal, it suddenly occurred to him that however completely stocked Clarendon was with things of the Past, they did not apply to the larder, and *these* victuals were undoubtedly fresh and particularly good.

“By the way! Moses,” he said, “I’m glad you were thoughtful enough to send out and purchase these things,” with an indicating motion to the table. “They are very satisfactory.”

“Pu’chase!” said the darky, in surprise. “Dese things not pu’chased. No, seh! Dey’s borro’d, seh, from Majah Bo’den’s, yass, seh!”

“Good God!” Croyden exclaimed. “You don’t mean you borrowed my luncheon!”

“Yass, seh! Why not, seh? Jose jes’ went ovah an’ sez to Cassie – she’s de cook, at de Majah’s, seh – sez she, Marster Croyden don’ cum and warns some’n to eat. An’ she got hit, yass, seh!”

“Is it the usual thing, here, to borrow an entire meal from the neighbor’s?” asked Croyden.

“Sut’n’y, seh! We borrows anything we needs from the neighbors, an’ they does de same wid us.”

“Well, I don’t want any borrowing by *us*, Moses, please remember,” said Croyden, emphatically. “The neighbors can borrow anything we have, and welcome, but we won’t claim the favor from them, you understand?”

“Yass, seh!” said the old darky, wonderingly.

Such a situation as one kitchen not borrowing from another was incomprehensible. It had been done by the servants from time immemorial – and, though Croyden might forbid, yet Josephine would continue to do it, just the same – only, less openly.

“And see that everything is returned not later than to-morrow,” Croyden continued.

“Yass, seh! I tote’s dem back dis minut, seh! – ”

“What?”

“Dese things, heah, whar yo didn’ eat, seh – ”

“Do you mean – Oh, Lord!” exclaimed Croyden.

“Never mind, Moses. I will return them another way. Just forget it.”

“Sut’n’y, seh,” returned the darky. “Dat’s what I wuz gwine do in de fust place.”

Croyden laughed. It was pretty hopeless, he saw. The ways they had, were the ways that would hold them. He might protest, and order otherwise, until doomsday, but it would not avail. For them, it was sufficient if Colonel Duval permitted it, or if it were the custom.

“I think I shall let the servants manage me,” he thought. “They know the ways, down here, and, besides, it’s the line of least resistance.”

He went into the library, and, settling himself in a comfortable chair, lit a cigarette... It was the world turned upside down. Less than twenty-four hours ago it was money and madness, bankruptcy and divorce courts, the automobile pace – the devil’s own. Now, it was quiet and gentility, easy-living and refinement. Had he been in Hampton a little longer, he would have added: gossip and tittle-tattle, small-mindedness and silly vanity.

He smoked cigarette after cigarette and dreamed. He wondered what Elaine Cavendish had done last evening – if she had dined at the Club-house, and what gown she had worn, if she had played golf in the afternoon, or tennis, and with whom; he wondered what she would do this evening – wondered if she thought of him more than casually. He shook it off for a moment. Then he wondered again: who had his old quarters at the Heights? He knew a number who would be jumping for them – who had his old table for breakfast? it, too, would be eagerly sought – who would take his place on the tennis and the golf teams? – what Macloud was doing? Fine chap was Macloud! the only man in Northumberland he would trust, the only man in Northumberland, likely, who would care a rap whether he came back or whether he didn’t, or who would ever give him a second thought. He wondered if Gaspard, his particular waiter, missed him? yes, he would miss the tips, at least; yes, and the boy who brushed his clothes and drew his bath would miss him, and his caddie, as well. Every one whom he *paid*, would miss him...

He threw away his cigarette and sat up sharply. It was not pleasant thinking.

An old mahogany slant-top escritoire, in the corner by the window, caught his eye. It had a shell, inlaid in maple, in the front, and the parquetry, also, ran around the edges of the drawers and up the sides.

There was one like it in the Cavendish library, he remembered. He went over to it, and, the key being in the lock, drew out pulls and turned back the top. Inside, there was the usual lot of pigeon holes and small drawers, with compartments for deeds and larger papers. All were empty. Either Colonel Duval, in anticipation of death, had cleaned it out, or Moses and Josephine, for their better preservation, had packed the contents away. He was glad of it; he could use it, at least, without ejecting the Colonel.

He closed the lid and had turned away, when the secret drawer, which, sometimes, was in these old desks, occurred to him. He went back and began to search for it... And, presently, he found it. Under the middle drawer was a sliding panel that rolled back, when he pressed on a carved lion’s head ornamentation, and which concealed a hidden recess. In this recess lay a paper.

It was yellow with age, and, when Croyden took it in his fingers, he caught the faint odor of sandal wood. It was brittle in the creases, and threatened to fall apart. So, opening it gently, he spread it on the desk before him. Here is what he read:

“Annapolis, 10 May, 1738.

“Honoured Sir:

“I fear that I am about to Clear for my Last Voyage – the old wounds trouble me, more and more, especially those in my head and chest. I am confined to my bed, and though Doctor Waldron does not say it, I know he thinks I am bound for Davy Jones’ locker. So be it – I’ve lived to a reasonable Age, and had a fair Time in the living. I’ve done that which isn’t according to Laws, either of Man or God – but for the Former, I was not Caught, and for the Latter, I’m willing to chance him in death. When you were last in Annapolis, I intended to mention a Matter to you, but something prevented, I know not what, and you got Away ere I was aware of it. Now, fearing lest I Die before you come again, I will Write it, though it is against the Doctor’s orders – which, however, I obey only when it pleases me.

“You are familiar with certain Episodes in my Early Life, spent under the Jolly Roger on the Spanish Main, and you have maintained Silence – for which I shall always be your debtor. You have, moreover, always been my Friend, and for that, I am more than your debtor. It is, therefore, but Mete that you should be my Heir – and I have this day Executed my last Will and Testament, bequeathing to you all my Property and effects. It is left with Mr. Dulany, the Attorney, who wrote it, to be probated in due Season.

“But there still remains a goodly portion which, for obvious reasons, may not be so disposed of. I mean my buried Treasure. I buried it in September, 1720, shortly after I came to Annapolis, trusting not to keep so great an Amount in my House. It amounts to about half my Fortune, and Approximates near to Fifty Thousand Pounds, though that may be but a crude Estimate at best, for I am not skilled in the judging of Precious Stones. Where I obtained this wealth, I need not mention, though you can likely guess. And as there is nothing by which it can be identified, you can use it without Hesitation. Subject, however, to one Restriction: As it was not honestly come by (according to the World’s estimate, because, forsooth, I only risked my Life in the gathering, instead of pilfering it from my Fellow man in Business, which is the accepted fashion) I ask you not to use it except in an Extremity of Need. If that need does not arise in your Life, you, in turn, may pass this letter on to your heir, and he, in turn, to his heir, and so on, until such Time as the Need may come, and the Restriction be lifted. And now to find the Treasure: —

“Seven hundred and fifty feet – and at right angles to the water line – from the extreme tip of Greenberry Point, below Annapolis, where the Severn runs into the Chesapeake, are four large Beech trees, standing as of the corners of a Square, though not equidistant. Bisect this Square, by two lines drawn from the Corners. At a Point three hundred and thirty feet, North-by-North-East, from where these two lines intersect and at a depth of Six feet, you will come upon an Iron Box. It contains the Treasure. And I wish you (or whoever recovers it) Joy of it! – as much joy with it as I had in the Gathering.

“Lest I die before you come again to Annapolis, I shall leave this letter with Mr. Dulany, to be delivered to you on the First Occasion. I judge him as one who will respect a Dead man’s seal. If I see you not again, Farewell. I am, sir, with great respect,

“Y’r humb’l & obed’t Serv’t

“Robert Parmenter.

“To Marmaduke Duval, Esq’r.”

Below was written, by another hand:

“The Extremity of Need has not arisen, I pass it on to my son.

“*M.D.*”

And below that, by still another hand:

“Neither has the Need come to me. I pass it to my son.

“*D.D.*”

And below that, by still another hand:

“Nor to me. I pass it to my son.

“*M.D.*”

And below that:

“The Extremity of Need brushed by me so close I heard the rustling of its gown, but I did not dig. I have sufficient for me, and I am the last of my line. I pass it, therefore, to my good friend Hugh Croyden (and, in the event that he predecease me, to his son Geoffrey Croyden), to whom Clarendon will go upon my demise.

“*D.D.*”

Croyden read the last endorsement again; then he smiled, and the smile broadened into an audible laugh.

The heir of a pirate! Well, at least, it promised something to engage him, if time hung heavily on his hands. The Duvals seem to have taken the bequest seriously – so, why not he? And, though the extremity of need seems never to have reached them, it was peculiar that none of the family had inspected the locality and satisfied himself of the accuracy of the description. The extreme tip of Greenberry Point had shifted, a dozen times, likely, in a hundred and ninety years, and the four beech trees had long since disappeared, but there was no note of these facts to aid the search. He must start just where Robert Parmenter had left off: with the letter.

He found an old history of Maryland in the book-case. It contained a map. Annapolis was somewhere on the Western Shore, he knew. He ran his eyes down the Chesapeake. Yes, here it was – with Greenberry Point just across the Severn. So much of the letter was accurate, at least. The rest would bear investigation. Some time soon he would go across, and take a look over the ground. Greenberry Point, for all he knew, might be built up with houses, or blown half a mile inland, or turned into a fort, or anything. It was not likely to have remained the same, as in Parmenter’s day; and, yet, if it had changed, why should not the Duvals have remarked it, in making their endorsements.

He put the letter back in the secret compartment, where it had rested for so many years. Evidently, Colonel Duval had forgotten it, in his last brief illness. And Fortune had helped him in the finding. Would it help him to the treasure as well? For with him, the restriction was lifted – the extremity of need was come. Moreover, it was time that the letter should be put to the test.

V

MISS CARRINGTON

Croyden was sitting before the house, later in the afternoon, when an elderly gentleman, returning leisurely from town, turned in at the Clarendon gates.

“My first caller,” thought Croyden, and immediately he arose and went forward to meet him.

“Permit me to present myself, sir,” said the newcomer. “I am Charles Carrington.”

“I am very glad to meet you, Captain Carrington,” said Croyden, taking the proffered hand.

“This is your first visit to Hampton, I believe, sir,” the Captain remarked, when they were seated under the trees. “It is not Northumberland, sir; we haven’t the push, and the bustle, and the smoke, but we have a pleasant little town, sir, and we’re glad to welcome you here. I think you will like it. It’s a long time since Clarendon had a tenant, sir. Colonel Duval’s been dead nearly ten years now. Your father and he were particular friends, I believe.”

Croyden assured him that such was the case.

“Yes, sir, the Colonel often spoke of him to me with great affection. I can’t say I was surprised to know that he had made him his heir. He was the last of the Duvals – not even a collateral in the family – there was only one child to a generation, sir.”

Manifestly, it was not known in Hampton how Hugh Croyden came to be the Colonel’s heir, and, indeed, friendship had prompted the money-loan, without security other than the promise of the ultimate transfer of Clarendon and its contents. And Croyden, respecting the Colonel’s wish, evident now, though unexpressed either to his father or himself, resolved to treat the place as a gift, and to suppress the fact that there had been an ample and adequate consideration.

After a short visit, Captain Carrington arose to go.

“Come over and take supper with us, this evening, sir,” said he. “I want you to meet Mrs. Carrington and my granddaughter.”

“I’ll come with pleasure,” Croyden answered, thinking of the girl with the blue-black hair and slender ankles.

“It’s the house yonder, with the white pillars – at half-after-six, then, sir.”

As Croyden approached the Carrington house, he encountered Miss Carrington on the walk.

“We have met before,” she said, as he bowed over her hand. “I was your original guide to Clarendon. Have you forgot?”

“Have I forgot?” said Croyden. “Do you think it possible?” looking her in the eyes.

“No, I don’t.”

“But you wanted to hear me say it?”

“I wanted to know if you could say it,” she answered, gayly.

“And how have I succeeded?”

“Admirably!”

“Sufficiently well to pass muster?”

“Muster – for what?” she asked, with a sly smile.

“For enrollment among your victims.”

“Shall I put your name on the list – at the foot?” she laughed.

“Why at the foot?”

“The last comer – you have to work your way up by merit, you know.”

“Which consists in?”

“*That* you will have to discover.”

“I shall try,” he said. “Is it so very difficult of discovery?”

“No, it should not be so difficult – for you,” she answered, with a flash of her violet eyes. “Mother!” as they reached the piazza – “let me present Mr. Croyden.”

Mrs. Carrington arose to greet him – a tall, slender woman, whose age was sixty, at least, but who appeared not a day over forty-five, despite the dark gown and little lace cap she was wearing. She seemed what the girl had called her – the mother, rather than the grandmother. And when she smiled!

“Miss Carrington two generations hence. Lord! how do they do it?” thought Croyden.

“You play Bridge, of course, Mr. Croyden,” said Miss Carrington, when the dessert was being served.

“I like it very much,” he answered.

“I was sure you did – so sure, indeed, I asked a few friends in later – for a rubber or two – and to meet you.”

“So it’s well for me I play,” he smiled.

“It is indeed!” laughed Mrs. Carrington – “that is, if you care aught for Davila’s good opinion. If one can’t play Bridge one would better not be born.”

“When you know Mother a little better, Mr. Croyden, you will recognize that she is inclined to exaggerate at times,” said Miss Carrington. “I admit that I am fond of the game, that I like to play with people who know how, and who, at the critical moment, are not always throwing the wrong card – you understand?”

“In other words, you haven’t any patience with stupidity,” said Croyden. “Nor have I – but we sometimes forget that a card player is born, not made. All the drilling and teaching one can do won’t give card sense to one who hasn’t any.”

“Precisely!” Miss Carrington exclaimed, “and life is too short to bother with such people. They may be very charming otherwise, but not across the Bridge table.”

“Yet ought you not to forgive them their misplays, just because they are charming?” Mrs. Carrington asked. “If you were given your choice between a poor player who is charming, and a good player who is disagreeable, which would you choose, Mr. Croyden? – Come, now be honest.”

“It would depend upon the size of the game,” Croyden responded. “If it were half a cent a point, I should choose the charming partner, but if it were five cents or better, I am inclined to think I should prefer the good player.”

“I’ll remember that,” said Miss Carrington. “As we don’t play, here, for money stakes, you won’t care if your partner isn’t very expert.”

“Not exactly,” he laughed. “The stipulation is that she shall be charming. I should be willing to take *you* for a partner though you trumped my ace and forgot my lead.”

“*Merci, Monsieur,*” she answered. “Though you know I should do neither.”

“Ever play poker?” Captain Carrington asked, suddenly.

“Occasionally,” smiled Croyden.

“Good! We’ll go down to the Club, some evening. We old fellows aren’t much on Bridge, but we can handle a pair or three of-a-kind, pretty good. Have some sherry, won’t you?”

“You must not let the Captain beguile you,” interposed Mrs. Carrington. “The men all play poker with us, – it is a heritage of the old days – though the youngsters are breaking away from it.”

“And taking up Bridge!” the Captain ejaculated. “And it is just as well – we have sense enough to stop before we’re broke, but they haven’t.”

“To hear father talk, you would think that the present generation is no earthly good!” smiled Miss Carrington. “Yet I suppose, when he was young, his elders held the same opinion of him.”

“I dare say!” laughed the Captain. “The old ones always think the young ones have a lot to learn – and they have, sir, they have! But it’s of another sort than we can teach them, I reckon.” He pushed back his chair. “We’ll smoke on the piazza, sir – the ladies don’t object.”

As they passed out, a visitor was just ascending the steps. Miss Carrington gave a smothered exclamation and went forward.

“How do you do, Miss Erskine!” she said.

“How do you do, my dear!” returned Miss Erskine, “and Mrs. Carrington – and the dear Captain, too. – I’m charmed to find you all at home.”

She spoke with an affected drawl that would have been amusing in a handsome woman, but was absurdly ridiculous in one with her figure and unattractive face.

She turned expectantly toward Croyden, and Miss Carrington presented him.

“So this is the new owner of Clarendon,” she gurgled with an ‘a’ so broad it impeded her speech. “You have kept us waiting a long time, Mr. Croyden. We began to think you a myth.”

“I’m afraid you will find me a very husky myth,” Croyden answered.

“‘Husky’ is scarcely the correct word, Mr. Croyden; *animated* would be better, I think. We scholars, you know, do not like to hear a word used in a perverted sense.”

She waddled to a chair and settled into it. Croyden shot an amused glance toward Miss Carrington, and received one in reply.

“No, I suppose not,” he said, amiably. “But, then, you know, I am not a scholar.”

Miss Erskine smiled in a superior sort of way.

“Very few of us are properly careful of our mode of speech,” she answered. “And, oh! Mr. Croyden, I hope you intend to open Clarendon, so as to afford those of us who care for such things, the pleasure of studying the pictures, and the china, and the furniture. I am told it contains a Stuart and a Peale – and they should not be hidden from those who can appreciate them.”

“I assume you’re talking of pictures,” said Croyden.

“I am, sir, – most assuredly!” the dame answered.

“Well, I must confess ignorance, again,” he replied. “I wouldn’t know a Stuart from a – chromo.”

Miss Erskine gave a little shriek of horror.

“I do not believe it, Mr. Croyden! – you’re playing on my credulity. I shall have to give you some instructions. I will lecture on Stuart and Peale, and the painters of their period, for your especial delectation – and soon, very soon!”

“I’m afraid it would all be wasted,” said Croyden. “I’m not fond of art, I confess – except on the commercial side; and if I’ve any pictures, at Clarendon, worth money, I’ll be for selling them.”

“Oh! Mrs. Carrington! Will you listen – did you ever hear such heresy?” she exclaimed. “I can’t believe it of you, Mr. Croyden. Let me lend you an article on Stuart to read. I shall bring it out to Clarendon to-morrow morning – and you can let me look at all the dear treasures, while you peruse it.”

“Mr. Croyden has an appointment with me to-morrow, Amelia,” said Carrington, quickly – and Croyden gave him a look of gratitude.

“It will be but a pleasure deferred, then, Mr. Croyden,” said Miss Erskine, impenetrable in her self conceit. “The next morning will do, quite as well – I shall come at ten o’clock – What a lovely evening this is, Mrs. Carrington!” preparing to patronize her hostess.

The Captain snorted with sudden anger, and, abruptly excusing himself, disappeared in the library. Miss Carrington stayed a moment, then, with a word to Croyden, that she would show him the article now, before the others came, if Miss Erskine would excuse them a moment, bore him off.

“What do you think of her?” she demanded.

“Pompous and stupid – an irritating nuisance, I should call her.”

“She’s more! – she is the most arrogant, self-opinionated, self-complacent, vapid piece of humanity in this town or any other town. She irritates me to the point of impoliteness. She never sees that people don’t want her. She’s as dense as asphalt.”

“It is very amusing!” Croyden interjected.

“At first, yes – pretty soon you will be throwing things at her – or wanting to.”

“She’s art crazy,” he said. “Dilettanteism gone mad.”

“It isn’t only Art. She thinks she’s qualified to speak on every subject under the sun, Literature – Bridge – Teaching – Music. Oh, she is intolerable!”

“What fits her for assuming universal knowledge?” asked Croyden.

“Heaven only knows! She went away to some preparatory school, and finished off with another that teaches pedagogy. Straightway she became an adept in the art of instruction, though, when she tried it, she had the whole academy by the ears in two weeks, and the faculty asked her to resign. Next, she got some one to take her to Europe – spent six weeks in looking at a lot of the famous paintings, with the aid of a guide book and a catalogue, and came home prepared to lecture on Art – and, what’s more, she has the effrontery to do it – for the benefit of Charity, she takes four-fifths of the proceeds, and Charity gets the balance.

“Music came next. She read the lives of Chopin and Wagner and some of the other composers, went to a half dozen symphony concerts, looked up theory, voice culture, and the like, in the encyclopædias, and now she’s a critic! Literature she imbibed from the bottle, I suppose – it came easy to *her*! And she passes judgment upon it with the utmost ease and final authority. And as for Bridge! She doesn’t hesitate to arraign Elwell, and we, of the village, are the very dirt beneath her feet. I hear she’s thinking of taking up Civic Improvement. I hope it is true – she’ll likely run up against somebody who won’t hesitate to tell her what an idiot she is.”

“Why do you tolerate her?” Croyden asked. “Why don’t you throw her out of society, metaphorically speaking.”

“We can’t: she belongs – which is final with us, you know. Moreover, she has imposed on some, with her assumption of superiority, and they kowtow to her in a way that is positively disgusting.”

“Why don’t you, and the rest who dislike her, snub her?”

“Snub *her*! You can’t snub her – she never takes a snub to herself. If you were to hit her in the face, she would think it a mistake and meant for some one else.”

“Then, why not do the next best thing – have fun with her?”

“We do – but even that grows monotonous, with such a mountain of Egotism – she will stay for the Bridge this evening, see if she doesn’t – and never imagine she’s not wanted.” Then she laughed: “I think if she does I’ll give her to you!”

“Very good!” said he. “I’d rather enjoy it. If she is any more cantankerous than some of the women at the Heights, she’ll be an interesting study. Yes, I’ll be glad to play a rubber with her.”

“If you start, you’ll play the entire evening with her – we don’t change partners, here.”

“And what will *you* do?” he asked.

“Look on – at the *other* table. She will have my place. I was going to play with you.”

“Then the greater the sacrifice I’m making, the greater the credit I should receive.”

“It depends – on how you acquit yourself,” she said gayly. “There are the others, now – come along.”

There were six of them. Miss Tilghman, Miss Lashiel and Miss Tayloe, Mr. Dangerfield, Mr. Leigh, and Mr. Byrd. They all had heard of Croyden’s arrival, in Hampton, and greeted him as they would one of themselves. And it impressed him, as possibly nothing else could have done – for it was distinctly new to him, after the manners of chilliness and aloofness which were the ways of Northumberland.

“We are going to play Bridge, Miss Erskine, will you stay and join us?” asked Miss Carrington.

“I shall be charmed! charmed!” was the answer. “This is an ideal evening for Bridge, don’t you think so, Mr. Croyden?”

“Yes, that’s what we *thought*!” said Miss Tilghman, dryly.

“And who is to play with me, dear Davila?” Miss Erskine inquired.

“I’m going to put Mr. Croyden with you.”

“How nice of you! But I warn you, Mr. Croyden, I am a very exacting partner. I may find fault with you, if you violate rules – just draw your attention to it, you know, so you will not let it occur again. I cannot abide blunders, Mr. Croyden – there is no excuse for them, except stupidity, and stupidity should put one out of the game.”

"I'll try to do my very best," said Croyden humbly.

"I do not doubt that you will," she replied easily, her manner plainly implying further that she would soon see how much that "best" was.

As they went in to the drawing-room, where the tables were arranged, Miss Erskine leading, with a feeling of divine right and an appearance of a Teddy bear, Byrd leaned over to Croyden and said:

"She's the limit!"

"No!" said Leigh, "she's past the limit; she's the sublimated It!"

"Which is another way of saying, she's a superlative d – fool!" Dangerfield ended.

"I think I understand!" Croyden laughed. "Before you came, she tackled me on Art, and, when I confessed to only the commercial side, and an intention to sell the Stuart and Peale, which, it seems, are at Clarendon, the pitying contempt was almost too much for me."

"My Lord! why weren't we here!" exclaimed Byrd.

"She's coming out to inspect my 'treasures,' on Thursday morning."

"Self invited?"

"I rather think so."

"And you?"

"I shall turn her over to Moses, and decamp before she gets there."

"Gentlemen, we are waiting!" came Miss Erskine's voice.

"Oh, Lord! the old dragoon!" said Leigh. "I trust I'm not at her table."

And he was not – Miss Tilghman and Dangerfield were designated.

"Come over and help to keep me straight," Croyden whispered to Miss Carrington.

She shook her head at him with a roguish smile.

"You'll find your partner amply able to keep you straight," she answered.

The game began. Miss Tilghman won the cut and made it a Royal Spade.

"They no longer play Royal Spades in New York," said Miss Erskine.

"Don't know about New York," returned Miss Tilghman, placidly, "but *we're* playing them here, this evening. Your lead, Miss Amelia."

The latter shut her thick lips tightly, an instant.

"Oh, well, I suppose we must be provincial a little longer," she said, sarcastically. "Of course, you do not still play Royal Spades in Northumberland, Mr. Croyden."

"Yes, indeed! Play anything to keep the game moving," Croyden answered.

"Oh, to be sure! I forgot, for the instant, that Northumberland *is* a rapid town. – I call that card, Edith – the King of Hearts!" as Miss Tilghman inadvertently exposed it.

A moment later, Miss Tilghman, through anger, also committed a revoke, which her play on the succeeding trick disclosed.

That it was a game for pure pleasure, without stakes, made no difference to Miss Erskine. Technically it was a revoke, and she was within her rights when she exclaimed it.

"Three tricks!" she said exultantly, "and you cannot make game this hand."

"I'm very sorry, partner," Miss Tilghman apologized.

"It's entirely excusable under the circumstances," said Dangerfield, with deliberate accent. "You may do it again!"

"How courteous Mr. Dangerfield is," Miss Erskine smiled. "To my mind, nothing excuses a revoke except sudden blindness."

"And you would claim it even then, I suppose?" Dangerfield retorted.

"I said, sudden blindness was the only excuse, Mr. Dangerfield. Had you observed my language more closely, you doubtless would have understood. – It is your lead, partner."

Dangerfield, with a wink at Croyden, subsided, and the hand was finished, as was the next, when Croyden was dummy, without further jangling. But midway in the succeeding hand, Miss Erskine began.

"My dear Mr. Croyden," she said, "when you have the Ace, King, and *no more* in a suit, you should lead the Ace and then the King, to show that you have no more – give the down-and-out signal. We would have made an extra trick, if you had done so – I could have given you a diamond to trump. As it was, you led the King and then the Ace, and I supposed, of course, you had at least four in suit."

"I'm very sorry; I'll try to remember in future," said Croyden with affected contrition.

But, at the end of the hand, he was in disgrace again.

"If your original lead had been from your fourth best, partner, I could have understood you," she said. "As it was, you misinformed me. Under the rule of eleven, I had but the nine to beat, I played the ten and Mr. Dangerfield covered with the Knave, which by the rule you should have held. We lost another trick by it, you see."

"It's too bad – too bad!" Croyden answered; "that's two tricks we've lost by my stupid playing. I'm afraid I'm pretty ignorant, Miss Erskine, for I don't know what is meant by the rule of eleven."

Miss Erskine's manner of cutting the cards was somewhat indicative of her contempt – lingeringly, softly, putting them down as though she scorned to touch them except with the tips of her fingers.

"The rule of eleven is usually one of the first things learned by a beginner at Bridge," she said, witheringly. "I do not always agree with Mr. Elwell, some of whose reasoning and inferences, in my opinion, are much forced, but his definition of this rule is very fair. I give it in his exact words, which are: 'Deduct the size of the card led from eleven, and the difference will show how many cards, higher than the one led, are held outside the leader's hand.' For example: if you lead a seven then there are four higher than the seven in the other three hands."

"I see!" Croyden exclaimed. "What a bully rule! – It's very informing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's very informing – in more ways than one," she answered.

Whereat Miss Tilghman laughed outright, and Dangerfield had to retrieve a card from the floor, to hide his merriment.

"What's the hilarity?" asked Miss Carrington, coming over to their table. "You people seem to be enjoying the game."

Which sent Miss Tilghman into a gale of laughter, in which Dangerfield joined.

Miss Erskine frowned in disapproval and astonishment.

"Don't mind them, Mr. Croyden," she said. "They really know better, but this is the silly season, I suppose. They have much to learn, too – much to learn, indeed." She turned to Miss Carrington. "I was explaining a few things about the game to Mr. Croyden, Davila, the rule of eleven and the Ace-King lead, and, for some reason, it seemed to move them to jollity."

"I'm astonished!" exclaimed Miss Carrington, her violet eyes gleaming with suppressed mirth.

"I hope Mr. Croyden does not think we were laughing at *him*!" cried Miss Tilghman.

"Of course not!" returned Croyden solemnly, "and, if you were, my stupidity quite justified it, I'm sure. If Miss Erskine will only bear with me, I'll try to learn – Bully thing, that rule of eleven!"

It was now Croyden's deal and the score, games all – Miss Erskine having made thirty-six on hers, and Dangerfield having added enough to Miss Tilghman's twenty-eight to, also, give them game.

"How cleverly you deal the cards," Miss Erskine remarked. "You're particularly nimble in the fingers."

"I acquired it dealing faro," Croyden returned, innocently.

"Faro!" exclaimed Miss Carrington, choking back a laugh. "What is faro?"

"A game about which you should know nothing, my dear," Miss Erskine interposed. "Faro is played only in gambling hells and mining camps."

“And in some of the Clubs *in New York*,” Croyden added – at which Miss Tilghman’s mirth burst out afresh. “That’s where I learned to copper the ace or to play it open. – I’ll make it no trumps.”

“I’ll double!” said Miss Tilghman.

“I’ll go back!”

“Content.”

“Somebody will win the rubber, this hand,” Miss Erskine platitudinized, – with the way such persons have of announcing a self evident fact – as she spread out her hand. “It is fair support, partner.”

Croyden nodded. Then proceeded with much apparent thought and deliberation, to play the hand like the veriest tyro.

Miss Erskine fidgeted in her seat, gave half smothered exclamations, looked at him appealingly at every misplay. All with no effect. Croyden was wrapped in the game – utterly oblivious to anything but the cards – leading the wrong one, throwing the wrong one, matching pasteboards, that was all.

Miss Erskine was frantic. And when, at the last, holding only a thirteener and a fork in Clubs, he led the losing card of the latter, she could endure the agony no longer.

“That is five tricks you have lost, Mr. Croyden, to say nothing of the rubber!” she snapped. “I must go, now – a delightful game! thank you, my dear Davila. So much obliged to you all, don’t you know. Ah, Captain Carrington, will you see me as far as the front gate? – I won’t disturb the game. Davila can take my place.”

“Yes, I’ll take her to the gate!” muttered the Captain aside to Croyden, who was the very picture of contrition. “But if she only were a man! Are you ready, Amelia?” and he bowed her out.

“You awful man!” cried Miss Carrington. “How could you do it!”

“I think it was lovely – perfectly lovely!” exclaimed Miss Tilghman. – “Oh! that last hand was too funny for words. – If only you could have seen her face, Mr. Croyden.”

“I didn’t dare!” laughed he. “One look, and I’d have given the whole thing away.”

“She never suspected. – I tell you, she is as dense as asphalt,” said Miss Carrington. “Come, now we’ll have some Bridge.”

“And I’ll try to observe the rule of eleven!” said Croyden.

He lingered a moment, after the game was ended and the others had gone. When he came to say good-night, he held Miss Carrington’s slender fingers a second longer than the occasion justified.

“And may I come again soon?” he asked.

“As often as you wish,” she answered. “You have the advantage of proximity, at least.”

VI

CONFIDENCE AND SCRUPLES

The next month, to Croyden, went pleasantly enough. He was occupied with getting the household machinery to run according to his ideas – and still retain Moses and Josephine, who, he early discovered, were invaluable to him; in meeting the people worth knowing in the town and vicinity, and in being entertained, and entertaining – all very quietly and without ostentation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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