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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
ALONE WITH HER WEALTH

On a beautiful September afternoon in a handsome room of one of the grand, up-town hotels in New York sat Mrs. Cliff, widow and millionaire.

Widow of a village merchant, mistress of an unpretending house in the little town of Plainton, Maine, and, by strange vicissitudes of fortune, the possessor of great wealth, she was on her way from Paris to the scene of that quiet domestic life to which for nearly thirty years she had been accustomed.

She was alone in the hotel; her friends, Captain Horn and his wife Edna, who had crossed the ocean with her, had stayed but a few days in New York and had left early that afternoon for Niagara, and she was here by herself in the hotel, waiting until the hour should arrive when she would start on a night train for her home.

Her position was a peculiar one, altogether new to her. She was absolutely independent, – not only could she do what she pleased, but there was no one to tell her what it would be well

for her to do, wise for her to do, or unwise. Everything she could possibly want was within her reach, and there was no reason why she should not have everything she wanted.

For many months she had been possessed of enormous wealth, but never until this moment had she felt herself the absolute, untrammelled possessor of it. Until now Captain Horn, to whom she owed her gold, and the power it gave her, had been with her or had exercised an influence over her. Until the time had come when he could avow the possession of his vast treasures, it had been impossible for her to make known her share in them, and even after everything had been settled, and they had all come home together in the finest state-rooms of a great ocean liner, she had still felt dependent upon the counsels and judgment of her friends.

But now she was left absolutely free and independent, untrammelled, uncounselled, alone with her wealth.

She rose and looked out of the window, and, as she gazed upon the crowd which swept up and down the beautiful avenue, she could not but smile as she thought that she, a plain New England countrywoman, with her gray hair brushed back from her brows, with hands a little hardened and roughened with many a year of household duties, which had been to her as much a pleasure as a labor, was in all probability richer than most of the people who sat in the fine carriages or strolled in their fashionable clothes along the sidewalk.

"If I wanted to do it," she thought, "I could have one of those

carriages with prancing horses and a driver in knee breeches, or I could buy that house opposite, with its great front steps, its balconies, and everything in it, but there is nobody on this earth who could tempt me to live there."

"Now," said Mrs. Cliff to herself, as she turned from the window and selected a fresh easy chair, and sank down into its luxurious depths, "there is nothing in this world so delightful as to go back rich to Plainton. To be rich in Paris or New York is nothing to me; it would simply mean that I should be a common person there as I used to be at home, and, for the matter of that, a little more common."

As the good lady's thoughts wandered northward, and spread themselves from the railroad station at Plainton all over the little town, she was filled with a great content and happiness to go to her old home with her new money. This was a joy beyond anything she had dreamed of as possible in this world.

But it was the conjunction of the two which produced this delightful effect upon her mind. The money anywhere else, or Plainton without it, would not have made Mrs. Cliff the happy woman that she was.

It pleased her to let her mind wander over the incidents of her recent visit to her old home, the most unhappy visit she had ever made in all her life, but everything that was unpleasant then would help to make everything more delightful in the present home-coming.

She thought of the mental chains and fetters she had worn

when she went to Plainton with plenty of money in her purse and a beautiful pair of California blankets in her handsome trunk; when she had been afraid to speak of the one or to show the other; when she had sat quietly and received charity from people whose houses and land, furniture, horses, and cows, she could have bought and given away without feeling their loss; when she had been publicly berated by Nancy Shott for spending money on luxuries which should have been used to pay her debts; when she had been afraid to put her money in the bank for fear it would act as a dynamite bomb and blow up the fortunes of her friends, and when she could find no refuge from the miseries brought upon her by the necessity of concealing her wealth except to go to bed and cover up her head so that she should not hear the knock of some inquiring neighbor upon her front door.

Then when she had made this background as dark and gloomy as it was possible to make it, she placed before it the glittering picture of her new existence in Plainton.

But this new life, bright as it now appeared to her, was not to be begun without careful thought and earnest consideration. Ever since her portion of the golden treasure had been definitely assigned to her, the mind of Mrs. Cliff had been much occupied with plans for her future in her old home.

It was not to be altogether a new life. All the friends she had in the world, excepting Captain and Mrs. Horn, lived in Plainton. She did not wish to lose these friends, – she did not wish to be obliged to make new ones. With simple-minded and honest Willy

Croup, who had long lived with her and for her; with Mrs. Perley, the minister's wife; with all her old neighbors and friends, she wished to live as she had always lived, but, of course, with a difference. How to manage, arrange, and regulate that difference was the great problem in her mind.

One thing she had determined upon: her money should not come between her and those who loved her and who were loved by her. No matter what she might do or what she might not do, she would not look down upon people simply because she was rich, and oh, the blessed thought which followed that! There would be nobody who could look down upon her because she was not rich!

She did not intend to be a fine new woman; she did not intend to build a fine new house. She was going to be the same Mrs. Cliff that she used to be, – she was going to live in the same house. To be sure, she would add to it. She would have a new dining-room and a guest's chamber over it, and she would do a great many other things which were needed, but she would live in her old home where she and her husband had been so happy, and where she hoped he would look down from heaven and see her happy until the end of her days.

As she thought of the things she intended to do, and of the manner in which she intended to do them, Mrs. Cliff rose and walked the floor. She felt as if she were a bird, a common-sized bird, perhaps, but with enormous wings which seemed to grow and grow the more she thought of them until they were able

to carry her so far and so high that her mind lost its power of directing them.

She determined to cease to think of the future, of what was going to be, and to let her mind rest and quiet itself with what really existed. Here she was in a great city full of wonders and delights, of comforts, conveniences, luxuries, necessities, and all within her power. Almost anything she could think of she might have; almost anything she wanted to do she might do. A feeling of potentiality seemed to swell and throb within her veins. She was possessed of an overpowering desire to do something now, this moment, to try the power of her wealth.

Near her on the richly papered wall was a little button. She could touch this and order – what should she order? A carriage and prancing pair to take her to drive? She did not wish to drive. A cab to take her to the shops, or an order to merchants to send her samples of their wares that here, in her own room, like a queen or a princess, she might choose what she wanted and think nothing of the cost? But no, she did not wish to buy anything. She had purchased in Paris everything that she cared to carry to Plainton.

She went and stood by the electric button. She must touch it, and must have something! Her gold must give her an instant proof that it could minister to her desires, but what should she ask for? Her mind travelled over the whole field of the desirable, and yet not one salient object presented itself. There was absolutely nothing that she could think of that she wished to ask for at that

moment. She was like a poor girl in a fairy tale to whom the good fairy comes and asks her to make one wish and it shall be granted, and who stands hesitating and trembling, not being able to decide what is the one great thing for which she should ask.

So stood Mrs. Cliff. There was a fairy, a powerful fairy, in her service who could give her anything she desired, and with all her heart she wanted to want something that minute. What should she want?

In her agitation she touched the bell. Half frightened at what she had done, she stepped back and sat down. In a few minutes there was a knock, the door opened, a servant entered. "Bring me a cup of tea," said Mrs. Cliff.

CHAPTER II
WILLY CROUP DOESN'T KNOW

The next afternoon as the train approached Plainton, Mrs. Cliff found herself a great deal agitated as she thought of the platform at the station. Who would be there, – how should she be met? With all her heart she hoped that there would not be anything like a formal reception, and yet this was not improbable. Everybody knew she was coming; everybody knew by what train she would arrive. She had written to Willy Croup, and she was very sure that everybody knew everything that she had written. More than this, everybody knew that she was coming home rich. How rich they were not aware, because she had not gone into particulars on this subject, but they knew that the wealthy Mrs. Cliff would arrive at 5.20 that afternoon, and what were they going to do about it?

When she had gone home before, all her friends and neighbors, and even distant acquaintances, – if such people were possible in such a little town, – had come to her house to bid her welcome, and many of them had met her at the station. But then they had come to meet a poor, shipwrecked widow, pitied by most of them and loved by many. Even those who neither pitied nor loved her had a curiosity to see her, for she had been shipwrecked, and it was not known in Plainton how people

looked after they had been wrecked.

But now the case was so different that Mrs. Cliff did not expect the same sort of greeting, and she greatly feared formality. If Mr. Perley should appear on the platform, surrounded by some of the leading members of his congregation, and should publicly take her by the hand and bid her "Welcome home!" and if those who felt themselves entitled to do so, should come forward and shake hands with her, while others, who might feel that they belonged to a different station in life, should keep in the background and wait until she came to speak to them, she would be deeply hurt.

After all, Plainton and the people in it were dearer to her than anything else in the world, and it would be a great shock if she should meet formality where she looked for cordial love. She wanted to see Mr. Perley, – he was the first person she had seen when she came home before, – but now she hoped that he would not be there. She was very much afraid that he would make a stiff speech to her; and if he did that, she would know that there had been a great change, and that the friends she would meet were not the same friends she had left. She was almost afraid to look out of the window as the train slowed up at the station.

The minds of the people of Plainton had been greatly exercised about this home-coming of Mrs. Cliff. That afternoon it was probable that no other subject of importance was thought about or talked about in the town, and for some days before the whole matter had been so thoroughly considered and discussed

that the good citizens, without really coming to any fixed and general decision upon the subject, had individually made up their minds that, no matter what might happen afterward, they would make no mistake upon this very important occasion which might subsequently have an influence upon their intercourse with their old, respected neighbor, now millionnaire. Each one for himself, or herself, decided – some of them singly and some of them in groups – that as they did not know what sort of a woman Mrs. Cliff had become since the change in her circumstances, they would not place themselves in false positions. Other people might go and meet her at the station, but they would stay at home and see what happened. Even Mr. Perley thought it wise, under the circumstances, to do this.

Therefore it was, that when Mrs. Cliff stepped down upon the platform, she saw no one there but Willy Croup. If Mrs. Cliff was a little shocked and a good deal surprised to find no one to meet her but that simple-minded dependant and relative, her emotions were excited in a greater degree by the manner in which she was greeted by this old friend and companion.

Instead of rushing toward her with open arms, – for Willy was an impulsive person and given to such emotional demonstrations, – Miss Croup came forward, extending a loosely filled black cotton glove. Her large, light-blue eyes showed a wondering interest, and Mrs. Cliff felt that every portion of her visible attire was being carefully scanned.

For a moment Mrs. Cliff hesitated, and then she took the hand

of Willy Croup and shook it, but she did not speak. She had no command of words, at least for greeting.

Willy earnestly inquired after her health, and said how glad she was to see her, but Mrs. Cliff did not listen. She looked about her. For an instant she thought that possibly the train had come in ahead of time, but this, of course, was absurd – trains never did that.

"Willy," she said, her voice a little shaken, "has anything happened? Is anybody sick?"

"Oh no!" said Willy; "everybody is well, so far as I know. I guess you are wondering why there is nobody here to meet you, and I have been wondering at that too. They must have thought that you did not want to be bothered when you were attending to your baggage and things. Is anybody with you?"

"With me!" exclaimed Mrs. Cliff; "who could be with me?"

"Oh, I didn't know," replied the other; "I thought perhaps you might have a maidservant, or some of those black people you wrote about."

Mrs. Cliff was on the point of telling Willy she was a fool, but she refrained.

"Here is the baggage-man," said Willy, "and he wants your checks."

As Mrs. Cliff took the little pieces of brass from her purse and handed them to the man, Willy looked on in amazement.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Seven! I guess you had to pay for extra baggage. Shall I get you a carriage, and where do

you want to be driven to – to your own house or the hotel?"

Now Mrs. Cliff could not restrain herself. "What is the matter with you, Willy? Have you gone crazy?" she exclaimed. "Of course I am going to my own house, and I do not want any carriage. Did I ever need a carriage to take me such a short distance as that? Tell the man to bring some one with him to carry the trunks upstairs, and then come on."

"Let me carry your bag," said Willy, as the two walked away from the station at a much greater pace, it may be remarked, than Willy was accustomed to walk.

"No, you shall not carry my bag," said Mrs. Cliff, and not another word did she speak until she had entered the hallway of her home. Then, closing the door behind her, and without looking around at any of the dear objects for a sight of which she had so long been yearning, she turned to her companion.

"Willy," she cried, "what does this mean? Why do you treat me in this way when I come home after having been away so long, and having suffered so much? Why do you greet me as if you took me for a tax collector? Why do you stand there like a – a horrible clam?"

Willy hesitated. She looked up and she looked down.

"Things are so altered," she said, "and I didn't know – "

"Well, know now," said Mrs. Cliff, as she held out her arms. In a moment the two women were clasped in a tight embrace, kissing and sobbing.

"How should I know?" said poor Willy, as she was wiping

her eyes. "Chills went down me as I stood on that platform, wondering what sort of a grand lady you would look like when you got out of the car, with two servant women, most likely, and perhaps a butler, and trying to think what I should say."

Mrs. Cliff laughed. "You were born addle-pated, and you can't help it. Now, let us go through this house without wasting a minute!" Willy gazed at her in amazement.

"You're just the same as you always was!" she cried "Indeed I am!" said Mrs. Cliff. "Did you clean this dining-room yourself, Willy? It looks as spick and span as if I had just left it."

"Indeed it does," was the proud reply, "and you couldn't find a speck of dust from the ceiling to the floor!"

When Mrs. Cliff had been upstairs and downstairs, and in the front yard, the side yard, and the back yard, and when her happy eyes had rested upon all her dear possessions, she went into the kitchen.

"Now, Willy," she said, "let us go to work and get supper, for I must say I am hungry."

At this Willy Croup turned pale, her chin dropped, a horrible suspicion took possession of her. Could it be possible that it was all a mistake, or that something dreadful had happened; that the riches which everybody had been talking about had never existed, or had disappeared? She might want to go to her old home; she might want to see her goods and chattels, but that she should want to help get supper – that was incomprehensible! At that moment the world looked very black to Willy. If Mrs. Cliff

had gone into the parlor, and had sat down in the best rocking-chair to rest herself, and had said to her, "Please get supper as soon as you can," Willy would have believed in everything, but now – !

The grinding of heavy wheels was heard in front of the house, and Willy turned quickly and looked out of the window. There was a wagon containing seven enormous trunks! Since the days when Plainton was a little hamlet, up to the present time, when it contained a hotel, a bank, a lyceum, and a weekly paper, no one had ever arrived within its limits with seven such trunks. Instantly the blackness disappeared from before the mind of Willy Croup.

"Now, you tell the men where to carry them," she cried, "and I will get the supper in no time! Betty Handshall stayed here until this morning, but she went away after dinner, for she was afraid if she stayed she would be in the way, not knowing how much help you would bring with you."

"I wonder if they are all crack-brained," thought Mrs. Cliff, as she went to the front door to attend to her baggage.

That evening nearly all Plainton came to see Mrs. Cliff. No matter how she returned, – as a purse-proud bondholder, as a lady of elegant wealth with her attendants, as an old friend suddenly grown jolly and prosperous, – it would be all right for her neighbors to go in and see her in the evening. There they might suit themselves to her new deportment whatever it might be, and there would be no danger of any of them getting into false positions, which would have been very likely indeed if they

had gone to meet her at the station.

Her return to her own house gave her real friends a great deal of satisfaction, for some of them had feared she would not go there. It would have been difficult for them to know how to greet Mrs. Cliff at a hotel, even such an unpretentious one as that of Plainton. All these friends found her the same warm-hearted, cordial woman that she had ever been. In fact, if there was any change at all in her, she was more cordial than they had yet known her. As in the case of Willy Croup, a cloud had risen before her. She had been beset by the sudden fear that her money already threatened to come between her and her old friends. "Not if I can help it!" said Mrs. Cliff to herself, as fervently as if she had been vowing a vow to seek the Holy Grail; and she did help it. The good people forgot what they had expected to think about her, and only remembered what they had always thought of her. No matter what had happened, she was the same.

But what had happened, and how it had happened, and all about it, up and down, to the right and the left, above and below, everybody wanted to know, and Mrs. Cliff, with sparkling eyes, was only too glad to tell them. She had been obliged to be so reserved when she had come home before, that she was all the more eager to be communicative now; and it was past midnight before the first of that eager and delighted company thought of going home.

There was one question, however, which Mrs. Cliff successfully evaded, and that was – the amount of her wealth.

She would not give even an approximate idea of the value of her share of the golden treasure. It was very soon plain to everybody that Mrs. Cliff was the same woman she used to be in regard to keeping to herself that which she did not wish to tell to others, and so everybody went away with imagination absolutely unfettered.

CHAPTER III
MISS NANCY SHOTT

The next morning Mrs. Cliff sat alone in her parlor with her mind earnestly fixed upon her own circumstances. Out in the kitchen, Willy Croup was dashing about like a domestic fanatic, eager to get the morning's work done and everything put in order, that she might go upstairs with Mrs. Cliff, and witness the opening of those wonderful trunks.

She was a happy woman, for she had a new dish-pan, which Mrs. Cliff had authorized her to buy that very morning, the holes in the bottom of the old one having been mended so often that she and Mrs. Cliff both believed that it would be very well to get a new one and rid themselves of further trouble.

Willy also had had the proud satisfaction of stopping at the carpenter shop on her way to buy the dish-pan, and order him to come and do whatever was necessary to the back-kitchen door. Sometimes it had been the hinges and sometimes it had been the lock which had been out of order on that door for at least a year, and although they had been tinkering here and tinkering there, the door had never worked properly; and now Mrs. Cliff had said that it must be put in perfect order even if a new door and a new frame were required, and without any regard to what it might cost. This to Willy was the dawn of a new era, and the thought

of it excited her like wine.

Mrs. Cliff's mind was not excited; it was disquieted. She had been thinking of her investments and of her deposits, all of which had been made under wise advice, and it had suddenly occurred to her to calculate how much richer she was to-day than she had been yesterday. When she appreciated the fact that the interest on her invested property had increased her wealth, since the previous morning, by some hundreds of dollars, it frightened her. She felt as if an irresistible flood of opulence was flowing in upon her, and she shuddered to think of the responsibility of directing it into its proper courses, and so preventing it from overwhelming her and sweeping her away.

To-morrow there would be several hundred dollars more, and the next day more, and so on always, and what was she doing, or what had she planned to do, to give proper direction to these tidal waves of wealth? She had bought a new dish-pan and ordered a door repaired!

To be sure, it was very soon to begin to think of the expenditure of her income, but it was a question which could not be postponed. The importance of it was increasing all the time. Every five minutes she was two dollars richer.

For a moment she wished herself back in Paris or New York. There she might open some flood-gate which would give instant relief from the pressure of her affluence and allow her time to think; but what could she do in Plainton? At least, how should she begin to do anything?

She got up and walked about the room. She was becoming annoyed, and even a little angry. She resented this intrusion of her wealth upon her. She wanted to rest quietly for a time, to enjoy her home and friends, and not be obliged to think of anything which it was incumbent upon her to do. From the bottom of her heart she wished that her possessions had all been solid gold, or in some form in which they could not increase, expand, or change in any way until she gave them leave. Then she would live for a week or two, as she used to live, without thought of increment or responsibilities, until she was ready to begin the life of a rich woman and to set in motion the currents of her exuberant income.

But she could not change the state of affairs. The system of interest had been set in motion, and her income was flowing in upon her hour by hour, day by day, steadily and irresistibly, and her mind could not be at rest until she had done something – at least, planned something – which would not only prevent her from being overwhelmed and utterly discouraged, but which would enable her to float proudly, on this grand current of absolute power, over the material interests of the world.

Mrs. Cliff was a woman of good sense. No matter how much money she might possess, she would have considered herself its unworthy possessor if she should spend any of it without proper value received. She might spend it foolishly, but she wanted the worth of her money. She would consider it a silly thing, for instance, to pay a thousand dollars for an India shawl, because

few people wore India shawls, and she did not care for them; but if she had done so, she would have been greatly mortified if she found that she had paid too much, and that she might have bought as good a shawl for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Since she had been in that room and thinking about these things, enough interest had come to her to enable her to buy a good silver watch for some deserving person. Now, who was there to whom she could give a plain silver watch? Willy Croup would be glad to have it, but then it would be better to wait a few hours and give her a gold one.

Now it was that Willy came into the room with a disappointed expression upon her countenance.

"I was just coming in to tell you," she said, "that I was ready now to go up and help you open the trunks, but here comes that horrid Miss Shott, and dear knows how long she will stay!"

Nancy Shott was the leading spinster of Plainton. In companies where there were married ladies she was sometimes obliged to take a second place, but never among maidens, old or young. There were very few subjects upon which Miss Shott had not an opinion; and whatever this opinion might be, she considered it her first duty in life to express it. As a rule, the expression was more agreeable to her than to others.

When Mrs. Cliff heard that Miss Shott was approaching, she instantly forgot her wealth and all her perplexities concerning it. Miss Shott had not called upon her the previous evening, but she had not expected her, nor did she expect her now.

On her previous visit to Plainton, Mrs. Cliff had been shamefully insulted by Miss Shott, who had accused her of extravagance, and, by implication, of dishonesty, and in return, the indignant widow had opened upon her such a volley of justifiable retaliation that Miss Shott, in great wrath, had retired from the house, followed, figuratively, by a small coin which she had brought as a present and which had been hurled after her.

But Mrs. Cliff knew that her acrimonious neighbor could never be depended upon to do anything which might be expected of her, and she was not quite so much surprised as she was annoyed. Of course, she had known she must meet Nancy Shott, and she had intended to do nothing which would recall to the mind of any one that she remembered the disagreeable incident referred to, but she had not expected that the meeting would be in private.

She knew that Nancy would do something decidedly unpleasant. If she had stayed away because she wanted a chance to re-open the previous quarrel, that would be bad enough; but if she had determined to drop all resentment and had come prepared to offer honey and sugar, and thus try to make a rich friend out of one she had considered as a poor enemy, that would be still more disagreeable. But by the time the visitor had entered the parlor, Mrs. Cliff had made up her mind to meet her as if nothing unpleasant had ever happened between them, and then to await the course of events. She was not at all pleased with the visit, but, notwithstanding this, she had great curiosity

to know what Miss Shott had to say about the change in her circumstances.

Nancy Shott was different from other people. She was capable of drawing the most astounding inferences and of coming to the most soul-irritating conclusions, even on subjects which could not be otherwise than pleasant to ordinary people.

"How do you do?" said Miss Shott, offering her hand. "I am glad to see you back, Mrs. Cliff."

Mrs. Cliff replied that she was quite well and was glad to be back.

"You are not looking as hale as you did," said the visitor, as she seated herself; "you must have lost a good many pounds, but that was to be expected. From what I have heard, South America must be about as unhealthy a place as any part of the world, and then on top of that, living in Paris with water to drink which, I am told, is enough to make anybody sick to look at it, is bound to have some sort of an effect upon a person."

Mrs. Cliff smiled. She was used to this sort of talk from Nancy Shott. "I am better than I was two years ago," she said, "and the last time I was weighed I found that I had gained seven pounds."

"Well, there is no accounting for that," said her visitor, "except as we grow old we are bound to show it, and sometimes aging looks like bad health, and as to fat, that often comes as years go on, though as far as I am concerned, I think it is a great misfortune to have more to carry, as you get less and less able to carry it."

Mrs. Cliff might have said that that sort of thing would not

be likely to trouble Miss Shott, whose scantily furnished frame was sure to become thinner and thinner as she became older and weaker, but she merely smiled and waited to hear what would come next.

"I do not want to worry you," said Miss Shott; "but several people that were here last night said you was not looking as they had hoped to see you look, and I will just say to you, if it is anything connected with your appetite, with a feeling of goneness in the mornings, you ought to buy a quassia cup and drink the full of it at least three times a day."

Miss Shott knew that Mrs. Cliff absolutely detested the taste of quassia. Mrs. Cliff was not annoyed. She hoped that her visitor would soon get through with these prefatory remarks and begin to take the stand, whatever it might be, which she had come there that morning to take.

"There has been sickness here since you last left," said Miss Shott, "and it has been where it was least to be expected, too. Barney Thompson's little boy, the second son, has had the diphtheria, and where he got it nobody knows, for it was vacation time, and he did not go to school, and there was no other diphtheria anywhere in all this town, and yet he had it and had it bad."

"He did not die?" said Mrs. Cliff.

"Oh no, he got over it, and perhaps it was a bad case and perhaps it was not; but you may be sure I did not go near it, for I considered it my duty to keep away, and I did keep away, but

the trouble is – "

"And did none of the other children take it?" asked Mrs. Cliff.

"No, they didn't. But the trouble is, that when diphtheria or anything like it comes up suddenly like this, without any reason that nobody can see, it is just as likely to come up again without any reason, and I am expecting to hear every day of another of them Thompson children being stricken down; and I was very sorry indeed, Mrs. Cliff, to see, this very morning, Willy Croup coming out of Barney Thompson's house and to hear from her afterwards that she had been to order him to come here to put up a new kitchen door, which I do not suppose is absolutely needed, and even if it is, I am sure I would wait a good while before I would have Barney Thompson come into my house with diphtheria, that very minute, perhaps, in the throats of one or maybe more of his children; but of course, if people choose to trifle with their own lives, it is their own business."

"It was not real diphtheria," said Willy Croup, who happened to be passing the open door at this moment; "it was only a bad sore throat, and the child was well in two days."

"I suppose, of course," said Miss Shott, "that if the disease did get into this house, Willy Croup would be the first to take it, because she is such a spongy person that she takes almost anything that is in the air and is not wholesome; but then you would not want to lose her, and after a funeral in the house, no matter whose it may be, things is always gloomy for a long time afterwards, and nobody can feel easy if it was a catchin' disease

that the person died of."

Mrs. Cliff was naturally desirous to hear all the domestic news of the town, but she would have liked to have had something pleasant thrown in among the gloomy tidings of which Miss Shott had made herself the bearer, and so she made a little effort to turn the conversation.

"I shall be glad to go about and see my old friends and neighbors," she said, "for I am interested in everything which has happened to them; but I suppose it will be some days before I can settle down and feel ready to go on in the old way. It seems to me as if I had been on the move ever since I left here, although, of course, I was not travelling all the time."

"I suppose nobody has told you," said Miss Shott, "that Edward Darley has ploughed up that little pasture of his and planted it with young apple trees. Now, it does seem to me that for a man like Edward Darley, who comes of a consumptive family, and who has been coughin' regularly, to my certain knowledge, for more than a year, to go and plant apple trees, which he can't expect to live to see bear fruit, is nothing more or less than a wicked waste of money, time, and labor. I suppose if I was to go and tell him so he would not like that, but I do not know as I ought to consider it. There are people in this world who'll never know anything if they're not told!"

Five other topics of the town, each of a doleful nature and each indicating an evident depravity in a citizen of Plainton, were related by Miss Shott, and then she arose to go.

"I hope you'll remember what I told you about Thompson's children," she said, as she walked to the front door, "and if I was you, I'd have that kitchen fumigated after he has put the door in!"

"There now!" said Miss Shott to herself, as she proudly walked down the street. "The Widow Cliff can't say I've done any toadying; and, no matter what she's got, and what she hasn't got, she can't say to herself that I consider her any better able to give me twenty-five cents than she was when she was here before; or that it makes any difference to me whether she has much or little!"

CHAPTER IV
A LAUNCH INTO A NEW LIFE

It required the greater part of two days for Mrs. Cliff and Willy to open the seven trunks, and properly display and dispose of the various articles and goods, astonishing in their variety and beauty, and absolutely amazing when the difference between the price paid for them and what they would have cost in New York was considered.

During these fascinating operations it so happened that at one time or another nearly all of Mrs. Cliff's female friends dropped in, and all were wonderfully impressed by what they saw and what they heard; but although Miss Shott did not come there during the grand opening, it was not long before she knew the price and something of the general appearance of nearly everything that Mrs. Cliff had brought with her.

Among the contents of the trunks were a great many presents for Mrs. Cliff's friends, and whenever Miss Shott heard of one of these gifts, she made a remark to the effect that she had not a doubt in the world that the Widow Cliff knew better than to bring her a present, for she would not want the thing, whatever it was, whether a glass pitcher or a pin-cushion, flung back at her after the fashion that she had set herself at a time when everybody was trying their best to be kind to her.

It was clearly a fact, that through the influence of the seven trunks Mrs. Cliff was becoming a very popular woman, and Miss Shott did not like it at all. She had never had any faith – at least she said so – in those lumps of gold found in a hole in some part of the world that nobody had ever heard of; and had not hesitated to say that fortunes founded on such wild-goose stories as these should not even be considered by people of good sense who worked for their living, or had incomes which they could depend on. But the dress goods, the ribbons, the gloves, the little clocks, the shoes, the parasols, the breast-pins, the portfolios of pictures, the jewelry, the rugs and table covers, and hundreds of other beautiful and foreign things, were a substantial evidence that Mrs. Cliff's money was not all moonshine.

It was very pleasant for Mrs. Cliff to bring out her treasures to display them to her enthusiastic friends, and to arrange them in her house, and to behold the rapturous delight of Willy Croup from early morn until bed-time.

But the seven empty trunks had been carried up into the garret, and now Mrs. Cliff set her mind to the solution of the question – how was she to begin her new life in her old home? It must be a new life, for to live as she had lived even in the days of her highest prosperity during her husband's life would be absurd and even wicked. With such an income she must endeavor as far as was possible to her to live in a manner worthy of it; but one thing she was determined upon – she would not alienate her friends by climbing to the top of her money and looking down

upon them. None of them knew how high she would be if she were to perch herself on the very top of that money, but even if she climbed up a little way, they might still feel that they were very small in her sight.

No, the money should always be kept in the background. It might be as high as the sky and as glorious as a sunset, but she would be on the ground with the people of Plainton, and as far as was possible, they should all enjoy the fine weather together.

She could not repress a feeling of pride, for she would be looked upon as one of the principal persons – if not the principal person – in Plainton; but she could not believe that any real friend could possibly object to that.

If her husband had lived and prospered, it was probable he would have been the principal man in Plainton, the minister always excepted; but now there was no reason whatever why any one should object to her being a principal personage, and, in this case, she could not see why the minister's wife should be excepted.

But Plainton was to be her home; the Plainton people were to be her friends. How should she set about using her money in such a way that she should not be driven forth to some large city to live as ordinary wealthy people live, in a fashion to which she was utterly unsuited, and which possessed for her no attractions whatever?

Of course, she had early determined to devote a large sum to charitable purposes, for she would have thought herself a very

unworthy woman if her wealth had not benefited others than herself, but this was an easy matter to attend to. The amount she had set aside for charity was not permanently invested, and, through the advice of Mr. Perley, there would be no difficulty in devoting this to suitable objects. Already she had confidentially spoken to her pastor on the subject, and had found him enthusiastic in his desire to help her in every possible way in her benevolent purposes. But who was there who could help her in regard to herself? Who was there who could tell her how she ought to live so as to gain all the good that her money should give her, and yet not lose that which was to her the highest object of material existence, – a happy and prosperous life among her old friends in her native town?

Should she choose to elevate herself in the social circle by living as ordinary very rich people live, she could not hope to elevate her friends in that way, although she would be glad enough to do it in many cases, and there would be a gap between them which would surely grow wider and wider; and yet here was this money coming in upon her in a steady stream day by day, and how was she going to make herself happier with it?

She must do that, or, she believed, it would be her duty to hand it over to somebody else who was better adapted by nature to use it.

"If I did not take so much pleasure in things which cost so little and which are so easy for me to buy," said poor Mrs. Cliff to herself, "or if I did not have so much money, I am sure I should

get on a great deal better."

Mrs. Cliff's belief that she must not long delay in selecting some sort of station in life, and endeavoring to live up to it, was soon strengthened by Willy Croup. During the time of the trunk opening, and for some days afterwards, when all her leisure hours were occupied with the contemplation and consideration of her own presents, Willy had been perfectly contented to let things go on in the old way, or any way, but now the incongruity of Mrs. Cliff's present mode of living, and the probable amount of her fortune, began to impress itself upon her.

"It does seem to me," said she, "that it's a sin and a shame that you should be goin' about this house just as you used to do, helpin' me upstairs and downstairs, as if you couldn't afford to hire nobody. You ought to have a girl, and a good one, and for the matter of that, you might have two of 'em, I suppose. And even if it wasn't too much for you to be workin' about when there's no necessity for it, the people are beginnin' to talk, and that ought to be stopped."

"What are they talking about?" asked Mrs. Cliff.

"Well, it's not everybody that's talkin'," returned Willy, "and I guess that them that does gets their opinions from one quarter, but I've heard people say that it's pretty plain that all you got out of that gold mine you spent in buyin' the things you brought home in your trunks; for if you didn't, you wouldn't be livin' like this, helpin' to do your own housework and cookin'."

In consequence of this conversation, a servant-of-all-work

was employed; for Mrs. Cliff did not know what she would do with two women until she had made a change in her household arrangements; and with this as a beginning, our good widow determined to start out on her career as a rich woman who intended to enjoy herself in the fashion she liked best.

She sent for Mr. Thompson, the carpenter, and consulted with him in regard to the proposed additions to her house, but when she had talked for a time, she became disheartened. She found that it would be necessary to dig a new cellar close to her present premises; that there would be stones, and gravel, and lime, and sand, and carts and horses, and men, and dirt; and that it would be some months before all the hammering, and the sawing, and the planing, and the plastering, and tinwork could be finished, and all this would be going on under her eye, and close to her ears during those first months in which she had proposed to be so happy in her home. She could not bear to give the word to dig, and pound, and saw. It was not like building a new house, for that would not be near her, and the hub-bub of its construction would not annoy her.

So she determined she would not begin a new dining-room at present. She would wait a little while until she had had some good of her house as it was, and then she would feel better satisfied to live in the midst of pounding, banging, and all-pervading dust; but she would do something. She would have the fence which separated the sidewalk from her front yard newly painted. She had long wanted to have that done, but had not been able to afford

it.

But when Mr. Thompson went to look at the fence, he told her that it would be really a waste of money to paint it, for in many places it was old and decayed, and it would be much wiser to put up a new one and paint that.

Again Mrs. Cliff hesitated. If that fence had to be taken down, and the posts dug up, and new posts put in, and the flower-bed which ran along the inside of it destroyed, it would be just as well to wait until the other work began and have it all done at once; so she told Mr. Thompson he need not send a painter, for she would make the old fence do for a while.

Mrs. Cliff sighed a little as the carpenter walked away, but there were other things to do. There was the pasture lot at the rear of her garden, and she could have a cow, and there was the little barn, and she could have a horse. The idea of the horse pleased her more than anything she had yet thought of in connection with her wealth.

In her days of prosperity it had been her greatest pleasure to drive in her phaëton with her good brown horse, generally with Willy Croup by her side; to stop at shops or to make calls upon friends, and to make those little excursions into the surrounding country in which she and Willy both delighted. They had sometimes gone a long distance and had taken their dinner with them, and Willy was really very good in unharnessing the horse and watering him at a brook, and in giving him some oats.

To return to these old joys was a delightful prospect, and Mrs.

Cliff made inquiries about her horse, which had been sold in the town; but he was gone. He had been sold to a drover, and his whereabouts no one knew.

So she went to Mr. Williams, the keeper of the hotel, who knew more about horses than anybody else, and consulted with him on the subject of a new steed. She told him just what she wanted: a gentle horse which she could drive herself, and one which Willy could hold when she went into a house or a shop.

Now, it so happened that Mr. Williams had just such a horse, and when Mrs. Cliff had seen it, and when Willy had come up to look at it, and when the matter had been talked about in all the aspects in which it presented itself to Mrs. Cliff's mind, she bought the animal, and it was taken to her stable, where Andrew Marks, a neighbor, was engaged to take care of it.

The next morning Mrs. Cliff and Willy took a drive a little way out of town, and they both agreed that this horse, which was gray, was a great deal better traveller than the old brown, and a much handsomer animal; but both of them also agreed that they did not believe that they would ever learn to love him as they had their old horse.

Still he was very easy to drive, and he went along so pleasantly, without needing the whip in the least, that Mrs. Cliff said to herself, that for the first time since her return she really felt herself a rich woman.

"If everything," she thought, "should come to me as this horse came to me, how delightful my life would be! When I wanted

him, I found him. I did not have to trouble myself in the least about the price; I simply paid it, and ordered him sent home. Now, that sort of thing is what makes a person feel truly rich."

When they had gone far enough, and had reached a wide place in the road, Mrs. Cliff turned and started back to Plainton. But now the horse began to be a different kind of a horse. With his face towards his home, he set out to trot as fast as he could, and when Mrs. Cliff, not liking such a rapid pace, endeavored to pull him in, she found it very hard to do, and when she began to saw his mouth, thinking that would restrain his ardor, he ambled and capered, and Mrs. Cliff was obliged to let him resume his rapid gait.

He was certainly a very hard-mouthed horse, going home, and Mrs. Cliff's arms ached, and Willy Croup's heart quaked, long before they reached the town. When they reached Plainton, Mrs. Cliff began to be afraid that he would gallop through the streets, and she told Willy that if he did, she must not scream, but must sit quietly, and she would endeavor to steer him clear of the vehicles and people.

But although he did not gallop, the ardent gray seemed to travel faster after he entered the town, and Mrs. Cliff, who was getting very red in the face from her steady tugging at the reins, thought it wise not to attempt to go home, but to let her horse go straight to the hotel stables where he had lived.

When Mrs. Cliff had declared to Mr. Williams that that horse would never suit her, that she would not be willing to drive it,

and would not even think of going into a house and leaving Willy Croup to hold him, he was very much surprised, and said that he had not a gentler horse in his stable, and he did not believe there was one in the town.

"All horses," said he, "want to go home, especially at dinner-time."

"But the old brown did not," urged Mrs. Cliff. "That is the sort of horse I want."

"Some very old beast might please you better," said he; "but really, Mrs. Cliff, that is not the sort of horse you should have. He would die or break down in a little while, and then you would have to get another. What you should do is to have a good horse and a driver. You might get a two-seated carriage, either open or closed, and go anywhere and everywhere, and never think of the horse."

That was not the thing she longed for; that would not bring back the happy days when she drove the brown through the verdant lanes. If she must have a driver, she might as well hire a cab and be driven about. But she told Mr. Williams to get her a suitable vehicle, and she would have Andrew Marks to drive her; and she and Willy Croup walked sadly home.

As to the cow, she succeeded better. She bought a fairly good one, and Willy undertook to milk her and to make butter.

"Now, what have I done so far?" said Mrs. Cliff, on the evening of the day when the cow came home. "I have a woman to cook, I have a new kitchen door, and I have a cow! I do not count

the horse and the wagon, for if I do not drive, myself, I shall not feel that they are mine in the way that I want them to be."

CHAPTER V
A FUR-TRIMMED OVERCOAT AND A SILK HAT

Mrs. Cliff now began to try very hard to live as she ought to live, without pretensions or snobbery, but in a style becoming, in some degree, her great fortune.

There was one thing she determined to do immediately, and that was, to begin a series of hospitalities, – and it made her feel proud to think that she could do this and do it handsomely, and yet do it in the old home where everybody knew she had for years been obliged to practise the strictest economy.

She gave a dinner to which she invited her most select friends. Mr. and Mrs. Perley were there, and the Misses Thorpedyke, two maiden ladies who constituted the family of the highest social pretension of Plainton. There were other people who were richer, but Miss Eleanor Thorpedyke, now a lady of nearly seventy, and her sister Barbara, some ten years younger, belonged to the very best family in that part of the country, and were truly the aristocrats of the place.

But they had always been very friendly with Mrs. Cliff, and they were glad to come to her dinner. The other guests were all good people, and a dinner-party of more distinction could not have been collected in that town.

But this dinner did not go off altogether smoothly. If the people had come merely to eat, they must have been abundantly satisfied, for everything was of the very best and well cooked, Mrs. Cliff and Willy having seen to that; but there were certain roughnesses and hitches in the management of the dinner which disturbed Mrs. Cliff. In her travels and at the hotels where she had lived she had seen a great deal of good service, and she knew what it was.

Willy, who, being a relative, should really have come to the table, had decidedly declined to do so, and had taken upon herself the principal part of the waiting, assisted by the general servant and a small girl who had been called in. But the dining-room was very small, some of the chairs were but a little distance from the wall, and it was evident that Willy had not a true appreciation of the fact that in recent years she had grown considerably rounder and plumper than she used to be; and it made Mrs. Cliff's blood run cold to see how she bumped the back of Mr. Perley's chair, as she thrust herself between it and the wall.

The small girl had to be told almost everything that she must do, and the general servant, who did not like to wait on table, only came in when she was called and left immediately when she had done what she had been called for.

When the guests had gone, Mrs. Cliff declared to Willy that that was the last large dinner she would give in that house. "It was not a dinner which a woman of my means should offer to her friends." Willy was amazed.

"I don't see how it could have been better," said she, "unless you had champagne, and I know Mr. Perley wouldn't have liked that. Everything on the table was just as good as it could be."

But Mrs. Cliff shook her head. She knew that she had attempted something for which her present resources were insufficient. After this she invited people to dinner once or twice a week, but the company was always very small and suited to the resources of the house.

"I will go on this way for a while," thought the good lady, "and after a time I will begin to spread out and do things in a different style."

Several times she drove over to Harrington, a large town some five miles away, which contained a furniture factory, and there she purchased many articles which would be suitable for the house, always securing the best things for her purposes, but frequently regretting that certain beautiful and imposing pieces of furniture were entirely unsuited to the capacity of her rooms and hallways. But when her dining-room should be finished, and the room above it, she would have better opportunity of gratifying her taste for handsome wood in imposing designs. Then it might be that Harrington would not be able to give her anything good enough.

Her daily mail was now much larger than it ever had been before. Business people sent her cards and circulars, and every now and then she received letters calling her attention to charities or pressing personal needs of the writers, but there were not

very many of these; for although it was generally known that Mrs. Cliff had come into a fortune, her manner of living seemed also a matter of public knowledge. Even the begging letters were couched in very moderate terms; but all these Mrs. Cliff took to Mr. Perley, and, by his advice, she paid attention to but very few of them.

Day by day Mrs. Cliff endeavored to so shape and direct her fortunes that they might make her happy in the only ways in which she could be happy, but her efforts to do so did not always gain for her the approval of her fellow townspeople. There were some who thought that a woman who professed to have command of money should do a good many things which Mrs. Cliff did not do, and there were others who did not hesitate to assert that a woman who lived as Mrs. Cliff should not do a great many things which she did do, among which things some people included the keeping of a horse and carriage. It was conceded, of course, that all this was Mrs. Cliff's own business. She had paid the money she had borrowed to go to South America; she had been very kind to some of the poor people of the town, and it was thought by some had been foolishly munificent to old Mrs. Bradley, who, from being a very poor person threatened with the loss of her home, was now an independent householder, and enjoyed an annuity sufficient to support her.

More than that, Mrs. Cliff had been very generous in regard to the church music. It was not known exactly how much she had given towards this object, but there were those who said that she

must have given her means a considerable strain when she made her contribution. That is, if the things were to be done which Mr. Perley talked about.

When Mrs. Cliff heard what had been said upon this subject, – and Willy Croup was generally very well able to keep her informed in regard to what the people of the town said about her, – she thought that the gossips would have been a good deal astonished if they had known how much she had really given to the church, and that they would have been absolutely amazed if they knew how much Mr. Perley had received for general charities. And then she thought, with a tinge of sadness, how very much surprised Mr. Perley would have been if he had known how much more she was able to give away without feeling its loss.

Weeks passed on, the leaves turned red and yellow upon the trees, the evenings and mornings grew colder and colder, and Mrs. Cliff did everything she could towards the accomplishment of what now appeared to her in the light of a great duty in her life, – the proper expenditure of her income and appropriation of her great fortune.

Her labors were not becoming more cheerful. Day after day she said to herself that she was not doing what she ought to do, and that it was full time that she should begin to do something better, but what that better thing was she could not make up her mind. Even the improvements she contemplated were, after all, such mere trifles.

It was a very cold morning in October when Mrs. Cliff went

into her parlor and said to Willy that there was one thing she could do, – she could have a rousing, comfortable fire without thinking whether wood was five, ten, or twenty dollars per cord. When Willy found that Mrs. Cliff wanted to make herself comfortable before a fine blazing fire, she seemed in doubt.

"I don't know about the safety of it," she said. "That chimney's in a pretty bad condition; the masons told us so years ago, and nothin' has ever been done to it! There have been fires in it, but they have been little ones; and if I was you, I wouldn't have too large a blaze in that fireplace until the chimney has been made all right!"

Mrs. Cliff was annoyed. "Well then, Willy, I wish you would go for the mason immediately, and tell him to come here and repair the chimney. It's perfectly ridiculous that I can't have a fire in my own parlor when I am able to have a chimney as high and as big as Bunker Hill Monument if I wanted it!"

Willy Croup smiled. She did not believe that Mrs. Cliff really knew how much such a chimney would cost, but she said, "You have got to remember, you know, that we can't have the Cuthberts here to dinner to-morrow if the masons come to work at that chimney. Ten to one they will have to take the most part of it down, and we shall be in a general mess here for a week."

Mrs. Cliff sat down with a sigh. "You need not mind to have the wood brought in," she said; "just give me a few sticks and some kindling, so that I can give things a little air of cheerfulness."

As she sat before the gently blazing little fire, Mrs. Cliff felt that things needed an air of cheerfulness. She had that morning been making calculations, and, notwithstanding all she had bought, all she had done, and even including with the most generous margin all she had planned to do, her income was gaining upon her in a most discouraging way.

"I am not fit for it," she said to herself. "I don't know how to live as I want to live, and I won't live as I don't want to live. The whole business is too big for me. I don't know how to manage it. I ought to give up my means to somebody who knows how to use them, and stay here myself with just enough money to make me happy."

For the fortieth time she considered the question of laying all her troubles before Mr. Perley, but she knew her pastor. The great mass of her fortune would quickly be swallowed up in some grand missionary enterprise; and this would not suit Mrs. Cliff. No matter how much she was discouraged, no matter how difficult it was to see her way before her, no matter how great a load she felt her wealth to be, there was always before her a glimmering sense of grand possibilities. What they were she could not now see or understand, but she would not willingly give them up.

She was an elderly woman, but she came of a long-lived family, all of whom had lived in good health until the end of their days, and if there was any grand, golden felicity which was possible to her, she felt that there was reason to believe she would

live long to enjoy it when she wanted it.

One morning as Mrs. Cliff sat thinking over these things, there was a knock at the front door, and, of course, Willy Croup ran to open it. No matter where she was, or no matter what she was doing, Willy always went to the door if she could, because she had so great a desire to know who was there.

This time it was a gentleman, a very fine gentleman, with a high silk hat and a handsome overcoat trimmed with fur – fur on the collar, fur on the sleeves, and fur down the front. Willy had never seen such a coat. It was October and it was cool, but there was no man in Plainton who would have worn such a coat as that so early in the season even if he had one.

The gentleman had dark eyes and a very large mustache, and he carried a cane and wore rather bright tan-colored gloves. All these things Willy observed in an instant, for she was very quick in taking notice of people's clothes and general appearance.

The gentleman raised his hat and asked if Mrs. Cliff lived there. Now Willy thought he must be an extraordinary fine gentleman, for how should he know that she was not a servant, and in those parts gentlemen did not generally raise their hats to girls who opened front doors.

The gentleman was admitted and was ushered into the parlor, where sat Mrs. Cliff. She was a little surprised at the sight of this visitor, who came in with his hat on, but who took it off and made her a low bow as soon as he saw her. But she thought she appreciated the situation, and she hardened her heart.

A strange man, so finely dressed, and with such manners, must have come for money, and Mrs. Cliff had already learned to harden her heart towards strangers who solicited. But the hardness of her heart utterly disappeared in her amazement when this gentleman, having pulled off his right glove, advanced toward her, holding out his hand.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Cliff?" he said in a loud, clear voice. "No wonder, for I am a good deal changed, but it is not the same with you. You are the same as ever – I declare you are!"

Mrs. Cliff took the proffered hand, and looked into the face of the speaker. There was something there which seemed familiar, but she had never known such a fine gentleman as this. She thought over the people whom she had seen in France and in California, but she could not recollect this face.

"It's a mean thing to be puzzlin' you, Mrs. Cliff," said the stranger, with a cheery smile. "I'm George Burke, seaman on the *Castor*, where I saw more of you, Mrs. Cliff, than I've ever seen since; for though we have both been a good deal jumbled up since, we haven't been jumbled up together, so I don't wonder if you don't remember me, especially as I didn't wear clothes like these on the *Castor*. Not by any means, Mrs. Cliff!"

"I remember you," she said, and she shook his hand warmly. "I remember you, and you had a mate named Edward Shirley."

"Yes, indeed!" said Mr. Burke, "and he's all right, and I'm all right, and how are you?"

The overcoat with the fur trimmings came off, and, with the

hat, the cane, and the gloves, was laid upon a chair, and Burke and Mrs. Cliff sat down to talk over old times and old friends.

CHAPTER VI
A TEMPERANCE LARK

As Mrs. Cliff sat and talked with George Burke, she forgot the calculations she had been making, she forgot her perplexities and her anxieties concerning the rapid inroads which her income was making upon her ability to dispose of it, in the recollection of the good-fellowships which the presence of her companion recalled.

But Mr. Burke could give her no recent news of Captain Horn and Edna, she having heard from them later than he had; and the only one of the people of the *Castor* of whom he could tell her was Edward Shirley, who had gone into business.

He had bought a share in a shipyard, and, as he was a man who had a great idea about the lines of a vessel, and all that sort of thing, he had determined to put his money into that business. He was a long-headed fellow, and Burke had no doubt but that he would soon hear of some fine craft coming from the yard of his old shipmate.

"But how about yourself, Mr. Burke? I want to know what has happened to you, and what you intend doing, and how you chanced to be coming this way."

"Oh, I will tell you everything that has happened to me," said Mr. Burke, "and it won't take long; but first let me ask you something, Mrs. Cliff?" and as he spoke he quietly rose and shut

the parlor door.

"Now then," said he, as he seated himself, "we have all been in the same box, or, I should say, in the same boxes of different kinds, and although I may not have the right to call myself a friend, I am just as friendly to you as if I was, and feel as if people who have been through what we have ought to stand by each other even after they've got through their hardest rubs.

"Now, Mrs. Cliff, has anything happened to you? Have you had any set-backs? I know that this is a mighty queer world, and that even the richest people can often come down with a sudden thump just as if they had slipped on the ice."

Mrs. Cliff smiled. "Nothing has happened to me," she said. "I have had no set-backs, and I am just as rich to-day, – I should say a great deal richer, than I was on the day when Captain Horn made the division of the treasure. But I know very well why you thought something had happened to me. You did not expect to find me living in this little house."

"No, by the Lord Harry, I didn't!" exclaimed Burke, slapping his knee. "You must excuse me, Mrs. Cliff, for speaking out in that way, but really I never was so much surprised as when I came into your front yard. I thought I would find you in the finest house in the place until you could have a stately mansion built somewhere in the outskirts of the town, where there would be room enough for a park. But when I came to this house, I couldn't help thinking that perhaps some beastly bank had broke, and that your share of the golden business had been swept away. Things

like that do happen to women, you know, and I suppose they always will; but I am mighty glad to hear you are all right!

"But, as you have asked me to tell you my story, I will make short work of it, and then I would like to hear what has happened to you, as much as you please to tell me about it.

"Now, when I got my money, Mrs. Cliff, which, when compared to what your share must have been, was like a dory to a three-mast schooner, but still quite enough for me, and, perhaps, more than enough if a public vote could be taken on the subject, I was in Paris, a jolly place for a rich sailor, and I said to myself, —

"'Now, Mr. Burke,' said I, for I might as well begin by using good manners, 'the general disposition of a sea-faring man with a lot of money is to go on a lark, or, perhaps, a good many larks, and so get rid of it and then ship again before the mast for fourteen dollars per month, or thereabouts.'

"But I made up my mind right there on the spot that that sort of thing wouldn't suit me. The very idea of shipping again on a merchant vessel made the blood run cold inside of me, and I swore to myself that I wouldn't do it.

"To be sure, I wouldn't give up all notion of a lark. A sailor with money, – and I don't believe there ever was an able-bodied seaman with more money than I had, – who doesn't lark, at least to some degree, has no right to call himself a whole-souled mariner; so I made up my mind to have one lark and then stop."

Mrs. Cliff's countenance clouded. "I am sorry, Mr. Burke," said she, "that you thought it necessary to do that. I do hope you

didn't go on one of those horrible – sprees, do they call them?"

"Oh no!" interrupted Burke, "I didn't do anything of that kind. If I'd begun with a bottle, I'd have ended with nothing but a cork, and a badly burnt one at that. No ma'am! drinking isn't in my line. I don't take anything of that sort except at meals, and then only the best wine in genteel quantities. But I was bound to have one lark, and then I would stop and begin to live like a merchant-tailor, with no family nor poor relations."

"But what did you do?" asked Mrs. Cliff. "If it was a lark without liquor, I want to hear about it."

"It was a temperance lark, ma'am," said Burke, "and this is what it was.

"Now, though I have been to sea ever since I was a boy, I never had command of any kind of craft, and it struck me that I would like to finish up my life on the ocean wave by taking command of a vessel. It is generally understood that riches will give you anything you want, and I said to myself that my riches should give me that. I didn't want a sailin' vessel. I was tired of sailin' vessels. I wanted a steamer, and when I commanded a steamer for a little while I would stop short and be a landsman for the rest of my life.

"So I went up to Brest, where I thought I might find some sort of steamer which might suit me, and in that harbor I did find an English steamer, which had discharged her cargo and was expectin' to sail again pretty much in ballast and brandy, so far as I could make out. I went to this vessel and I made an offer to

her captain to charter her for an excursion of one week – that was all I wanted.

"Well, I'm not going to bother you, Mrs. Cliff, with all that was said and done about this little business, which seemed simple enough, but which wasn't. There are people in this world who think that if you have money you can buy anything you want, but such people might as well get ready to change their opinions if they ever expect to come into money."

"That is true," said Mrs. Cliff; "every word of it is true, as I have found out for myself!"

"Well," continued Burke, "there had to be a lot of telegraphin' to the owners in London and a general fuss with the officers of the port about papers, and all that, but I got the business through all right; for if money won't get you everything, it's a great help in making things slip along easy. And so one fine afternoon I found myself on board that steamer as commander for one week.

"Of course, I didn't want to give orders to the crew, but I intended to give my orders to the captain, and tell him what he was to do and what he was not to do for one week. He didn't like that very much, for he was inclined to bulldogism, but I paid him extra wages, and he agreed to knuckle under to me.

"So I gave him orders to sail out of the harbor and straight to the Island of Ushant, some twenty-five miles to the west of northwest.

"'There's no use going there,' said the captain, – his name was Dork, – 'there's nothing on that blasted bit of rock for you to see.

There's no port I could run this steamer into.'

"I had been studying out my business on the chart, and this little island just suited my idea, and though the name was 'Ushant,' I said to him, 'You shall,' and I ordered him to sail to that island and lay to a mile or two to the westward; and as to the landing, he needn't talk about that until I mentioned it myself.

"So when we got about a couple of miles to the west of Ushant, we lay to. Now I knew we were on the forty-eighth parallel of latitude, for I had looked that out on the chart, so I said to Captain Dork, —

"'Now, sir!' says I, 'I want you to head your vessel, sir, due west, and then to steam straight ahead for a hundred miles, keepin' your vessel just as near as you can on that line of latitude.'"

"I see!" said Mrs. Cliff, very much interested. "If he once got on that line of latitude and kept sailing west without turning one way or the other, he would be bound to keep on it."

"That's exactly it!" said Mr. Burke. "'Twas pretty near midnight when we started off to run along the forty-eighth parallel, but I kept my eyes on the man at the wheel and on the compass, and I let them know that that ship was under the command of an able-bodied seaman who knew what he was about, and if they skipped to one side of that line or to the other he would find it out in no time.

"I went below once to take a nap, but, as I promised the fellow at the wheel ten shillings if he would keep her head due west,

and told him he would be sure to wake me up if he didn't, I felt certain we wouldn't skip the line of latitude.

"Well, that steamer, which was called the *Duke of Dorchester*, and which was a vessel of not more than a thousand tons, wasn't much of a sailer, or perhaps they was saving coal, I don't know which, and, not knowing how much coal ought to be used, I kept my mouth shut on that point; but I had the log thrown a good deal, and I found that we never quite came up to ten knots an hour, and when we took an observation at noon the next day, we saw that we hadn't quite done the hundred miles; but a little before one o'clock we did it, and then I ordered the captain to stop the engine and lay to.

"There was a brig about a mile away, and when she saw us layin' to, she put about and made for us, and when she was near enough she hailed to know if anything was the matter. She was a French brig, but Captain Dork understood her, and I told him to bid her 'Good morning,' and to tell her that nothin' was the matter, but that we were just stoppin' to rest. I don't know what he did tell her, but she put about her helm and was off again on her own business.

"'Now,' said I to Captain Dork, 'I want you to back this steamer due east to the Island of Ushant.'

"He looked at me and began to swear. He took me for a maniac, – a wild, crazy man, and told me the best thing I could do would be to go below and turn in, and he would take me back to my friends, if I had any.

"I didn't want to tell him what I was up to, but I found I had to, and so I explained to him that I was a rich sailor takin' a lark, and the lark I wanted to take was, to sail on a parallel of latitude a hundred miles in a steamer, and then to back that steamer along that same parallel to the place where she started from. I didn't believe that there was ever a ship in the world that had done that, and bein' on a lark, I wanted to do it, and was willin' to pay for it; and if his engineers and his crew grumbled about backing the steamer for a hundred miles, he could explain to them how the matter stood, and tell them that bein' on a lark I was willin' to pay for all extra trouble I might put them to, and for any disturbances in their minds which might rise from sailin' a vessel in a way which didn't seem to be accordin' to the ordinary rules of navigation.

"Now, when Captain Dork knew that I was a rich sailor on a lark, he understood me, and he made no more objections, though he said he wouldn't have spent his money in that way; and when he told his crew and his engineers and men about the extra pay, they understood the matter, and they agreed to back her along the forty-eighth parallel just as nigh as they could until they lay to two miles west of Ushant.

"So back we went, and they kept her due east just as nigh as they could, and they seemed to take an interest in it, as if all of them wanted me to have as good a lark as I could for my money, and we didn't skip that parallel very much, although it wasn't an easy job, I can tell you, to keep her head due west

and her stern due east, and steam backwards. They had to rig up the compass abaft the wheel, and do some other things that you wouldn't understand, madam, such as running a spar out to stern to take sight by."

"I declare," said Mrs. Cliff, "that sort of sailing must have astonished any ship that saw it. Did you meet any other vessels?"

"Oh yes," said Burke. "After daybreak we fell in with a good many sail and some steamers, and most of them ran close and hailed us, but there wasn't any answer to give them, except that we were returning to port and didn't want no help; but some of the skippers of the smaller crafts were so full of curiosity that they stuck to us, and when we arrived off Ushant, which wasn't until nearly dark the next day, the *Duke of Dorchester* had a convoy of five sloops, two schooners, a brig, eight pilot boats, and four tugs."

Although Mr. Burke had said that he was going to make very short work with his story, it had already occupied a good deal of time, and he was not half through with it; but Mrs. Cliff listened with the greatest interest, and the rich sailor went on with his recital of adventures.

"Now, when I had finished scoring that forty-eighth parallel backward and forward for a hundred miles, I took out my purse and I paid that captain and all the crew what I promised to give them, and then we steamed back to Brest, where I told him to drop anchor and make himself comfortable.

"I stayed on board for a day and a night just to get my fill

feeling I was in command of a steamer, before I gave up a seafaring life forever. I threw up the rest of the week that I was entitled to and went ashore, and my lark was over.

"I went to England and took passage for home, and I had a first-class state-room, and laid in a lot of good clothes before I started. I don't think I ever had greater comfort in my life than sittin' on deck, smokin' a good cigar, and watchin' the able-bodied seamen at their work.

"I hope I'm not tiring you, madam, but I'm trying to cut things as short as I can. It's often said that a sailor is all at sea when he is on shore, but I was a country fellow before I was a sailor, and land doings come naturally to me when I fix my mind on them.

"I'd made up my mind I was going to build my mother a house on Cape Cod, but when I got home I thought it better to buy her one already built, and that's what I did, and I stayed there with her a little while, but I didn't like it. I'd had a notion of having another house near my mother's, but I gave up that. There's too much sea about Cape Cod.

"Now, she liked it, for she's a regular sailor's mother, but I couldn't feel that I was really a rich fellow livin' ashore until I got out of hearin' of the ocean, and out of smellin' of salt and tar, so I made up my mind that I'd go inland and settle somewhere on a place of my own, where I might have command of some sort of farm.

"I didn't know just exactly what I wanted, nor just exactly where I wanted to go, so I thought it best to look around a little

and hold council with somebody or other. I couldn't hold council with my mother, because she wanted me to buy a ship and take command of her. And then I thought of Captain Horn, and goin' to ask him. But the captain is a great man – "

"Indeed he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Cliff. "We all know that!"

"But he is off on his own business," continued Burke, "and what sort of a princely concern he's got on hand I don't know. Anyway, he wouldn't want me followin' him about and botherin' him, and so I thought of everybody I could, and at last it struck me that there wasn't anybody better than you, Mrs. Cliff, to give me the points I wanted, for I always liked you, Mrs. Cliff, and I consider you a woman of good sense down to the keel. And, as I heard you were livin' in sort of a country place, I thought you'd be the very person that I could come and talk to and get points.

"I felt a hankerin', anyway, after some of the old people of the *Castor*; for, after having had all that money divided among us, it made me feel as if we belonged to the same family. I suppose that was one reason why I felt a sort of drawing to you, you know. Anyway, I knew where you lived, and I came right here, and arrived this morning. After I'd taken a room at the hotel, I asked for your house and came straight here."

"And very glad am I to see you, Mr. Burke!" said Mrs. Cliff, speaking honestly from the bottom of her heart.

She had not known Burke very well, but she had always looked upon him as a fine, manly sailor; and now that he had come to her, she was conscious of the family feeling which he had spoken

of, and she was very glad to see him.

She saw that Burke was very anxious to know why she was living in a plain fashion in this unpretentious house, but she found it would be very difficult to explain the matter to him. Hers was not a straightforward tale, which she could simply sit and tell, and, moreover, although she liked Burke and thought it probable that he was a man of a very good heart, she did not believe that he was capable of advising her in the perplexities which her wealth had thrown about her.

Still, she talked to him and told him what she thought she could make him properly understand, and so, from one point to another, she went on until she had given the ex-sailor a very good idea of the state of her mind in regard to what she was doing, and what she thought she ought to do.

When Mrs. Cliff had finished speaking, Burke thrust his hands into his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and looked at the ceiling of the room, the walls, and the floor. He wanted to say something, but he was not prepared to do so. His mind, still nautical, desired to take an observation and determine the latitude and longitude of Mrs. Cliff, but the skies were very much overcast.

At this moment Willy Croup knocked at the parlor door, and when Mrs. Cliff went to her, she asked if the gentleman was going to stay to dinner.

Mrs. Cliff was surprised. She had no idea it was so late, but she went back to Mr. Burke and urged him to stay to dinner.

He consented instantly, declaring that this was the first time that anybody, not his mother, had asked him to dinner since he came into his fortune.

When Mrs. Cliff had excused herself to give some directions about the meal, Burke walked about the parlor, carefully examining everything in it. When he had finished his survey, he sat down and shook his head.

"The trouble with her is," he said to himself, "that she's so dreadfully afraid of running ashore that she will never reach any port, that's what's the matter!"

When Mrs. Cliff returned, she asked her visitor if he would like to see her house, and she showed him over it with great satisfaction, for she had filled every room with all the handsome and appropriate things she could get into it. Burke noticed everything, and spoke with approbation of many things, but as he walked behind his hostess, he kept shaking his head.

He went down to dinner, and was introduced to Willy Croup, who had been ordered to go and dress herself that she might appear at the meal. He shook hands with her very cordially, and then looked all around the little dining-room, taking in every feature of its furnishing and adornment. When he had finished, he would have been glad to shake his head again, but this would have been observed.

When the dinner came on, however, Mr. Burke had no desire to shake his head. It was what might have been called a family dinner, but there was such a variety, such an abundance,

everything was so admirably cooked, and the elderberry wine, which was produced in his honor, was so much more rich and fragrant to his taste than the wines he had had at hotels, that Mr. Burke was delighted.

Now he felt that in forming an opinion as to Mrs. Cliff's manner of living he had some grounds to stand upon. "What she wants," thought he, "is all the solid, sensible comfort her money can give her, and where she knows what she wants, she gets it; but the trouble seems to be that in most things she doesn't know what she wants!"

When Mr. Burke that afternoon walked back to the hotel, wrapped in his fur-trimmed coat and carefully puffing a fine Havana cigar, he had entirely forgotten his own plans and purposes in life, and was engrossed in those of Mrs. Cliff.

CHAPTER VII
MR. BURKE ACCEPTS A RESPONSIBILITY

Willy Croup was very much pleased with Mr. Burke, and she was glad that she had allowed herself to be persuaded to sit at table with such a fine gentleman.

He treated her with extreme graciousness of manner, and it was quite plain to her that if he recognized her in her silk gown as the person who, in a calico dress, had opened the front door for him, he had determined to make her feel that he had not noticed the coincidence.

He was a good deal younger than she was, but Willy's childlike disposition had projected itself into her maturer years, and in some respects there was a greater sympathy, quickly perceived by both, between her and Mr. Burke than yet existed between him and Mrs. Cliff. After some of the amusing anecdotes which he told, the visitor looked first towards Willy to see how she appreciated them; but it must not be supposed that he was not extremely attentive and deferential to his hostess.

If Willy had known what a brave, gallant, and daring sailor he was, she would have made a hero of him; but Mrs. Cliff had never said much about Burke, and Willy simply admired him as the best specimen of the urbane man of the world with whom

she had yet met.

The two women talked a good deal about their visitor that evening, and Mrs. Cliff said that she hoped he was not going to leave town very soon, for it was possible that she might be of help to him if he wanted to settle down in that part of the country.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, when Willy opened the front gate of the yard and stepped out upon the street with a small covered basket in her hand, she had gone but a very little distance when she met Mr. Burke, with his furs, his cane, and his silk hat. The latter was lifted very high as its owner saluted Miss Croup.

Willy, who was of a fair complexion, reddened somewhat as she shook hands with the gentleman, informed him, in answer to his questions, that Mrs. Cliff was very well, that she was very well; that the former was at home and would be glad to see him, and that she herself was going into the business part of the town to make some little purchases.

She would have been better pleased if she had not been obliged to tell him where she was going, but she could not do otherwise when he said he supposed she was walking for the benefit of the fresh morning air. He added to her discomfiture by requesting to be allowed to walk with her, and by offering to carry her basket. This threw Willy's mind into a good deal of a flutter. Why could she not have met this handsomely dressed gentleman sometime when she was not going to the grocery store to buy such things as stove-blacking and borax?

It seemed to her as if these commodities must suggest to the mind of any one rusty iron and obtrusive insects, and as articles altogether outside the pale of allusion in high-toned social intercourse.

It also struck her as a little odd that a gentleman should propose to accompany a lady when she was going on domestic errands; but then this gentleman was different from any she had known, and there were many ways of the world with which she was not at all acquainted.

Mr. Burke immediately began to speak of the visit of the day before. He had enjoyed seeing Mrs. Cliff again and he had never sat down to a better dinner.

"Yes," said Willy, "she likes good eatin', and she knows what it is, and if she had a bigger dining-room she would often invite people to dinner, and I expect the house would be quite lively, as she seems more given to company than she used to be, and that's all right, considerin' she's better able to afford it."

Mr. Burke took a deep satisfied breath. The opportunity had already come to him to speak his mind.

"Afford it!" said he. "I should think so! Mrs. Cliff must be very rich. She is worth, I should say – well, I don't know what to say, not knowing exactly and precisely what each person got when the grand division was made."

Willy's loyalty to Mrs. Cliff prompted her to put her in as good a light as possible before this man of the world, and her own self-esteem prompted her to show that, being a friend and relative of

this rich lady, she was not ignorant of her affairs in life.

"Oh, she's rich!" said Willy. "I can't say, of course, just how much she has, but I'm quite sure that she owns at least – "

Willy wished to put the amount of the fortune at one hundred thousand dollars, but she was a little afraid that this might be too much, and yet she did not wish to make the amount any smaller than could possibly be helped. So she thought of seventy-five, and then eighty, and finally remarked that Mrs. Cliff must be worth at least ninety thousand dollars. Mr. Burke looked up at the sky and wanted to whistle.

"Ninety thousand dollars!" he said to himself. "I know positively that it was at least four millions at the time of the division, and she says she's richer now than she was then, which is easy to be accounted for by the interest coming in. I see her game! She wants to keep shady about her big fortune because her neighbors would expect her to live up to it, and she knows it isn't in her to live up to it. Now, I'm beginning to see through the fog." "It seems to me," said he, "that Mrs. Cliff ought to have a bigger dining-room."

This remark pulled up the flood-gate to Willy's accumulated sentiments on the subject, and they poured forth in a rushing stream.

Yes, indeed, Mrs. Cliff ought to have a bigger dining-room, and other rooms to the house, and there was the front fence, and no end of things she ought to have, and it was soon made clear to Mr. Burke that Willy had been lying awake at night thinking, and

thinking, and thinking about what Mrs. Cliff ought to have and what she did not have. She said she really and honestly believed that there was no reason at all why she did not have them, except that she did not want to seem to be setting herself up above her neighbors. In fact, Mrs. Cliff had told Willy two or three times, when there had been a discussion about prices, that she was able to do anything she wanted, and if she could do that, why did she not do it? People were all talking about it, and they had talked and talked her fortune down until in some families it was not any more than ten thousand dollars.

On and on talked Willy, while Mr. Burke said scarcely a word, but he listened with the greatest attention. They had now walked on until they had reached the main street of the little town, gone through the business part where the shops were, and out into the suburbs. Suddenly Willy stopped.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, "I've gone too far! I was so interested in talking, that I didn't think."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Burke, "that I've taken you out of your way. Can't I get you what you want and save you the trouble?"

Now Willy was in another flutter. After the walk with the fur-trimmed coat, and the talk about dollars by thousands and tens of thousands, she could not come down to mention borax and blacking.

"Oh no, thank you!" said she, trying her best to think of some other errand than the one she had come upon. "I don't believe it's finished yet, and it's hardly worth while to stop. There was

one of those big cushion covers that she brought from Paris, that was to be filled with down, but I don't believe it's ready yet, and I needn't stop."

Mr. Burke could not but think it a little odd that such a small basket should be brought for the purpose of carrying home a large down cushion, but he said nothing further on the subject. He had had a most gratifying conversation with this communicative and agreeable person, and his interest in Mrs. Cliff was greatly increased.

When he neared the hotel, he took leave of his companion, saying that he would call in the afternoon; and Willy, after she had looked back and was sure he was out of sight, slipped into the grocery store and got her borax and blacking.

Mr. Burke called on Mrs. Cliff that afternoon, and the next morning, and two or three times the day after. They came to be very much interested in each other, and Burke in his mind compared this elderly friend with his mother, and not to the advantage of the latter. Burke's mother was a woman who would always have her own way, and wanted advice and counsel from no one, but Mrs. Cliff was a very different woman.

She was so willing to listen to what Burke said – and his remarks were nearly always on the subject of the proper expenditure of money – and appeared to attach so much importance to his opinions, that he began to feel that a certain responsibility, not at all an unpleasant one, was forcing itself upon him.

He did not think that he should try to constitute himself her director, or even to assume the position of professional suggester, but in an amateur way he suggested, and she, without any idea of depending upon him for suggestions, found herself more and more inclined to accept them as he continued to offer them.

She soon discovered that he was the only person in Plainton who knew her real fortune, and this was a bond of sympathy and union between them, and she became aware that she had succeeded in impressing him with her desire to live upon her fortune in such a manner that it would not interfere with her friendships or associations, and her lifelong ideas of comfort and pleasure.

The people of the town talked a great deal about the fine gentleman at the hotel, but they knew he was one of the people who had become rich in consequence of Captain Horn's discovery; and some of them, good friends of Mrs. Cliff, felt sorry that she had not profited to as great a degree by that division as this gentleman of opulent taste, who occupied two of the best rooms in the hotel, and obliged Mr. Williams to send to Harrington, and even to Boston, for provisions suitable to his epicurean tastes, and who drove around the country with a carriage and pair at least once a day.

When Burke was ready to make his suggestions, he thought he would begin in a mild fashion, and see how Mrs. Cliff would take them.

"If I was in your place, madam," said he, "the first thing I

would do would be to have a lot of servants. There's nothin' money can give a person that's better than plenty of people to do things. Lots of them on hand all the time, like the crew of a ship."

"But I couldn't do that, Mr. Burke," said she; "my house is too small. I haven't any place for servants to sleep. When I enlarge my house, of course, I may have more servants."

"Oh, I wouldn't wait for that," said he; "until then you could board them at the hotel."

This suggestion was strongly backed by Willy Croup, and Mrs. Cliff took the matter to heart. She collected together a domestic establishment of as many servants as she thought her establishment could possibly provide with work, and, although she did not send them to be guests at the hotel, she obtained lodging for them at the house of a poor woman in the neighborhood.

When she had done this, she felt that she had made a step in the direction of doing her duty by her money.

Mr. Burke made another suggestion. "If I was you," said he, "I wouldn't wait for times or seasons, for in these days people build in winter the same as in summer. I would put up that addition just as soon as it could be done."

Mrs. Cliff sighed. "I suppose that's what I should do," said she. "I feel that it is, but you know how I hate to begin it."

"But you needn't hate it," said he. "There isn't the least reason in the world for any objection to it. I've a plan which will make it all clear sailin'. I've been thinkin' it out, and this is the way I've

thought it." Mrs. Cliff listened with great attention.

"Now then," said Burke, "next to you on the west is your own lot that you're going to put your new dining-room on. Am I right there?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Cliff, "you are right there."

"Well, next to that is the little house inhabited by a family named Barnard, I'm told, and next to that there's a large corner lot with an old house on it that's for sale. Now then, if I was you, I'd buy that corner lot and clear away the old house, and I'd build my dining-room right there. I'd get a good architect and let him plan you a first-class, A number one, dining-room, with other rooms to it, above it and below it, and around it; with porticos, and piazzas, and little balconies to the second story, and everything that anybody might want attached to a first-class dining-room."

Mrs. Cliff laughed. "But what good would it be to me away up there at the corner of the next street?"

"The reason for putting it there," said Burke, "is to get clear of all the noise and dirt of building, and the fuss and bother that you dislike so much. And then when it was all finished, and painted, and papered, and the carpets down, if you like, I'd have it moved right up here against your house just where you want it. When everything was in order, and you was ready, you could cut a door right through into the new dining-room, and there you'd be. They've got so in the way of slidin' buildings along on timbers now that they can travel about almost like the old stage coaches, and you needn't have your cellar dug until you're ready to clap

your new dining-room right over it."

Mrs. Cliff smiled, and Willy listened with open eyes. "But how about the Barnard family and their house?" said she.

"Oh, I'd buy them a lot somewhere else," said he, "and move their house. They wouldn't object if you paid them extra. What I'd have if I was in your place, Mrs. Cliff, would be a clear lot down to the next street, and I'd have a garden in it with flowers, and gravel walks, and greenhouses, and all that sort of thing."

"All stretching itself out in the sunshine under the new dining-room windows!" cried Willy Croup, with sparkling eyes.

Mrs. Cliff sat and considered, a cheerful glow in her veins. Here, really, was an opportunity of stemming the current of her income without shocking any of her social instincts!

CHAPTER VIII
MR. BURKE BEGINS TO MAKE THINGS MOVE IN PLAINTON

It was not long before Mr. Burke began to be a very important personage in Plainton. It was generally known that he intended to buy land and settle in the neighborhood, and as he was a rich man, evidently inclined to be liberal in his expenditures, this was a matter of great interest both in social and business circles.

He often drove out to survey the surrounding country, but when he was perceived several times standing in front of an old house at the corner of the street near Mrs. Cliff's residence, it was supposed that he might have changed his mind in regard to a country place, and was thinking of building in the town.

He was not long considered a stranger in the place. Mrs. Cliff frequently spoke of him as a valued friend, and there was reason to believe that in the various adventures and dangers of which they had heard, Mr. Burke had been of great service to their old friend and neighbor, and it was not unlikely that his influence had had a good deal to do with her receipt of a portion of the treasure discovered by the commander of the expedition.

Several persons had said more than once that they could not see why Mrs. Cliff should have had any claim upon this treasure, except, perhaps, to the extent of her losses. But if she had had a

friend in camp, – and Mr. Burke was certainly a friend, – it was easy to understand why he would do the best he could, at a time when money was so plenty, for the benefit of one whom he knew to be a widow in straitened circumstances.

So Mr. Burke was looked upon not only as a man of wealth and superior tastes in regard to food and personal comfort, but as a man of a liberal and generous disposition. Furthermore, there was no pride about him. Often on his return from his drives, his barouche and pair, which Mr. Williams had obtained in Harrington for his guest's express benefit, would stop in front of Mrs. Cliff's modest residence; and two or three times he had taken that good lady and Willy Croup to drive with him.

But Mrs. Cliff did not care very much for the barouche. She would have preferred a little phaëton and a horse which she could drive herself. As for her horse and the two-seated wagon, that was declared by most of the ladies of the town to be a piece of absolute extravagance. It was used almost exclusively by Willy, who was known to deal with shops in the most distant part of the town in order that she might have an excuse, it was said, to order out that wagon and have Andrew Marks to drive her.

Of course they did not know how often Mrs. Cliff had said to herself that it was really not a waste of money to keep this horse, for Willy was no longer young; and if she could save her any weary steps, she ought to do it, and at the same time relieve a little the congested state of her income.

Moreover, Mr. Burke was not of an unknown family. He was

quite willing to talk about himself, especially to Mr. Williams, as they sat and smoked together in the evening, and he said a good deal about his father, who had owned two ships at Nantucket, and who, according to his son, was one of the most influential citizens of the place.

Mr. Williams had heard of the Burkes of Nantucket, and he did not think any the less of the one who was now his guest, because his father's ships had come to grief during his boyhood, and he had been obliged to give up a career on shore, which he would have liked, and go to sea, which he did not like. A brave spirit in poverty coupled with a liberal disposition in opulence was enough to place Mr. Burke on a very high plane in the opinions of the people of Plainton.

Half a mile outside the town, upon a commanding eminence, there was a handsome house which belonged to a family named Buskirk. These people were really not of Plainton, although their post-office and railroad station were there. They were rich city people who came to this country place for the summer and autumn, and who had nothing to do with the town folks, except in a limited degree to deal with some of them.

This family lived in great style, and their coachman and footman in knee breeches, their handsome horses with docked tails, the beautiful grounds about their house, a feebly shooting fountain on the front lawn, were a source of anxious disquietude in the mind of Mrs. Cliff. They were like the skeletons which were brought in at the feasts of the ancients.

"If I should ever be obliged to live like the Buskirks on the hill," the good lady would say to herself, "I would wish myself back to what I used to be, asking only that my debts be paid."

Even the Buskirks took notice of Mr. Burke. In him they thought it possible they might have a neighbor. If he should buy a place and build a fine house somewhere in their vicinity, which they thought the only vicinity in which any one should build a fine house, it might be a very good thing, and would certainly not depreciate the value of their property. A wealthy bachelor might indeed be a more desirable neighbor than a large family.

The Buskirks had been called upon when they came to Plainton a few years before by several families. Of course, the clergyman, Mr. Perley, and his wife, paid them a visit, and the two Misses Thorpedyke hired a carriage and drove to the house, and, although they did not see the family, they left their cards.

After some time these and other calls were returned, but in the most ceremonious manner, and there ended the social intercourse between the fine house on the hill and the town.

As the Buskirks drove to Harrington to church, they did not care about the Perleys, and although they seemed somewhat inclined to cultivate the Thorpedykes, who were known to be of such an excellent old family, the Thorpedykes did not reciprocate the feeling, and, having declined an invitation to tea, received no more.

But now Mr. Buskirk, who had come up on Saturday to spend Sunday with his family, actually called on Mr. Burke at the hotel.

The wealthy sailor was not at home, and the city gentleman left his card.

When Mr. Burke showed this card to Mrs. Cliff, her face clouded. "Are you going to return the visit?" said she.

"Oh yes!" answered Burke. "Some of these days I will drive up and look in on them. I expect they have got a fancy parlor, and I would like to sit in it a while and think of the days when I used to swab the deck. There's nothin' more elevatin', to my mind, than just that sort of thing. I do it sometime when I am eatin' my meals at the hotel, and the better I can bring to mind the bad coffee and hard tack, the better I like what's set before me."

Mrs. Cliff sighed. She wished Mr. Buskirk had kept away from the hotel.

As soon as Mrs. Cliff had consented to the erection of the new dining-room on the corner lot, – and she did not hesitate after Mr. Burke had explained to her how easy it would be to do the whole thing almost without her knowing anything about it, if she did not want to bother herself in the matter, – the enterprise was begun.

Burke, who was of an active mind, and who delighted in managing and directing, undertook to arrange everything. There was no agreement between Mrs. Cliff and himself that he should do this, but it pleased him so much to do it, and it pleased her so much to have him do it, that it was done as a thing which might be expected to happen naturally.

Sometimes she said he was giving her too much of his time,

but he scorned such an idea. He had nothing to do, for he did not believe that he should buy a place for himself until spring, because he wanted to pick out a spot to live in when the leaves were coming out instead of when they were dropping off, and the best fun he knew of would be to have command of a big crew, and to keep them at work building Mrs. Cliff's dining-room.

"I should be glad to have you attend to the contracts," said Mrs. Cliff, "and all I ask is, that while you don't waste anything, – for I think it is a sin to waste money no matter how much you may have, – that you will help me as much as you can to make me feel that I really am making use of my income."

Burke agreed to do all this, always under her advice, of course, and very soon he had his crew, and they were hard at work. He sent to Harrington and employed an architect to make plans, and as soon as the general basis of these was agreed upon, the building was put in charge of a contractor, who, under Mr. Burke, began to collect material and workmen from all available quarters.

"We've got to work sharp, for the new building must be moored alongside Mrs. Cliff's house before the first snowstorm."

A lawyer of Plainton undertook the purchase of the land and, as the payments were to be made in cash, and as there was no chaffering about prices, this business was soon concluded.

As to the Barnard family, Mr. Burke himself undertook negotiations with them. When he had told them of the handsome lot on another street, which would be given them in exchange,

and how he would gently slide their house to the new location, and put it down on any part of the lot which they might choose, and guaranteed that it should be moved so gently that the clocks would not stop ticking, nor the tea or coffee spill out of their cups, if they chose to take their meals on board during the voyage; and as, furthermore, he promised a handsome sum to recompense them for the necessity of leaving behind their well, which he could not undertake to move, and for any minor inconveniences and losses, their consent to the change of location was soon obtained.

Four days after this Burke started the Barnard house on its travels. As soon as he had made his agreement with the family, he had brought a man down from Harrington, whose business it was to move houses, and had put the job into his hands. He stipulated that at one o'clock P.M. on the day agreed upon the house was to begin to move, and he arranged with the mason to whom he had given the contract for preparing the cellar on the new lot, that he should begin operations at the same hour.

He then offered a reward of two hundred dollars to be given to the mover if he got his house to its destination before the cellar was done, or to the mason if he finished the cellar before the house arrived.

The Barnards had an early dinner, which was cooked on a kerosene stove, their chimney having been taken down, but they had not finished washing the dishes when their house began to move.

Mrs. Cliff and Willy ran to bid them good-bye, and all the Barnards, old and young, leaned out of a back window and shook hands.

Mr. Burke had arranged a sort of gang-plank with a railing if any of them wanted to go on shore – that is, step on terra firma – during the voyage. But Samuel Rolands, the mover, heedful of his special prize, urged upon them not to get out any oftener than could be helped, because when they wished to use the gang-plank he would be obliged to stop.

There were two boys in the family who were able to jump off and on whenever they pleased, but boys are boys, and very different from other people.

Houses had been moved in Plainton before, but never had any inhabitants of the place beheld a building glide along upon its timber course with, speaking comparatively, the rapidity of this travelling home.

Most of the citizens of the place who had leisure, came at some time that afternoon to look at the moving house, and many of them walked by its side, talking to the Barnards, who, as the sun was warm, stood at an open window, very much excited by the spirit of adventure, and quite willing to converse.

Over and over they assured their neighbors that they would never know they were moving if they did not see the trees and things slowly passing by them.

As they crossed the street and passed between two houses on the opposite side, the inhabitants of these gathered at their

windows, and the conversation was very lively with the Barnards, as the house of the latter passed slowly by.

All night that house moved on, and the young people of the village accompanied it until eleven o'clock, when the Barnards went to bed.

Mr. Burke divided his time between watching the moving house, at which all the men who could be employed in any way, and all the horses which could be conveniently attached to the windlasses, were working in watches of four hours each, in order to keep them fresh and vigorous, – and the lot where the new cellar was being constructed, where the masons continued their labors at night by the light of lanterns and a blazing bonfire fed with resinous pine.

The excitement caused by these two scenes of activity was such that it is probable that few of the people of the town went to bed sooner than the Barnard family.

Early the next morning the two Barnard boys looked out of the window of their bedroom and saw beneath them the Hastings' barnyard, with the Hastings boy milking. They were so excited by this vision that they threw their shoes and stockings out at him, having no other missiles convenient, and for nearly half an hour he followed that house, trying to toss the articles back through the open window, while the cow stood waiting for the milking to be finished.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.