Isham Frederic Stewart

The Strollers

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Содержание

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PROLOGUE
THE MARQUIS' HONEYMOON

Old Drury Lane rang with applause for the performance of Madame Carew. Of British-French parentage, she was a recognized peer among the favorite actresses on the English stage and a woman whose attractions of face and manner were of a high order. She came naturally by her talents, being a descendant of Madame de Panilnac, famed as an actress, confidante of Louise-Benedicte, Duchess du Maine, who originated the celebrated *nuits blanches* at Sceaux during the close of Louis XIV's reign.

The bill for the evening under consideration was "Adrienne Lecouvreur" and in no part had the actress been more natural and effective. Her triumph was secure, for as the prologue says:

> "Your judgment given–your sentence must remain;
> No writ of error lies–to Drury Lane."

She was the talk of the day and her praises or deficiencies were discussed by the scandal-carriers of the town; the worn-out dowagers, the superannuated maidens, the "tabernacle gallants," the male members of the tea tables and all the coxcombs, sparks and beaux who haunted the stage door.

The player had every stimulus to appear at her best on this particular evening, for the audience, frivolous, volatile, taking its character from the loose, weak king, was unusually complaisant through the presence of the first gentleman of Europe. As the last of the Georges declared himself in good-humor, so every toady grinned and every courtly flunkey swore in the Billingsgate of that profanely eloquent period that the actress was a "monstrous fine woman."

With rare discretion and spirit had the latter played, a queenly figure in that ribald, gross gathering. She had reached the scene where the actress turns upon her tormentors, those noble ladies of rank and position, and launches the curse of a soul lashed beyond endurance. Sweeping forward to confront her adversaries, about to face them, her troubled glance chanced to fall into one of the side boxes where were seated a certain foreign marquis, somewhat notorious, and a lady of insolent, patrician bearing. The anticipated action was arrested, for at sight of the nobleman and his companion, Adrienne swayed slightly, as though moved by a new overpowering emotion. Only for a moment she hesitated, then fixing her blazing eyes upon the two and lifting her arm threateningly, the bitter words flowed from her lips with an earnestness that thrilled the audience. A pallor overspread the face of the marquis, while the lady drew back behind the draperies, almost as if in fear. At the conclusion of that effort the walls echoed with plaudits; the actress stood as in a trance; her face was pale, her figure seemed changed to stone and the light went out of her eyes.

She fainted and fell and the curtain descended quickly. The woman by the marquis' side, who had trembled at first, now forced a laugh, as she said: "The trollop can curse! Let us go." Together they left the box, the marquis regretting the temerity which had led him to bring his companion to the theater. He, too, was secretly unnerved, and, when they entered the carriage, they seated themselves as far apart as possible, the marquis detesting the lady and she for her part disliking him just as cordially.

Next day the critics referred to the scene with glowing words, while in the coffee houses they discussed the proposition: Should an actress feel the emotion she portrays? With a cynical smile the marquis read the different accounts of the performance, when he and his companion found themselves in the old stage coach *en route* for Brighton. He felt no regret for his action–had not the Prince of

Wales taught the gentlemen of his kingdom that it was fashionable to desert actresses? Had he not left the "divine Perdita" to languish, after snubbing her right royally in Hyde Park?

Disdainfully the lady in the coach regarded her husband and it was evident that the ties of affection which bound these two travelers together on life's road were neither strong nor enduring. Yet they were traveling together; their way was the same; their destination–but that belongs to the future. The marquis had been relieved in his mind after a consultation with a distinguished barrister, and, moreover, was pleased at the prospect of leaving this island of fogs for the sunny shores of France. The times were exciting; the country, on the verge of proposed electoral reforms. But in France the new social system had sprung into existence and–lamentable fact!–duty towards one's country had assumed an empire superior to ancient devotion toward kings.

To stem this tide and attach himself closely to King Charles X was the marquis' ambitious purpose. For this he had espoused a party in marrying a relative of the royal princess, thus enhancing the ties that bound him to the throne, and throwing to the winds *his* Perdita whose charms had once held him in folly's chains. Did he regret the step? Has ravening aspiration any compunction; any contrite visitings of nature? What did the player expect; that he would violate precedence; overthrow the fashionable maxims of good George IV; become a slave to a tragi-comic performer and cast his high destiny to the winds? Had ever a gentleman entertained such a project? Vows? Witness the agreeable perjuries of lovers; the pleasing pastime of fond hearts! Every titled rascallion lied to his mistress; every noble blackguard professed to be a Darby for constancy and was a Jonathan Wild by instinct. If her ideals were raised so high, the worse for her; if a farce of a ceremony was regarded as tying an indissoluble knot–let her take example by the lady who thought herself the king's spouse; pish! there are ceremonies and ceremonies, and wives and wives; those of the hedge-concealed cottage and those of palace and chateau!

As the coach sped over the road, the lady by his side smiled disagreeably from time to time, and my lord, when he became aware of it, winced beneath her glance. Had she fathomed his secret? Else why that eminently superior air; that manner which said as plainly as spoken words: "Now I have learned what to do if he should play the tyrant. Now I see a way to liberty, equality, fraternity!" And beneath the baneful gleam of that look of enlightenment, my lord cursed under his breath roundly. The only imperturbable person of the party was François, the marquis' valet, whose impassive countenance was that of a stoic, apathetic to the foibles of his betters; a philosopher of the wardrobe, to whom a wig awry or a loosened buckle seemed of more moment than the derangement of the marriage tie or the disorder of conjugal affection.

Not long thereafter the player left for America, where she procured an engagement in New York City, and, so far as London was concerned, she might have found rest and retiredness in the waters of Lethe. Of her reception in the old New York Theater; the verdict of the phalanx of critics assembled in the Shakespeare box which, according to tradition, held more than two hundred souls; the gossip over confections or tea in the coffee room of the theater–it is unnecessary to dwell upon. But had not the player become a voluntary exile; had she not foregone her former life for the new; had she not found that joy sometimes begets the bitterest grief, there would have been no occasion for this chronicle.

BOOK I
ON THE CIRCUIT IN THE WILDERNESS

CHAPTER I
THE TRAVELERS' FRIEND

It was a drizzly day in the Shadengo Valley. A mist had settled down upon the old inn; lost to view was the landscape with its varied foliage. Only the immediate foreground was visible to a teamster who came down the road–the trees with dripping branches, and the inn from the eaves of which water fell to the ground with depressing monotony; the well with its pail for watering the horses and the log trough in whose limpid waters a number of speckled trout were swimming. The driver drew up his horses before the Travelers' Friend–as the place was named–and called out imperatively:

"Hullo there!"

No one appearing, he leaned over and impatiently rapped on the door with the heavy oak butt-end of his whip. Still there was no response. Again he knocked, this time louder than before, and was preparing for an even more vigorous assault upon the unhospitable entrance, when the door swung back and the landlord, a tall, gaunt individual, confronted the driver.

"Well, I heard ye," he said testily. "Are ye coming in or shall I bring it out?"

"Bring it out," was the gruff response of the disgruntled teamster.

Shortly afterwards mine host reappeared with a tankard of generous dimensions. The teamster raised it; slowly drained it to the bottom; dropped a coin into the landlord's hand; cracked his whip in a lively manner and moved on. The steam from his horses mingled with the mist and he was soon swallowed up, although the cheerful snap of his whip could yet be heard. Then that became inaudible and the boniface who had stood for a brief space in the doorway, empty tankard in hand, re-entered the house satisfied that no more transient patronage would be forthcoming at present.

Going through an outer room, called by courtesy a parlor, the landlord passed into an apartment which served as dining-room, sitting-room and bar. Here the glow of a wood fire from the well swept hearth and the aspect of the varied assortment of bottles, glasses and tankards, gave more proof of the fitness of the appellation on the creaking sign of the road-house than appeared from a superficial survey of its exterior and far from neat stable yard, or from that chilly, forbidding room, so common especially in American residences in those days, the parlor. Any doubt regarding the contents of the hospitable looking bottles was dispelled by such prominent inscriptions in gilt letters as "Whisky," "Brandy" and "Rum." To add to the effect, between the decanters were ranged glass jars of striped peppermint and winter-green candies, while a few lemons suggested pleasing possibilities of a hot sling, spiced rum flip or Tom and Jerry. The ceiling of this dining-room was blackened somewhat and the huge beams overhead gave an idea of the substantial character of the construction of the place. That fuel was plentiful, appeared in evidence in the open fireplace where were burning two great logs, while piled up against the wall were many other good-sized sections of hickory.

Seated at a respectful distance from this cheerful conflagration was a young man of perhaps five-and-twenty, whose travel-stained attire indicated he had but recently been on the road. Upon a chair near by were a riding-whip and hat, the latter spotted with mud and testifying to the rough character of the road over which he had come. He held a short pipe to his lips and blew clouds of smoke toward the fire, while upon a table, within arm's length, rested a glass of some hot mixture. But in spite of his comfortable surroundings, the expression of his face was not that of a person in harmony with the Johnsonian conclusion, "A chair in an inn is a throne of felicity." His countenance, well bronzed as a weather-tried trooper's, was harsh, gloomy, almost morose; not an unhandsome

face, but set in such a severe cast the observer involuntarily wondered what experience had indited that scroll. Tall, large of limb, muscular, as was apparent even in a restful pose, he looked an athlete of the most approved type, active and powerful.

Mine host, having found his guest taciturn, had himself become genial, and now remarked as he entered: “How do you find the punch? Is it to your liking?”

“Yes,” shortly answered the stranger, without raising his eyes from a moody regard of the fire.

“You’re from France, I guess?” continued the landlord, as he seated himself on the opposite side of the fireplace. “Been here long? Where you going?” Without waiting for an answer to his first question he exercised his time-honored privilege of demanding any and all information from wayfarers at the Travelers’ Friend.

“I say, where you going?” he repeated, turning over a log and sending a shower of sparks up the flue.

With no change of countenance the guest silently reached for his punch, swallowed a portion of it, replaced the glass on the table and resumed his smoking as though oblivious of the other’s presence. Momentarily disconcerted, the landlord devoted himself once more to the fire. After readjusting a trunk of old hickory on the great andirons and gazing absently for a moment at the huge crane supporting an iron kettle of boiling water, mine host tipped back in his chair, braced his feet against the wall, lighted a vile-smelling pipe and again returned valiantly to the attack, resolved to learn more about his guest.

“I hear things are kind of onsettled in France?” he observed diplomatically, emitting a cloud of smoke. “I see in a Syracuse paper that Louis Philippe is no longer king; that he and the queen have fled to England. Perhaps, now,”–inwardly congratulating himself on his shrewdness–“you left Paris for political reasons?”

The stranger deliberately emptied his pipe and thrust it into his pocket, while the landlord impatiently awaited the response to his pointed query. When it came, however, it was not calculated to allay the curiosity of his questioner.

“Is it your practice,” said the young man coldly, in slow but excellent English, “to bark continuously at the heels of your guests?”

“Oh, no offense meant! No offense! Hope none’ll be taken,” stammered the landlord.

Then he recovered himself and his dignity by drawing forth a huge wine-colored silk handkerchief, set with white polka-dots, and ostentatiously and vigorously using it. This ear-splitting operation having once more set him up in his own esteem, he resumed his attentions to the stranger.

“I didn’t know,” he added with an outburst of honesty, “but what you might be some nobleman in disguise.”

“A nobleman!” said the other with ill-concealed contempt. “My name is Saint-Prosper; plain Ernest Saint-Prosper. I was a soldier. Now I’m an adventurer. There you have it all in a nut-shell.”

The inn-keeper surveyed his guest’s figure with undisguised admiration.

“Well, you look like a soldier,” he remarked. “You are like one of those soldiers who came over from France to help us in the Revolution.”

This tribute being silently accepted, the landlord grew voluble as his guest continued reserved.

“We have our own troubles with lords, too, right here in New York State,” he said confidentially. “We have our land barons, descendants of the patroons and holders of thousands of acres. And we have our bolters, too, who are making a big stand against feudalism.”

Thereupon he proceeded to present the subject in all its details to the soldier; how the tenants were protesting against the enforcement of what they now deemed unjust claims and were demanding the abolition of permanent leaseholds; how they openly resisted the collection of rents and had inaugurated an aggressive anti-rent war against tyrannical landlordism. His lengthy and rambling dissertation was finally broken in upon by a rumbling on the road, as of carriage wheels drawing near, and the sound of voices. The noise sent the boniface to the window, and, looking out, he discovered

a lumbering coach, drawn by two heavy horses, which came dashing up with a great semblance of animation for a vehicle of its weight, followed by a wagon, loaded with diversified and gaudy paraphernalia.

"Some troopers, I guess," commented the landlord in a tone which indicated the coming of these guests was not entirely welcome to him. "Yes," he added, discontentedly, "they're stage-folk, sure enough."

The wagon, which contained several persons, was driven into the stable yard, where it was unloaded of "drops" and "wings," representing a street, a forest, a prison, and so on, while the stage coach, with a rattle and a jerk, and a final flourish of the driver's whip, stopped at the front door. Springing to the ground, the driver opened the door of the vehicle, and at the same time two other men, with their heads muffled against the wind and rain, leisurely descended from the top. The landlord now stood at the entrance of the inn, a sour expression on his face. Certainly, if the travelers had expected in him the traditional glowing countenance, with the apostolic injunction to "use hospitality without grudging" writ upon it, they were doomed to disappointment.

A rustle of skirts, and there emerged from the interior of the coach, first, a little, dried-up old lady whose feet were enclosed in prunella boots, with Indian embroidered moccasins for outside protection; second, a young woman who hastily made her way into the hostelry, displaying a trim pair of ankles; third, a lady resembling the second and who the landlord afterwards learned was her sister; fourth, a graceful girl above medium height, wearing one of those provoking, quilted silk hoods of the day, with cherry-colored lining, known as "Kiss-me-if-you-dare" hoods.

Then followed a dark melancholy individual, the utility man, whose waistcoat of figured worsted was much frayed and whose "tooth-pick" collar was the worse for the journey. He preceded a more natty person in a bottle-green, "shad-belly" coat, who strove to carry himself as though he were fashionably dressed, instead of wearing clothes which no longer could conceal their shabbiness. The driver, called in theatrical parlance "the old man," was a portly personage in a blue coat with velvet collar and gilt buttons, a few of which were missing; while the ruffles of his shirt were in sad plight, for instead of protruding elegantly a good three or even four inches, their glory had gone and they lay ignominiously flattened upon the bosom of the wearer. A white choker rivaled in hue the tooth-pick collar of the melancholy individual.

The tavern's stable boy immediately began to remove the trunks into the main hallway. This overgrown, husky lad evidently did not share his employer's disapproval of the guests, for he gazed in open-eyed wonder at the sisters, and then, with increasing awe, his glance strayed to the young girl. To his juvenile imagination an actress appeared in the glamour of a veritable goddess. But she had obviously that tender consideration for others which belongs to humanity, for she turned to the old man with an affectionate smile, removing from his shoulders the wet Petersham overcoat, and, placing it on a chair, regarded him with a look of filial anxiety. Yet their appearance belied the assumption of such relationship; he was hearty, florid and sturdy, of English type, while she seemed a daughter of the South, a figure more fitting for groves of orange and cypress, than for this rugged northern wilderness.

The emotion of the stable boy as he gazed at her, and the forbidding mood of the landlord were broken in upon by the tiny old lady, who, in a large voice, remarked:

"A haven at last! Are you the landlord?"

"Yes, ma'am," testily replied that person.

"I am pleased to meet you, sir," exclaimed the melancholy individual, as he extended a hand so cold and clammy that shivers ran up and down the back of the host when he took it gingerly. "We are having fine tragedy weather, sir!"

"A fire at once, landlord!" commanded the would-be beau.

"Refreshments will be in order!" exclaimed she of the trim ankles.

"And show me the best room in the house," remarked her sister.

Mine host, bewildered by this shower of requests, stared from one to the other in helpless confusion, but finally collected his wits sufficiently to usher the company into the tap-room with:

"Here you'll find a fire, but as for the best room, this gentleman"–indicating the reticent guest–"already occupies it."

The young man at the fire, thus forced prominently into notice, arose slowly.

"You are mistaken, landlord," he said curtly, hardly glancing at the players. "I no longer occupy it since these ladies have come."

"Your complaisance does credit to your good nature, sir," exclaimed the old man. "But we can not take advantage of it."

"It is too good of you," remarked the elder sister with a glance replete with more gratitude than the occasion demanded. "Really, though, we could not think of it."

"Thank you; thank you," joined in the wiry old lady, bobbing up and down like a miniature figure moved by the unseen hand of the showman. "Allow me, sir!" And she gravely tendered him a huge snuff-box of tortoise shell, which he declined; whereupon she continued:

"You do not use it? New fashions; new habits! Though whether for the better is not for me to say."

She helped herself to a liberal portion and passed the box to the portly old gentleman. Here the landlord, in a surly tone, told the stable boy to remove the gentleman's things and show the ladies to their rooms. Before going, the girl in the provoking hood–now unfastened, and freeing sundry rebellious brown curls where the moisture yet sparkled like dew–turned to the old man:

"You are coming up directly? Your stock wants changing, while your ruffles"–laughing–"are disgraceful!"

"Presently, my dear; presently!" he returned.

The members of the company mounted the broad stairway, save the driver of the coach–he of the disordered ruffles–who wiped his heavy boots on a door mat and made his way to the fire, where he stood in English fashion with his coat-tails under his arms, rubbing his hands and drying himself before the flames.

"A disagreeable time of year, sir," he observed to the soldier, who had returned to his seat before the table. "Twice on the road we nearly broke down, and once the wagon dumped our properties in the ditch. Meanwhile, to make matters worse, the ladies heaped reproaches upon these gray hairs. This, sir, to the man who was considered one of the best whips in old Devonshire county."

The other did not answer immediately, but regarded the speaker with the look of one not readily disposed to make acquaintances. His conclusions were apparently satisfactory, however, for he presently vouchsafed the remark:

"You are the manager, I presume?"

"I enjoy that honor," returned the loquacious stranger. "But my duties are manifold. As driver of the chariot, I endure the constant apprehension of wrecking my company by the wayside. As assistant carpenter, when we can not find a stage it is my task to erect one. As bill-poster and license-procurer, treasurer and stage manager, my time is not so taken up, sir, as to preclude my going on and assuming a character."

"A life of variety," observed the young man, politely if indifferently.

"Yes; full of ups and downs, as the driver of the property wagon said when we entered this hilly district," replied the manager, with the contentment of a man who has found a snug haven after a hard ride in a comparatively unbroken country. "Affluence we may know, but poverty is apt to be our companion."

To this the other deemed no response necessary and a silence fell between them, broken only by the simmering water in the iron kettle, the sputtering of the sap in the burning logs and the creaking without of the long balancing pole that suspended the moss-covered bucket. The wind sighed in the

chimney and the wooing flames sprang to meet it, while the heart of the fire glowed in a mass of coals between the andirons.

The old gentleman before the blaze began to outrival the kettle in steaming; from his coat-tails a thin veil of mist ascended, his face beaming through the vapor with benign felicity. Then he turned and toasted the other side and the kettle reigned supreme until he thawed once more and the clouds ascended, surrounding him like Jupiter on the celestial mount. At that the kettle hummed more angrily and the old gentleman's face beamed with satisfaction.

"A snug company, sir," he said, finally, glowing upon the impassive face before him, "like a tight ship, can weather a little bad weather. Perhaps you noticed our troupe? The old lady is Mrs. Adams. She is nearly seventy, but can dance a horn-pipe or a reel with the best of them. The two sisters are Kate and Susan Duran, both coquettes of the first water. Our juvenile man is a young Irishman who thinks much of his dress and little of the cultivation of mind and manners. Then," added the old man tenderly, "there is my Constance."

He paused abruptly. "Landlord, a pot of ale. My throat is hoarse from the mist. Fancy being for hours on a road not knowing where you are! Your good-fortune, sir!" Lifting the mug. "More than once we lurched like a cockle-shell."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the appearance of the juvenile man.

"Mr. Barnes, the ladies desire your company immediately."

The manager hurriedly left the room and the newcomer regarded his retiring figure with a twinkle in his eye. Then he took a turn around the room in stilted fashion–like one who "carried about with him his pits, boxes and galleries"–and observed:

"Faith, Mr. Barnes' couch is not a bed of roses. It is better to have the fair ones dangling after you, than to be running at their every beck and call."

Here he twisted his mustache upward.

"A woman is a strange creature," he resumed. "If she calls and you come once, your legs will be busy for the rest of your natural days."

He seemed about to continue his observations along this philosophical line, when the manager appeared in much perturbation, approaching the landlord, who, at the same time, had entered the room from the kitchen.

"The ladies insist that their sheets are damp," began the manager in his most plausible manner.

A dangerous light appeared in the other's eyes.

"It's the weather, you understand. Not your fault; bless you, no!"

The landlord's face became a shade less acrimonious.

"Now, if there was a fire in the room–it is such a comfortable, cheery room–"

"Sandy!" interrupted the host, calling to the long-armed, red-handed stable boy, who thrust a shock of hair through the kitchen door. "Build a fire upstairs."

Mr. Barnes heaved a sigh of relief and drawing a chair to the blaze prepared once more to enjoy a well-earned rest.

By this time the shadows had begun to lengthen in the room as the first traces of early twilight filled the valley. The gurgling still continued down the water pipe; the old sign before the front door moaned monotonously. An occasional gust of wind, which mysteriously penetrated the mist without sweeping it aside, rattled the windows and waved wildly in mid-air a venturesome rose which had clambered to the second story of the old inn. The barn-yard appeared even more dismal because of the coming darkness and the hens presented a pathetic picture of discomfort as they tucked their heads under their wet feathers for the night, while his lordship, the rooster, was but a sorry figure upon his high perch, with the moisture regularly and unceasingly dripping through the roof of the hen-house upon his unprotected back.

An aroma from the kitchen which penetrated the room seemed especially grateful to the manager who smiled with satisfaction as he conjured up visions of the forthcoming repast. By his

Falstaffian girth, he appeared a man not averse to good living, nor one to deny himself plentiful libations of American home-brewed ale.

"Next to actual dining," observed this past-master in the art, "are the anticipations of the table. The pleasure consists in speculation regarding this or that aroma, in classifying the viands and separating this combination of culinary odors into courses of which you will in due time partake. Alas for the poor stroller when the tavern ceases to be! Already it is almost extinct on account of the Erie Canal. Only a short time ago this room would have been crowded with teamsters of the broad-tired Pennsylvania wagons, drawn by six or eight horses."

Again the appetizing aroma from the kitchen turned the current of his reflections into its original channel, for he concluded with: "An excellent dinner is in progress, if my diagnosis of these penetrating fragrances be correct."

And it was soon demonstrated that the manager's discernment was not in error. There was not only abundance but quality, and the landlord's daughter waited on the guests, thereby subjecting herself to the very open advances of the Celtic Adonis. The large table was laden with heavy crockery, old-fashioned and quaint; an enormous rotary castor occupied the center of the table, while the forks and spoons were–an unusual circumstance!–of silver.

When the company had seated themselves around the board the waitress brought in a sucking pig, done to a turn, well stuffed, and with an apple in its mouth. The manager heaved a sigh.

"The lovely little monster," said Kate, admiringly.

"Monster!" cried Susan. "Say cherub!"

"So young and tender for such a fate!" exclaimed Hawkes, the melancholy individual, with knife and fork held in mid-air.

"But worthy of the bearer of the dish!" remarked Adonis, so pointedly that the landlord's daughter, overwhelmed with confusion, nearly dropped the platter, miniature porker and all. Whereupon Kate cast an angry glance at the offender whom "she could not abide," yet regarded in a certain proprietary way, and Adonis henceforth became less open in his advances.

Those other aromas which the manager had mentally classified took form and substance and were arranged in tempting variety around the appetizing and well-browned suckling. There were boiled and baked hams, speckled with cloves, plates of doughnuts and pound cake, beet root and apple sauce. Before each of the guests stood a foaming mug of home-brewed ale that carried with it a palpable taste of the hops.

"There is nothing of the stage repast about this," commented the manager.

To which Kate, having often partaken of the conventional banquet of the theater, waved her hand in a serio-comic manner toward the *pièce de résistance* and observed:

"Suppose, now, by some necromancy our young and tender friend here on the platter should be changed to a cleverly fashioned block of wood, painted in imitation of a roasted porker, with a wooden apple in his mouth?"

The manager, poising the carving knife, replied:

"Your suggestion is startling. We will obviate the possibility of any such transformation."

And he cut the "ambrosian fat and lean" with a firm hand, eying the suckling steadfastly the while as if to preclude any exhibition of Hindoo mysticism, while the buxom lass, the daughter of the boniface, with round arms bared, bore sundry other dishes from place to place until the plates were heaped with an assortment of viands.

"Well, my dear, how are you getting on?" said the manager to the young actress, Constance, as he helped himself to the crackle. "Have you everything you want?"

She nodded brightly, and the stranger who was seated some distance from her glanced up; his gaze rested on her for a moment and then returned in cold contemplation to the fare set before him.

Yet was she worthy of more than passing scrutiny. The gleam of the lamp fell upon her well-turned figure and the glistening of her eyes could be seen in the shadow that rested on her brow

beneath the crown of hair. She wore a dark lavender dress, striped with silk, a small "jacquette," after the style of the day, the sleeves being finished with lace and the skirt full and flowing. Her heavy brown tresses were arranged in a coiffure in the fashion then prevailing, a portion of the hair falling in curls on the neck, the remainder brought forward in plaits and fastened at the top of the forehead with a simple pearl ornament.

If the young girl felt any interest in the presence of the taciturn guest she concealed it, scarcely looking at him and joining but rarely in the conversation. Susan, on the other hand, resorted to sundry coquetries.

"I fear, sir, that you find our poor company intrusive, since we have forced you to become one of us?" she said, toying with her fork, and thereby displaying a white and shapely hand.

His impassive blue eyes met her sparkling ones.

"I am honored in being admitted to your fellowship," he returned perfunctorily.

"Only poor players, sir!" exclaimed Hawkes deprecatingly, with the regal gesture a stage monarch might use in setting forth the perplexities of royal pre-eminence.

"The landlord does not seem to share your opinion?" continued Susan, looking once more at the stranger.

"As a host he believes in brave deeds, not fair words," said Kate, indicating the remains of the repast.

"Peace to his bones!" exclaimed the manager, extending a hand over the remnants of the suckling.

Here the dark-haired girl arose, the dinner being concluded. There was none of his usual brusqueness of manner, as the manager, leaning back in his chair and taking her hand, said:

"You are going to retire, my dear? That is right. We have had a hard day's traveling."

She bent her head, and her lips pressed softly the old man's cheek, after which she turned from the rest of the company with a grave bow. But as she passed through the doorway her flowing gown caught upon a nail in the wall. Pre-occupied though he seemed, her low exclamation did not escape the ear of the stranger, and, quitting his place, he knelt at her feet, and she, with half turned head and figure gracefully poised, looked down upon him.

With awkward fingers, he released the dress, and she bowed her acknowledgment, which he returned with formal deference. Then she passed on and he raised his head, his glance following her through the bleak-looking hall, up the broad, ill-lighted staircase, into the mysterious shadows which prevailed above.

Shortly afterward the tired company dispersed, and the soldier also sought his room. There he found the landlord's daughter before him with the warming-pan. She had spread open the sheets of his bed and was applying the old-fashioned contrivance for the prevention of rheumatism, but it was evident her mind was not on this commendable housewifely task, for she sighed softly and then observed:

"It must be lovely to be an actress!"

Dreamily she patted the pillows, until they were round and smooth, and absently adjusted the bed, until there was not a wrinkle in the snow-white counterpane, after which, like a good private in domestic service, she shouldered the warming pan with its long handle, murmured "good-night" and departed, not to dream of milking, churning or cheese-making, but of a balcony and of taking poison in a tomb.

Absently the stranger gazed at the books on the table: "Nutting's Grammar," "Adams' Arithmetic," "David's Tears" and the "New England Primer and Catechism"–all useful books undoubtedly, but not calculated long to engross the attention of the traveler. Turning from these prosaic volumes, the occupant of the chamber drew aside the curtain of the window and looked out.

Now the mists were swept away; the stars were shining and the gurgling had grown fainter in the pipes that descended from the roof to the ground. Not far was the dark fringe which marked the

forest and the liquid note of a whippoorwill arose out of the solitary depths, a melancholy tone in the stillness of the night. The little owl, too, was heard, his note now sounding like the filing of a saw and again changing in character to the tinkling of a bell. A dog howled for a moment in the barn-yard, and then, apparently satisfied with having given this evidence of watchfulness, re-entered his house of one room and curled himself upon the straw in his parlor, after which nothing more was heard from him.

Drawing the curtains of his own couch, a large, four-posted affair, sleep soon overpowered the stranger; but sleep, broken and fitful! Nor did he dream only of France and of kings running away, of American land barons and of “bolters.” More intrusive than these, the faces of the strollers crept in and disturbed his slumbers, not least among which were the features of the dark-eyed girl whose gown had caught as she passed through the doorway.

CHAPTER II
A NEW ARRIVAL

The crowing of the cock awakened the French traveler, and, going to the window, he saw that daylight had thrown its first shafts upon the unromantic barn-yard scene, while in the east above the hill-tops spread the early flush of morning. The watch-dog had left his one-roomed cottage and was promenading before it in stately fashion with all the pomp of a satisfied land-holder, his great undershot jaw and the extraordinary outward curve of his legs proclaiming an untarnished pedigree. The hens were happily engaged in scratching the earth for their breakfast; the rooster, no longer crestfallen, was strutting in the sunshine, while next to the barn several grunting, squealing pigs struggled for supremacy in the trough. From the cow-shed came an occasional low and soon a slip-shod maid, yawning mightily, appeared, pail in hand, and moved across the yard to her early morning task.

Descending the stairs and making his way to the barn, the soldier called to Sandy, the stable boy, who was performing his ablutions by passing wet fingers through a shock of red hair, to saddle his horse. The sleepy lad led forth a large but shapely animal, and soon the stranger was galloping across the country, away from the village, now down a gentle declivity, with the virgin forest on either side, then through a tract of land where was apparent the husbandry of the people.

After a brisk pace for some miles, he reined in his horse, and, leisurely riding in a circuit, returned on the road that crossed the farming country back of the tavern. Around him lay fields of rye and buckwheat sweet with the odor of the bee-hive; Indian corn, whose silken tassels waved as high as those of Frederick's grenadiers', and yellow pumpkins nestling to the ground like gluttons that had partaken too abundantly of mother earth's nourishment. Intermingling with these great oblong and ovoid gourds, squashes, shaped like turbans and many-cornered hats, appeared in fantastic profusion.

The rider was rapidly approaching the inn, when a sudden turn in the highway, as the road swept around a wind-break of willows, brought him upon a young woman who was walking slowly in the same direction. So fast was the pace of his horse, and so unexpected the meeting, she was almost under the trampling feet before he saw her. Taken by surprise, she stood as if transfixed, when, with a quick, decisive effort, the rider swerved his animal, and, of necessity, rode full tilt at the fence and willows. She felt the rush of air; saw the powerful animal lift itself, clear the rail-fence and crash through the bulwark of branches. She gazed at the wind-break; a little to the right, or the left, where the heavy boughs were thickly interlaced, and the rider's expedient had proved serious for himself, but chance–he had no time for choice–had directed him to a vulnerable point of leaves and twigs. Before she had fairly recovered herself he reappeared at an opening on the other side of the willow-screen, and, after removing a number of rails, led his horse back to the road.

With quivering nostrils, the animal appeared possessed of unquenchable spirit, but his master's bearing was less assured as he approached, with an expression of mingled anxiety and concern on his face, the young girl whom the manager had addressed as Constance.

"I beg your pardon for having alarmed you!" he said. "It was careless, inexcusable!"

"It was a little startling," she admitted, with a faint smile.

"Only a little!" he broke in gravely. "If I had not seen you just when I did–"

"You would not have turned your horse–at such a risk to yourself!" she added.

"Risk to myself! From what?" A whimsical light encroached on the set look in his blue eyes. "Jumping a rail fence? But you have not yet said you have pardoned me?"

The smile brightened. "Oh, I think you deserve that."

"I am not so sure," he returned, glancing down at her.

Slanting between the lower branches of the trees the sunshine touched the young girl's hair in flickering spots and crept down her dress like caressing hands of light, until her figure, passing

into a solid shadow, left these glimmerings prone upon the dusty road behind her. The “brides,” or strings of her little muslin cap, flaunted in the breeze and a shawl of China crape fluttered from her shoulders. So much of her dusky hair as defied concealment contrasted strongly with the calm translucent pallor of her face. The eyes, alone, belittled the tranquillity of countenance; against the rare repose of features, they were the more eloquent, shining beneath brows, delicately defined but strongly marked, and shaded by long upturned lashes, deep in tone as a sloe.

“You are an early riser,” he resumed.

“Not always,” she replied. “But after yesterday it seemed so bright outdoors and the country so lovely!”

His gaze, following hers, traversed one of the hollows. Below yet rested deep shadows, but upon the hillside a glory celestial enlivened and animated the surrounding scene. Scattered houses, constituting the little hamlet, lay in the partial shade of the swelling land, the smoke, with its odor of burning pine, rising lazily on the languid air. In the neighboring field a farm hand was breaking up the ground with an old-fashioned, pug-nosed “dirt-rooter;” soil as rich as that of Egypt, or the land, Gerar, where Isaac reaped an hundred fold and every Israelite sat under the shadow of his own vine.

Pausing, the husbandman leaned on the handle of his plow and deliberately surveyed the couple on the road. Having at the same time satisfied his curiosity and rested his arms, he grasped the handles once more and the horses pulled and tugged at the primitive implement.

While the soldier and the young girl were thus occupied in surveying the valley and the adjacent mounds and hummocks, the horse, considering doubtlessly that there had been enough inaction, tapped the ground with rebellious energy and tossed his head in mutiny against such procrastination.

“Your horse wants to go on,” she said, observing this equine by-play.

“He usually does,” replied the rider. “Perhaps, though, I am interrupting you? I see you have a play in your hand.”

“I was looking over a part–but I know it very well,” she added, moving slowly from the border of willows. Leading his horse, he followed.

His features, stern and obdurate in repose, relaxed in severity, while the deep-set blue eyes grew less searching and guarded. This alleviation became him well, a tide of youth softening his expression as a wave smoothes the sands.

“What is the part?”

“Juliana, in ‘The Honeymoon’! It is one of our stock pieces.”

“And you like it?”

“Oh, yes.” Lingering where a bit of sward was set with field flowers.

“And who plays the duke?” he continued.

“Mr. O’Flariaty,” she answered, a suggestion of amusement in her glance. Beneath the shading of straight, black brows, her eyes were deceptively dark, until scrutinized closely, they resolved themselves into a clear gray.

“Ah,” he said, recalling Adonis, O’Flariaty’s, appearance, and, as he spoke, a smile of singular sweetness lightened his face. “A Spanish grandee with a touch of the brogue! But I must not decry your noble lord!” he added.

“No lord of mine!” she replied gaily. “My lord must have a velvet robe, not frayed, and a sword not tin, and its most sanguinary purpose must not be to get between his legs and trip him up! Of course, when we act in barns–”

“In barns!”

“Oh, yes, when we can find them to act in!”

She glanced at him half-mockingly.

“I suppose you think of a barn as only a place for a horse.”

The sound of carriage wheels interrupted his reply, and, looking in the direction from whence it came, they observed a coach doubling the curve before the willows and approaching at a rapid pace.

It was a handsome and imposing equipage, with dark crimson body and wheels, preserving much of the grace of ancient outline with the utility of modern springs.

As they drew aside to permit it to pass the features of its occupant were seen, who, perceiving the young girl on the road–the shawl, half-fallen from her shoulder revealing the plastic grace of an erect figure–gazed at her with surprise, then thrust his head from the window and bowed with smiling, if somewhat exaggerated, politeness. The next moment carriage and traveler vanished down the road in a cloud of dust, but an alert observer might have noticed an eye at the rear port-hole, as though the person within was supplementing his brief observation from the side with a longer, if diminishing, view from behind.

The countenance of the young girl's companion retrograded from its new-found favor to a more inexorable cast.

"A friend of yours?" he said, briefly.

"I never saw him before," she answered with flashing eyes. "Perhaps he is the lord of the manor and thought I was one of his subjects."

"There are lords in this country, then?"

"Lords or patroons, they are called," she replied, her face still flushed.

At this moment, across the meadows, beyond the fence of stumps–poor remains of primeval monarchs!–a woman appeared at the back door of the inn with a tin horn upon which she blew vigorously, the harsh blasts echoing over hill and valley. The startled swallows and martins arose from the eaves and fluttered above the roof. The farm hand at the plow released the handle, and the slip-shod maid appeared in the door of the cow-shed, spry and nimble enough at meal time.

From the window of her room Susan saw them returning and looked surprised as well as a bit annoyed. Truth to tell, Mistress Susan, with her capacity for admiring and being admired, had conceived a momentary interest in the stranger, a fancy as light as it was ephemeral. That touch of melancholy when his face was in repose inspired a transitory desire for investigation in this past-mistress of emotional analysis. But the arrival of the coach which had passed the couple soon diverted Susan's thoughts to a new channel.

The equipage drew up, and a young man, dressed in a style novel in that locality, sprang out. He wore a silk hat with scarcely any brim, trousers extremely wide at the ankle, a waistcoat of the dimensions of 1745, and large watch ribbons, sustaining ponderous bunches of seals.

The gallant fop touched the narrow brim of his hat to Kate, who was peeping from one window, and waved a kiss to Susan, who was surreptitiously glancing from another, whereupon both being detected, drew back hastily. Overwhelmed by the appearance of a guest of such manifest distinction, the landlord bowed obsequiously as the other entered the tavern with a supercilious nod.

To Mistress Susan this incident was exciting while it lasted, but when the dandy had disappeared her attention was again attracted to Constance and Saint-Prosper, who slowly approached. He paused with his horse before the front door and she stood a moment near the little porch, on either side of which grew sweet-williams, four-o'clocks and larkspur. But the few conventional words were scanty crumbs for the fair eavesdropper above, the young girl soon entering the house and the soldier leading his horse in the direction of the stable. As the latter disappeared around the corner of the tavern, Susan left the window and turned to the mirror.

"La!" she said, holding a mass of blond hair in one hand and deftly coiling it upon her little head, "I believe she got up early to meet him." But Kate only yawned lazily.

Retracing his steps from the barn, the soldier crossed the back-yard, where already on the clothes' line evidences of early matutinal industry, a pair of blue over-alls, with sundry white and red stockings, were dancing in the breeze. First the over-alls performed wildly, then the white stockings responded with vim, while the red ones outdid themselves by their shocking abandonment, vaunting skyward as though impelled by the phantom limbs of some Parisian *danseuse*.

Making his way by this dizzy saturnalia and avoiding the pranks of animated hosiery and the more ponderous frolics of over-alls, sheets and tablecloths, Saint-Prosper entered the kitchen. Here the farm hand and maid of all work were eating, and the landlord's rotund and energetic wife was bustling before the fireplace. An old iron crane, with various sized pothooks and links of chain, swung from the jambs at the will of the housewife. Boneset, wormwood and catnip had their places on the wall, together with ears of corn and strings of dried apples.

Bustling and active, with arms bared to the elbow and white with flour, the spouse of mine host realized the scriptural injunction: "She looketh well to the ways of her household." Deftly she spread the dough in the baking pan; smoothly leveled it with her palm; with nice mathematical precision distributed bits of apple on top in parallel rows; lightly sprinkled it with sugar, and, lo and behold, was fashioned an honest, wholesome, Dutch apple cake, ready for the baking!

In the tap-room the soldier encountered the newcomer, seated not far from the fire as though his blood flowed sluggishly after his long ride in the chill morning air. Upon the table lay his hat, and he was playing with the seals on his watch ribbon, his legs indolently stretched out straight before him. Occasionally he coughed when the smoke, exuding from the damp wood, was not entirely expelled up the chimney, but curled around the top of the fireplace and diffused itself into the atmosphere. Well-built, although somewhat slender of figure, this latest arrival had a complexion of tawny brown, a living russet, as warm and glowing as the most vivid of Vandyke pigments.

He raised his eyes slowly as the soldier entered and surveyed him deliberately. From a scrutiny of mere physical attributes he passed on to the more important details of clothes, noting that his sack coat was properly loose at the waist and that the buttons were sufficiently large to pass muster, but also detecting that the trousers lacked breadth at the ankles and that the hat had a high crown and a broad brim, from which he complacently concluded the other was somewhat behind the shifting changes of fashion.

"Curse me, if this isn't a beastly fire!" he exclaimed, stretching himself still more, yawning and passing a hand through his black hair. "Hang them, they might as well shut up their guests in the smoke-house with the bacons and hams! I feel as cured as a side of pig, ready to be hung to a dirty rafter."

With which he pulled himself together, went to the window, raised it and placed a stick under the frame.

"They tell me there's a theatrical troupe here," he resumed, returning to his chair and relapsing into its depths. "Perhaps you are one of them?"

"I have not that honor."

"Honor!" repeated the new arrival with a laugh. "That's good! That was one of them on the road with you, I'll be bound. You have good taste! Heigho!" he yawned again. "I'm anchored here awhile on account of a lame horse. Perhaps though"–brightening–"it may not be so bad after all. These players promise some diversion." At that moment his face wore an expression of airy, jocund assurance which faded to visible annoyance as he continued: "Where can that landlord be? He placed me in this kennel, vanished, and left me to my fate. Ah, here he is at last!" As the host approached, respectfully inquiring:

"Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"More?" exclaimed this latest guest, ironically. "Well, better late than never! See that my servant has help with the trunks."

"Very well, sir; I'll have Sandy look after them. You are going to stay then?" Shifting several bottles on the bar with apparent industry.

"How can I tell?" returned the newcomer lightly. "Fate is a Sphynx, and I am not Œdipus to answer her questions!"

The landlord looked startled, paused in his feigned employment, but slowly recovering himself, began to dust a jar of peppermint candy.

"How far is it to Meadtown?" continued the guest.

"Forty odd miles! Perhaps you are seeking the old patroon manor there? They say the heir is expected any day"–gazing fixedly at the young man–"at least, the anti-renters have received information he is coming and are preparing–"

The sprightly guest threw up his hands.

"The trunks! the trunks!" he exclaimed in accents of despair. "Look at the disorder of my attire! The pride of these ruffles leveled by the dew; my wristbands in disarray; the odor of the road pervading my person! The trunks, I pray you!"

"Yes, sir; at once, sir! But first let me introduce you to Mr. Saint-Prosper, of Paris, France. Make yourselves at home, gentlemen!"

With which the speaker hurriedly vanished and soon the bumping and thumping in the hall gave cheering assurance of instructions fulfilled.

"That porter is a prince among his kind," observed the guest satirically, wincing as an unusual bang overhead shook the ceiling. "But I'll warrant my man won't have to open my luggage after he gets through."

Then as quiet followed the racket above–"So you're from Paris, France?" he asked half-quizzically. "Well, it's a pleasure to meet somebody from somewhere. As I, too, have lived–not in vain!–in Paris, France, we may have mutual friends?"

"It is unlikely," said the soldier, who meanwhile had drawn off his riding gloves, placed them on the mantel, and stood facing the fire, with his back to the other guest. As he spoke he turned deliberately and bent his penetrating glance on his questioner.

"Really? Allow me to be skeptical, as I have considerable acquaintance there. In the army there's that fire-eating conqueror of the ladies, Gen–"

"My rank was not so important," interrupted the other, "that I numbered commanders among my personal friends."

"As you please," said the last guest carelessly. "I had thought to exchange a little gossip with you, but–*n'importe*! In my own veins flows some of the blood of your country."

For the time his light manner forsook him.

"Her tumults have, in a measure, been mine," he continued. "Now she is without a king, I am well-nigh without a mother-land. True; I was not born there–but it is the nurse the child turns to. Paris was my *bonne*– a merry abigail! Alas, her vicious brood have turned on her and cast her ribbons in the mire! Untroubled by her own brats, she could extend her estates to the Eldorado of the southwestern seas." He had arisen and, with hands behind his back, was striding to and fro. Coming suddenly to a pause, he asked abruptly:

"Do you know the Abbé Moneau?"

At the mention of that one-time subtle confidant of the deposed king, now the patron of republicanism, Saint-Prosper once more regarded his companion attentively.

"By reputation, certainly," he answered, slowly.

"He was my tutor and is now my frequent correspondent. Not a bad sort of mentor, either!" The new arrival paused and smiled reflectively. "Only recently I received a letter from him, with private details of the flight of the king and vague intimations of a scandal in the army, lately come to light."

His listener half-started from his seat and had the speaker not been more absorbed in his own easy flow of conversation than in the attitude of the other, he would have noticed that quick change of manner. Not perceiving it, however, he resumed irrelevantly:

"You see I am a sociable animal. After being cramped in that miserable coach for hours, it is a relief to loosen one's tongue as well as one's legs. Even this smoky hovel suggests good-fellowship and jollity beyond a dish of tea. Will you not join me in a bottle of wine? I carry some choice brands to obviate the necessity of drinking the home-brewed concoctions of the inn-keepers of this district."

"Thank you," said the soldier, at the same time rising from his chair. "I have no inclination so early in the day."

"Early?" queried the newcomer. "A half-pint of Chateau Cheval Blanc or Cru du Chevalier, high and vinous, paves a possible way for Brother Jonathan's *déjeuner*– fried pork, potatoes and chicory!" And turning to his servant who had meanwhile entered, he addressed a few words to him, and, as the door closed on the soldier, exclaimed with a shrug of the shoulders:

"An unsociable fellow! I wonder what he is doing here."

CHAPTER III
AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE VENTURE

Pancakes, grits, home-made sausage, and, before each guest, an egg that had been proudly heralded by the clucking hen but a few hours before–truly a bountiful breakfast, discrediting the latest guest's anticipations! The manager, in high spirits, mercurial as the weather, came down from his room, a bundle of posters under his arm, boisterously greeting Saint-Prosper, whom he encountered in the hall:

"Read the bill! 'That incomparable comedy, The Honeymoon, by a peerless company.' How does that sound?"

"Attractive, certainly," said the other.

"Do you think it strong enough? How would 'unparagoned' do?"

"It would be too provincial, my dear; too provincial!" interrupted the querulous voice of the old lady.

"Very well, Madam!" the manager replied quickly. "You shall be 'peerless' if you wish. Every fence shall proclaim it; every post become loquacious with it."

"I was going to the village myself," said the soldier, "and will join you, if you don't mind?" he added suddenly.

"Mind? Not a bit. Come along, and you shall learn of the duties of manager, bill-poster, press-agent and license-procurer."

An hour or so later found the two walking down the road at a brisk pace, soon leaving the tavern behind them and beginning to descend a hill that commanded a view to eastward.

"How do you advertise your performances?" asked the younger man, opening the conversation.

"By posters, written announcements in the taverns, or a notice in the country paper, if we happen along just before it goes to press," answered Barnes. "In the old times we had the boy and the bell."

"The boy and the bell?"

"Yes," assented Barnes, a retrospective smile overspreading his good-natured face; "when I was a lad in Devonshire the manager announced the performance in the town market-place. I rang a cow-bell to attract attention and he talked to the people: Ding-a-ling!–'Good people, to-night will be given "Love in a Wood";' ding-a-long!–'to-morrow night, "The Beaux' Strategem"';' ding!–'Wednesday, "The Provoked Wife";' ling!–'Thursday, "The Way of the World."' So I made my début in a noisy part and have since played no rôle more effectively than that of the small boy with the big bell. Incidentally, I had to clean the lamps and fetch small beer to the leading lady, which duties were perfunctorily performed. My art, however, I threw into the bell," concluded the manager with a laugh.

"Do you find many theaters hereabouts?" asked the other, thoughtfully.

Barnes shook his head. "No; although there are plenty of them upon the Atlantic and Southern circuits. Still we can usually rent a hall, erect a stage and construct tiers of seats. Even a barn at a pinch makes an acceptable temple of art. But our principal difficulty is procuring licenses to perform."

"You have to get permission to play?"

"That we do!" sighed the manager. "From obdurate trustees in villages and stubborn supervisors or justices of the peace in the hamlets."

"But their reason for this opposition?" asked his companion.

They were now entering the little hamlet, exchanging the grassy path for a sidewalk of planks laid lengthwise, and the peace of nature for such signs of civilization as a troop of geese, noisily promenading across the thoroughfare, and a peacock–in its pride of pomp as a favored bird of old King Solomon–crying from the top of the shed and proudly displaying its gorgeous train. Barnes wiped the perspiration from his brow, as he answered:

"Well, a temperance and anti-theatrical agitation has preceded us in the Shadengo Valley, a movement originated in Baltimore by seven men who had been drunkards and are now lecturing throughout the country. This is known as the 'Washington' movement, and among the most formidable leaders of the crusade is an old actor, John B. Gough. But here we are at the supervisor's office. I'll run in and get the license, if you'll wait a moment."

Saint-Prosper assented, and Barnes disappeared through the door of a one-story wooden building which boasted little in its architectural appearance and whose principal decorations consisted of a small window-garden containing faded geraniums, and a sign with sundry inverted letters. The neighborhood of this far from imposing structure was a rendezvous for many of the young men of the place who had much leisure, and, to judge from the sidewalk, an ample supply of Lone Jack or some other equally popular plug tobacco. As Saint-Prosper surveyed his surroundings, the Lone Jack, or other delectable brand, was unceremoniously passed from mouth to mouth with immediate and surprising results so far as the sidewalk was concerned. Regarding these village yokels with some curiosity, the soldier saw in them a possible type of the audiences to which the strollers must appeal for favor. To such hobnails must the fair Rosalind say: "I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me." And the churls would applaud with their cowhide boots, devour her with eager eyes and–at this point the soldier found himself unconsciously frowning at his village neighbors until, with an impatient laugh, he recalled his wandering fancies. What was it to him whether the players appeared in city or hamlet? Why should he concern himself in possible conjectures on the fortunes of these strollers? Moreover–

Here Barnes reappeared with dejection in his manner, and, treading his way absent-mindedly past the Lone Jack contingent with no word of explanation to his companion, began to retrace his steps toward the hostelry on the hill.

"Going back so soon?" asked the young man in surprise.

"There is nothing to be done here! The temperance lecturer has just gone; the people are set against plays and players. The supervisor refuses the license."

With which the manager relapsed into silence, rueful and melancholy. Their road ran steadily upward from the sleepy valley, skirting a wood where the luxuriance of the overhanging foliage and the bright autumnal tint of the leaves were like a scene of a spectacular play. Out of breath from the steepness of the ascent, and, with his hand pressed to his side, Barnes suddenly called a halt, seated himself on a stump, his face somewhat drawn, and spoke for the first time since he left the hamlet.

"Let's rest a moment. Something catches me occasionally here," tapping his heart. "Ah, that's better! The pain has left. No; it's nothing. The machinery is getting old, that's all! Let me see–Ah, yes!" And he drew a cigar from his pocket. "Perhaps there lies a crumb of comfort in the weed!"

The manager smoked contemplatively, like a man pushed to the verge of disaster, weighing the slender chances of mending his broken fortunes. But as he pondered his face gradually lightened with a faint glimmer of satisfaction. His mind, seeking for a straw, caught at a possible way out of this labyrinth of difficulties and in a moment he had straightened up, puffing veritable optimistic wreaths. He arose buoyantly; before he reached the inn the crumb of comfort had become a loaf of assurance.

At the tavern the manager immediately sought mine host, stating his desire to give a number of free performances in the dining-room of the hotel. The landlord demurred stoutly; he was an inn-keeper, not the proprietor of a play-house. Were not tavern and theater inseparable, retorted Barnes? The country host had always been a patron of the histrionic art. Beneath his windows the masque and interlude were born. The mystery, harlequinade and *divertissement* found shelter in a pot-house.

In a word, so indefatigably did he ply arguments, appealing alike to clemency and cupidity–the custom following such a course–that the landlord at length reluctantly consented, and soon after the dining-room was transformed into a temple of art; stinted, it is true, for flats, drops, flies and screens, but at least more tenable than the roofless theaters of other days, when a downpour drenched the players and washed out the public, causing rainy tears to drip from Ophelia's nose and rivulets

of rouge to trickle down my Lady Slipaway's marble neck and shoulders. In this labor of converting the dining-room into an auditory, they found an attentive observer in the landlord's daughter who left her pans, plates and platters to watch these preparations with round-eyed admiration. To her that temporary stage was surrounded by glamour and romance; a world remote from cook, scullion and maid of all work, and peopled with well-born dames, courtly ladies and exalted princesses.

Possibly interested in what seemed an incomprehensible venture–for how could the manager's coffers be replenished by free performances?–Saint-Prosper that afternoon reminded Barnes he had returned from the village without fulfilling his errand.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Barnes, his face wrinkling in perplexity. "What have I been thinking about? I don't see how I can go now. Hawkes or O'Flariaty can't be spared, what with lamps to polish and costumes to get in order! Hum!" he mused dubiously.

"If I can be of any use, command me," said the soldier, unexpectedly.

"You!"–exclaimed the manager. "I could not think–"

"Oh, it's a notable occupation," said the other with a satirical smile. "Was it not the bill-posters who caused the downfall of the French dynasty?" he added.

"In that case," laughed Barnes, with a sigh of relief, "go ahead and spread the inflammable dodgers! Paste them everywhere, except on the tombstones in the graveyard."

Conspicuously before the postoffice, grocery store, on the town pump and the fence of the village church, some time later, the soldier accordingly nailed the posters, followed by an inquisitive group, who read the following announcement: "Tuesday, 'The Honeymoon'; Wednesday, 'The School for Scandal'; Thursday, 'The Stranger,' with diverting specialties; Friday, 'Romeo and Juliet'; Saturday, 'Hamlet,' with a Jig by Kate Duran. At the Travelers' Friend. Entrance Free."

"They're going to play after all," commented the blacksmith's wife.

"I don't see much harm in 'Hamlet,'" said the supervisor's yokemate. "It certainly ain't frivolous."

"Let's go to 'The Honeymoon'?" suggested an amorous carl to his slip-slop Sal.

"Go 'long!" she retorted with barn-yard bashfulness.

"Did you ever see 'The School for Scandal'?" asked the smithy's good wife.

"Once," confessed the town official's faded consort, her worn face lighting dreamily. "It was on our wedding trip to New York. Silas warn't so strict then."

Amid chit-chat, so diverting, Saint-Prosper finished "posting" the town. It had been late in the afternoon before he had altered the posters and set out on his paradoxical mission; the sun was declining when he returned homeward. Pausing at a cross-road, he selected a tree for one of his remaining announcements. It was already adorned with a dodger, citing the escape of a negro slave and offering a reward for his apprehension; not an uncommon document in the North in those days.

As the traveler read the bill his expression became clouded, cheerless. Around him the fallen leaves gave forth a pleasant fragrance; caught in the currents of the air, they danced in a circle and then broke away, hurrying helter-skelter in all directions.

"Poor devil!" he muttered. "A fugitive–in hiding–"

And he nailed one of his own bills over the dodger. As he stood there reflectively the lights began to twinkle in the village below like stars winking upwards; the ascending smoke from a chimney seemed a film of lace drawn slowly through the air; from the village forge came a brighter glow as the sparks danced from the hammers on the anvils.

Shaking the reins on his horse's neck, the soldier continued his way, while the sun, out of its city of clouds, sent beams like a searchlight to the church spire; the fields, marked by the plow; the gaunt stumps in a clearing, displaying their giant sinews. Then the resplendent rays vanished, the battlements crumbled away and night, with its army of shadows, invaded the earth. As Saint-Prosper approached the tavern, set prominently on the brow of the hill, all was solemnly restful save the sign which now creaked in doleful doldrums and again complained wildly as the wind struck it

a vigorous blow. The windows were bright from the fireplace and lamp; above the door the light streamed through the open transom upon the swaying sign and the fluttering leaves of the vine that clambered around the entrance.

In the parlor, near a deteriorated piano whose yellow keys were cracked and broken–in almost the seventh stage of pianodum, *sans* teeth, *sans* wire, *sans* everything–he saw the dark-eyed girl and reined his horse. As he did so, she seated herself upon the hair-cloth stool, pressed a white finger to a discolored key and smiled at the not unexpected result–the squeak of decrepitude. While her hand still rested on the board and her features shone strongly in relief against the fire like a cameo profile set in bloodstone, a figure approached, and, leaning gracefully upon the palsied instrument, bent over her with smiling lips. It was the grand seignior, he of the equipage with silver trimmings. If the horseman's gaze rested, not without interest, on the pleasing picture of the young actress, it was now turned with sudden and greater intentness to that of the dashing stranger, a swift interrogation glancing from that look.

How had he made his peace with her? Certainly her manner now betrayed no resentment. While motionless the rider yet sat in his saddle, an invisible hand grasped the reins.

"Shall I put up your horse?" said a small voice, and the soldier quickly dismounted, the animal vanishing with the speaker, as Saint-Prosper entered the inn. Gay, animated, conscious of his attractions, the fop hovered over the young girl, an all-pervading Hyperion, with faultless ruffles, white hands, and voice softly modulated. That evening the soldier played piquet with the wiry old lady, losing four shillings to that antiquated gamester, and, when he had paid the stakes, the young girl was gone and the buoyant beau had sought diversion in his cups.

"Strike me," muttered the last named personage, "the little stroller has spirit. How her eyes flashed when I first approached her! It required some tact and acting to make her believe I took her for some one else on the road. Not such an easy conquest as I thought, although I imagine I have put that adventurer's nose out of joint. But why should I waste time here? Curse it, just to cut that fellow out! Landlord!"

"Yes, sir," answered the host behind the bar, where he had been quietly dozing on a stool with his back against the wall.

"Do you think my horse will be fit for use to-morrow morning?"

"The swelling has gone down, sir, and perhaps, with care–"

"Perhaps! I'll take no chances. Hang the nag, but I must make the best of it! See that my bed is well warmed, and"–rising–"don't call me in the morning. I'll get up when I please. Tell my man to come up at once–I suppose he's out with the kitchen wenches. I have some orders to give him for the morning. Stay–send up a lamp, and–well, I believe that's all for now!"

CHAPTER IV
"GREEN GROW THE RUSHES, O!"

So well advertised in the village had been the theatrical company and so greatly had the crusade against the play and players whetted public curiosity that on the evening of the first performance every bench in the dining-room–auditorium–of the tavern had an occupant, while in the rear the standing room was filled by the overflow. Upon the counter of the bar were seated a dozen or more men, including the schoolmaster, an itinerant pedagogue who "boarded around" and received his pay in farm products, and the village lawyer, attired in a claret-colored frock coat, who often was given a pig for a retainer, or knotty wood, unfit for rails.

From his place, well to the front, the owner of the private equipage surveyed the audience with considerable amusement and complacency. He was fastidiously dressed in double-breasted waistcoat of figured silk, loosely fitting trousers, fawn-colored kid gloves, light pumps and silk hose. Narrow ruffles edged his wristbands which were fastened with link buttons, while the lining of his evening coat was of immaculate white satin. As he gazed around upon a scene at once novel and incongruous, he took from his pocket a little gold case, bearing an ivory miniature, and, with the eyes of his neighbors bent expectantly upon him, extracted therefrom a small, white cylinder.

"What may that be, mister?" inquired an inquisitive rustic, placing his hand on the other's shoulder.

The latter drew back as if resenting that familiar touch, and, by way of answer, poised the cylinder in a tiny holder and deliberately lighted it, to the amazement of his questioner. Cigarettes were then unknown in that part of the state and the owner of the coach enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the first to introduce them there. "Since which time," says Chronicler Barnes in his memoirs, "their use and abuse has, I believe, extended."

The lighting of the aboriginal American cigarette drew general attention to the smoker and the doctor, not a man of modern small pills, but a liberal dispenser of calomel, jalap, castor-oil and quinine, whispered to the landlord:

"Azeriah, who might he be?"

"The heir of the patroon estate, Ezekiel. I found the name on his trunks: 'Edward Mauville.'"

"Sho! Going to take possession at the manor?"

"He cal'lates to, I guess, ef he can!"

"Yes; ef he can!" significantly repeated the doctor. "So this is the foreign heir? He's got wristbands like a woman and hands just as small. Wears gloves like my darter when she goes to meeting-house! And silk socks! Why, the old patroon didn't wear none at all, and corduroy was good enough for him, they say. Wonder how the barn-burners will take to the silk socks? Who's the other stranger, Azeriah?" Indicating with his thumb the soldier, who, standing against a window casement in the rear of the room, was by his height a conspicuous figure in the gathering.

"I don't exactly know, Ezekiel," replied the landlord, regretfully. "Not that I didn't try to find out," he added honestly, "but he was so close, I couldn't get nothing from him. He's from Paris, France; may be Louis Philippe himself, for all I know."

"No; he ain't Louis Philippe," returned the doctor with decision, "'cause I seen his likeness in the magazine."

"Might be the dolphin then," suggested the boniface. "He's so mighty mysterious."

"Dolphin!" retorted the other contemptuously. "There ain't no dolphin. There hasn't been no dolphin since the French Revolution."

"Oh, I didn't know but there might a been," said the landlord vaguely.

From mouth to mouth the information, gleaned by the village doctor, was circulated; speculation had been rife ever since the demise of the last patroon regarding his successor, and,

although the locality was beyond the furthermost reach of that land-holder, their interest was none the less keen. The old master of the manor had been like a myth, much spoken of, never seen without the boundaries of his acres; but the new lord was a reality, a creditable creation of tailor, hatter, hosier, cobbler–which trades had not flourished under the old master who bought his clothes, cap and boots at a country store, owned by himself. Anticipation of the theatrical performance was thus relieved in a measure by the presence of the heir, but the delay, incident to a first night on an improvised stage, was so unusual that the audience at length began to evince signs of restlessness.

Finally, however, when the landlord's daughter had gazed what seemed to her an interminable period upon the lady and the swan, the lake and the greyhound, painted on the curtain, this picture vanished by degrees, with an exhilarating creaking of the rollers, and was succeeded by the representation of a room in a cottage. The scenery, painted in distemper and not susceptible to wind or weather, had manifold uses, reappearing later in the performance as a nobleman's palace, supplemented, it is true, by a well-worn carpet to indicate ducal luxury.

Some trifling changes–concessions to public opinion–were made in the play, notably in the scene where the duke, with ready hospitality, offers wine to the rustic Lopez. In Barnes' expurgated, "Washingtonian" version (be not shocked, O spirit of good Master Tobin!) the countryman responded reprovingly: "Fie, my noble Duke! Have you no water from the well?" An answer diametrically opposed to the tendencies of the sack-guzzling, roistering, madcap playwrights of that early period!

On the whole the representation was well-balanced, with few weak spots in the acting for fault finding, even from a more captious gathering. In the costumes, it is true, the carping observer might have detected some flaws; notably in Adonis, a composite fashion plate, who strutted about in the large boots of the Low Countries, topped with English trunk hose of 1550; his hand upon the long rapier of Charles II, while a periwig and hat of William III crowned his empty pate!

Kate was Volante; not Tobin's Volante, but one fashioned out of her own characteristics; supine, but shapely; heavy, but handsome; slow, but specious. Susan, with hair escaping in roguish curls beneath her little cap; her taper waist encompassed by a page's tunic; the trim contour of her figure frankly revealed by her vestment, was truly a lad "dressed up to cozen" any lover who preferred his friend and his bottle to his mistress. Merry as a sand-boy she danced about in russet boots that came to the knee; lithe and lissome in the full swing of immunity from skirts, mantle and petticoats!

Conscious that his identity had been divined, and relishing, perhaps, the effect of its discovery, the young patroon gazed languidly at the players, until the entrance of Constance as Juliana, when he forgot the pleasing sensations of self-thought, in contemplation of the actress. He remarked a girlish form of much grace, attired in an attractive gown of white satin and silver, as became a bride, with train and low shimmering bodice, revealing the round arms and shoulders which arose ivory-like in whiteness. Instead of the customary feathers and other ornaments of the period, specified in the text of the play, roses alone softened the effect of her dark hair. Very different she appeared in this picturesque Spanish attire from the lady of the lane, with the coquettish cap of muslin and its "brides," or strings.

The light that burned within shone from her eyes, proud yet gay; it lurked in the corners of her mouth, where gravity followed merriment, as silence follows laughter when the brook sweeps from the purling stones to the deeper pools. Her art was unconscious of itself and scene succeeded scene with a natural charm, revealing unexpected resources, from pathos to sorrow; from vanity to humility; from scorn to love awakened. And, when the transition did come, every pose spoke of the quickening heart; her movements proclaimed the golden fetters; passion shone in her glances, defiant though willing, lofty though humble, joyous though shy.

Was it the heat from the lamps?–but Mauville's brow became flushed; his buoyancy seemed gross and brutal; desire lurked in his lively glances; Pan gleamed from the curls of Hyperion!

The play jogged on its blithesome course to its wonted end; the duke delivered the excellent homily,

"A gentle wife
Is still the sterling comfort of a man's life,"

and the well-pleased audience were preparing to leave when Barnes, in a drab jacket and trunks, trimmed with green ribbon bows, came forward like the clown in the circus and addressed the "good people."

"In the golden age," said the father of Juliana, "great men treated actors like servants, and, if they offended, their ears were cut off. Are we, in brave America, returning to the days when they tossed an actor in a blanket or gave a poet a hiding? Shall we stifle an art which is the purest inspiration of Athenian genius? The law prohibits our performing and charging admission, but it does not debar us from taking a collection, if"–with a bow in which dignity and humility were admirably mingled–"you deem the laborer worthy of his hire?"

This novel epilogue was received with laughter and applause, but the audience, although good-natured, contained its proportion of timid souls who retreat before the passing plate. The rear guard began to show faint signs of demoralization, when Mauville sprang to his feet. Pan had disappeared behind his leafy covert; it was the careless, self-possessed man of the world who arose.

"I am not concerned about the ethics of art," he said lightly, "but the ladies of the company may count me among their devout admirers. I am sure," he added, bowing to the manager with ready grace, "if they were as charming in the old days, after the lords tossed the men, they made love to the women."

"There were no actresses in those days, sir," corrected Barnes, resenting the flippancy of his aristocratic auditor.

"No actresses?" retorted the heir. "Then why did people go to the theater? However, without further argument, let me be the first contributor."

"The prodigal!" said the doctor in an aside to the landlord. "He's holding up a piece of gold. It's the first time ever patroon was a spendthrift!"

But Mauville's words, on the whole, furthered the manager's project, and the audience remained in its integrity, while Balthazar, a property helmet in hand, descended from his palace and trod the aisles in his drab trunk-hose and purple cloak, a royal mendicant, in whose pot soon jingled the pieces of silver. No one shirked his admission fee and some even gave in excess; the helmet teemed with riches; once it had saved broken heads, now it repaired broken fortunes, its properties magical, like the armor of Pallas.

"How did you like the play, Mr. Saint-Prosper?" said Barnes, as he approached that person.

"Much; and as for the players"–a gleam of humor stealing over his dark features–"'peerless' was not too strong."

"'Your approbation likes me most, my lord,'" quoted the manager, and passed quickly on with his tin pot, in a futile effort to evade the outstretched hand of his whilom helper.

Thanking the audience for their generosity and complimenting them on their intelligence, the self-constituted lord of the treasury vanished once more behind the curtain. The orchestra of two struck up a negro melody; the audience rose again, the women lingering to exchange their last innocent gossip about prayer-meeting, or about the minister who "knocked the theologic dust from the pulpit cushions in the good old orthodox way," when some renegade exclaimed: "Clear the room for a dance!"

Jerusha's shawl straightway fell from her shoulders; Hannah's bonnet was whipped from her head; Nathaniel paused on his way to the stable yard to bring out the team and a score of willing hands obeyed the injunction amid laughing encouragement from the young women whose feet already were tapping the floor in anticipation of the Virginia Reel, Two Sisters, Hull's Victory, or even the waltz, "lately imported from the Rhine." A battered Cremona appeared like magic and while "'Twas

Monnie Musk in busy feet and Monnie Musk by heart"–old-fashioned "Monnie Musk" with "first couple join right hands and swing," "forward six" and "across the set"; an honest dance for country folk that only left regrets when it came to "Good Night for aye to Monnie Musk," although followed by the singing of "Old Hundred" or "Come, ye Sinners, Poor and Needy," on the homeward journey.

"In his shirt of check and tallowed hair
The fiddler sat in his bull-rush chair,"

In the parlor the younger lads and lasses were playing "snap and catch 'em" and similar games. The portly Dutch clock gazed down benignly on the scene, its face shining good-humoredly like the round visage of some comfortable burgher. "Green grow the rushes, O!" came from many merry-makers. "Kiss her quick and let her go" was followed by scampering of feet and laughter which implied a doubt whether the lad had obeyed the next injunction, "But don't you muss her ruffle, O!" Forming a moving ring around a young girl, they sang: "There's a rose in the garden for you, young man." A rose, indeed, or a rose-bud, rather, with ruffles he was commanded not to "muss," but which, nevertheless, suffered sadly!

Among these boys and girls, the patroon discovered Constance, no longer "to the life a duchess," with gown in keeping with the "pride and pomp of exalted station," but attired in the simple dress of lavender she usually wore, though the roses still adorned her hair. Shunning the entrancing waltz, the inspiring "Monnie Musk" and the cotillion, lively when set to Christy's melodies, she had sought the more juvenile element, and, when seen by the land baron, was circling around with fluttering skirts. Joyous, merry, there was no hint now in her natural, girlish ways of the capacity that lay within for varied impersonations, from the lightness of coquetry to the thrill of tragedy.

He did not know how it happened, as he stood there watching her, but the next moment he was imprisoned by the group and voices were singing:

"There he stands, the booby; who will have him for his beauty?"

Who? His eye swept the group; the merry, scornful glances fixed upon him; the joyous, half-inviting glances; the red lips parted as in kindly invitation; shy lips, willing lips!

Who? His look kindled; he had made his selection, and the next moment his arm was impetuously thrown around the actress's waist.

"Kiss her quick and let her go!"

Amid the mad confusion he strove to obey the command, but a panting voice murmured "no, no!" a pair of dark eyes gazed into his for an instant, defiantly, and the pliant waist slipped from his impassioned grasp; his eager lips, instead of touching that glowing cheek, only grazed a curl that had become loosened, and, before he could repeat the attempt, she had passed from his arms, with laughing lips and eyes.

"Play fair!" shouted the lads. "He should 'kiss her quick and let her go.'"

"Oh, he let her go first!" said the others.

"'Kiss her quick,'" reiterated the boys.

"He can't now," answered the girls.

The voices took up the refrain: "Don't you muss the ruffles, O!" and the game went on. The old clock gossiped gleefully, its tongue repeating as plainly as words:

"Let-her-go!–ho!–ho!–one–two–three!"

Three o'clock! Admonishingly rang out the hour, the jovial face of the clock looking sterner than was its wont. It glowered now like a preacher in his pulpit upon a sinful congregation. Enough of "snatch-and-catch'em;" enough of Hull's Victory or the Opera Reel; let the weary fiddler descend from his bull-rush chair, for soon the touch of dawn will be seen in the eastern sky! The merry-making began to wane and already the sound of wagon-wheels rattled over the log road away from the tavern. Yes, they were singing, and, as Hepsibeth leaned her head on Josiah's shoulder, they uplifted

their voices in the good old orthodox hymn, “Come, Ye Sinners,” for thus they courted and worshiped in olden times.

“Good-night, every one!” said a sweet voice, as Constance passed calmly on, with not a ruffle mussed.

“Good-night,” answered the patroon, a sparkle in his eyes. “I was truly a booby.”

“What can you mean?” she laughed.

“There’s many a slip ’twixt–lip and lip!” exclaimed Susan.

With heightened color the young girl turned, and as she did so her look rested on the soldier. His glance was cold, almost strange, and, meeting it, she half-started and then smiled, slowly mounting the stairs. He looked away, but the patroon never took his eyes from her until she had vanished. Afar, rising and falling on the clear air, sounded the voices of the singers:

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;”

and finally, softer and softer, until the melody melted into silence:

“Praise Him above, ye Heavenly H-o-s-t–”

“One good turn deserves another,” said Barnes to Saint-Prosper, when Susan and Kate had likewise retired. “Follow me, sir–to the kitchen! No questions; but come!”

CHAPTER V
A CONFERENCE IN THE KITCHEN

A keen observer might have noticed that the door of the inn kitchen had been kept swinging to and fro as certain ones in the audience had stolen cautiously, but repeatedly, in and out of the culinary apartment while the dancing and other festivities were in progress. The itinerant pedagogue was prominent in these mysterious movements which possibly accounted for his white choker's being askew and his disposition to cut a dash, not by declining Greek verbs, but by inclining too amorously toward Miss Abigail, a maiden lady with a pronounced aversion for frivolity.

The cause of the schoolmaster's frolicsome deportment was apparent to the soldier when he followed Barnes into the kitchen, where, in a secluded corner, near the hospitable oven, in the dim light of a tallow dip, stood a steaming punch bowl. A log smoldered in the fireplace, casting on the floor the long shadows of the andirons, while a swinging pot was reflected on the ceiling like a mighty eclipse. Numerous recesses, containing pans and plates that gleamed by day, were wrapped in vague mystery. Three dark figures around the bowl suggested a scene of incantation, especially when one of them threw some bark from the walnut log on the coals and the flames sprang up as from a pine knot and the eclipse danced among the rafters overhead while the pot swung to and fro.

As the manager approached the bowl, the trio, moved by some vague impelling impulse, locked arms, walked toward the side door, crossed its threshold in some confusion, owing to a unanimous determination to pass out at one and the same time, and went forth into the tranquil night, leaving Barnes and Saint-Prosper the sole occupants of the kitchen. The manager now helped himself and his companion to the beverage, standing with his back to the tiny forks of flame from the shagbark. His face expanded with good-fellowship; joviality shone from his eyes beaming upon the soldier whom he unconsciously regarded as an auxiliary.

"Here's to our better acquaintance," he said, placing his hand with little ceremony on the other's shoulder. "The Bill-Poster!" Raising his cup. "You gathered them in–"

"And you certainly gathered in the contents of their pockets!"

"A fair robbery!" laughed Barnes, "as Dick Turpin said when he robbed the minister who robbed the king who robbed the people! A happy thought that, turning the helmet into a collection box! It tided us over; it tided us over!"

Saint-Prosper returned the manager's glance in kind; Barnes' candor and simplicity were apparent antidotes to the other's taciturnity and constraint. During the country dance the soldier had remained a passive spectator, displaying little interest in the rustic merry-making or the open glances cast upon him by bonny lasses, burned in the sunlit fields, buxom serving maids, as clean as the pans in the kitchen, and hearty matrons, not averse to frisk and frolic in wholesome rural fashion.

But now, in the face of the manager's buoyancy at the success of a mere expedient–a hopefulness ill-warranted by his short purse and the long future before him!–the young man's manner changed from one of indifference to friendliness, if not sympathy, for the over-sanguine custodian of players. Would the helmet, like the wonderful pitcher, replenish itself as fast as it was emptied? Or was it but a make-shift? The manager's next remark seemed a reply to these queries, denoting that Barnes himself, although temporarily elated, was not oblivious to the precarious character of "free performances," with voluntary offerings.

"What we need," continued the manager, "is a temperance drama. With what intemperate eagerness would the people flock to see it! But where is it to be found? Plays don't grow on bushes, even in this agricultural district. And I have yet to discover any dramatists hereabouts, unless"–jocularly–"you are a Tom Taylor or a Tom Robertson in disguise. Are you sure you have never courted the divine muse? Men of position have frequently been guilty of that folly, sir."

"But once," answered the other in the same tone. "At college; a political satire."

"Was it successful?"

"Quite so–I was expelled for writing it!"

"Well," retorted Barnes, irrelevantly, "you have at least mildly coquetted with the muse. Besides, I dare say, you have been behind the scenes a good deal. The green room is a fashionable rendezvous. Where are you going? And what–if I may ask–is your business?"

"I am on my way to New Orleans," said the traveler, after a moment's hesitation. "My business, fortune-getting. In sugar, tobacco, or indigo-culture!"

"New Orleans!" exclaimed the manager, poising the ladle in mid air. "That, too, is our destination. We have an engagement to play there. Why not join our band? Write or adapt a play for us. Make a temperance drama of your play!"

"You are a whimsical fellow," said the stranger, smiling. "Why don't you write the play yourself?"

"I? An unread, illiterate dotard! Why, I never had so much as a day's schooling. As a lad I slept with the rats, held horses, swept crossings and lived like a mudlark! Me write a play! I might let fall a suggestion here and there; how to set a flat, or where to drop a fly; to plan an entrance, or to arrange an exit! No, no; let the shoemaker stick to his last! It takes"–with deference–"a scholar to write a drama."

"Thus you disqualify me," laughed the other, drawing out a pipe which he filled; and lighted with a coal held in the iron grip of the antique tongs. "If it were only to help plant a battery or stand in a gap!" he said grimly, replacing the tongs against the old brick oven at one side of the grate. "But to beset King Bacchus in three acts! To storm his castle in the first; scale the walls in the second, and blow up all the king's horses and all the king's men in the last–that is, indeed, serious warfare!"

"True, it will be a roundabout way to New Orleans," continued the manager, disregarding his companion's response, "but there is no better way of seeing the New World–that is, if you do not disdain the company of strolling players. You gain in knowledge what you lose in time. If you are a philosopher, you can study human nature through the buffoon and the mummer. If you are a naturalist, here are grand forests to contemplate. If you are not a recluse, here is free, though humble, comradeship."

His listener gazed thoughtfully into the fire. Was the prospect of sharing this gipsy-like life attractive to him? An adventurer himself, was he drawn toward these homeless strollers, for whom the illusions of dramatic art shone with enticing luster in the comparative solitude of the circuit on the wilderness?

As he sat before the glow, the light of the burning shagbark, playing elfishly above the dying embers, outlined the stalwart, yet active figure and the impenetrable, musing features. But when, with an upward shower of sparks, the backlog fell asunder and the waning flame cast yet more gloomy shadows behind them, he leaned back in his heavy, hewn chair and again bent an attentive look upon the loquacious speaker.

"Or, if you desire," resumed the manager after some hesitation, "it might become a business venture as well as a pleasure jaunt. Here is a sinking ship. Will the salvage warrant helping us into port; that is, New Orleans? There hope tells a flattering tale. The company is well equipped; has a varied repertoire, while Constance"–tenderly–"is a host in herself. If you knew her as I do; had watched her art grow"–his voice trembled–"and to think, sometimes I do not know where the next day's sustenance may come from! That she"–

He broke off abruptly, gazing at his companion half-apologetically. "We players, sir," he resumed, "present a jovial front, but"–tapping his breast–"few know what is going on here!"

"Therein," said the younger man, emptying his pipe, "you have stated a universal truth." He pushed a smoldering log with his foot toward the remnants of the embers. "Suppose I were so minded to venture"–and he mentioned a modest sum–"in this hazard and we patched up the play together?"

"You don't mean it?" cried the manager, eagerly. Then he regarded the other suspiciously: "Your proposal is not inspired through sympathy?"

"Why not through the golden prospects you have so eloquently depicted?" replied Saint-Prosper, coldly.

"Why not indeed!" exclaimed the reassured manager. "Success will come; it must come. You have seen Constance but once. She lives in every character to her heart's core. How does she do it? Who can tell? It's inborn. A heritage to her!"

His voice sank low with emotion. "Yes," he murmured, shaking his head thoughtfully, as though another image arose in his mind; "a heritage! a divine heritage!" But soon he looked up. "She's a brave girl!" he said. "When times were dark, she would always smile encouragingly, and, in the light of her clear eyes, I felt anew the Lord would temper the wind to the shorn lamb."

"One–two–three–four," rang the great clock through the silent hall, and, at its harsh clangor, Barnes started.

"Bless my soul, the maids'll be up and doing and find us here!" he exclaimed. "One last cup! To the success of the temperance drama!"

In a few moments they had parted for their respective chambers and only the landlord was left down-stairs. Now as he came from behind the bar, where he had been apparently dozing and secretly listening through the half-opened door leading into the kitchen, he had much difficulty to restrain his laughter.

"That's a good one to tell Ezekiel," he muttered, turning out the lights and sweeping the ashes on the hearth to the back of the grate. "To the temperance drama!"

CHAPTER VI
THE DEPARTURE OF THE CHARIOT

Down the hill, facing the tavern, the shadows of night were slowly withdrawn, ushering in the day of the players' leaving. A single tree, at the very top, isolated from its sylvan neighbors, was bathed in the warm sunshine, receiving the earliest benediction of day. Down, down, came the dark shade, pursued by the light, until the entire slope of the hill was radiant and the sad colored foliage flaunted in new-born gaiety.

Returning from the stable, where he had been looking after his horse, the soldier stood for a moment before the inn, when a flower fell at his feet, and, glancing over his shoulder, he perceived Susan, who was leaning from her window. The venturesome rose, which had clambered as high as the second story, was gone; plucked, alas, by the wayward hand of a coquette. Saint-Prosper bowed, and stooped for the aspiring but now hapless flower which lay in the dust.

"You have joined the chariot, I hear?" said Susan.

"For the present," he replied.

"And what parts will you play?" she continued, with smiling inquisitiveness.

"None."

"What a pity! You would make a handsome lover." Then she blushed. "Lud! What am I saying? Besides"–maliciously–"I believe you have eyes for some one else. But remember,"–shaking her finger and with a coquettish turn of the head–"I am an actress and therefore vain. I must have the best part in the new piece. Don't forget that, or I'll not travel in the same chariot with you." And Susan disappeared.

"Ah, Kate," she said, a moment later, "what a fine-looking young man he is!"

"Who?" drawled her sister.

"Mr. Saint-Prosper, of course."

"He is large enough," retorted Kate, leisurely.

"Large enough! O, Kate, what a phlegmatic creature you are!"

"Fudge!" said the other as she left the chamber.

Entering the tavern, the soldier was met by the wiry old lady who bobbed into the breakfast room and explained the kind of part that fitted her like a glove, her prejudices being strong against modern plays.

"Give me dramas like 'Oriana,' 'The Rival Queens' or Webster's pieces," she exclaimed, quoting with much fire for her years:

"'We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves!'"

"And do not forget the 'heavy' in your piece!" called out Hawkes across the table. "Something you can dig your teeth in!"

"Nor the 'juvenile lead,'" chimed in the Celtic Adonis.

"Adonis makes a great hit in a small part," laughed Kate, appearing at the door. "'My lord, the carriage is waiting!'"

"My lady, your tongue is too sharp!" exclaimed Adonis, nettled.

"And put in a love scene for Adonis and myself," she continued, lazily floating into the room. "He is so fond of me, it would not be like acting!"

This bantering was at length interrupted by the appearance of the chariot and the property wagon at the front door, ready for the journey. The rumbling of the vehicles, the resounding hoofs and the resonant voice of the stable boy awakened the young lord of the manor in his chamber above. He stretched himself sleepily, swore and again composed himself for slumber, when the noise of a

property trunk, thumping its way down the front stairs a step at a time, galvanized him into life and consciousness.

"Has the world come to an end?" he muttered. "No; I remember; it's only the players taking their departure!"

But, although he spoke carelessly, the bumping of boxes and slamming and banging of portable goods annoyed him more than he would confess. With the "crazy-quilt"–a patch-work of heptagons of different hues and patterns–around his shoulders, clothing him with all the colors of the rainbow, he sat up in bed, wincing at each concussion.

"I might as well get up!" he exclaimed. "I'll see her once more–the perverse beauty!" And tossing the kaleidoscopic covering viciously from him, he began to dress.

Meanwhile, as the time for their going drew near, mine host down-stairs sped the parting guest with good cheer, having fared profitably by the patronage the players had brought to the inn; but his daughter, Arabella, looked sad and pensive. How weary, flat and stale appeared her existence now! With a lump in her throat and a pang in her heart, she recklessly wiped her eyes upon the best parlor curtains, when Barnes mounted to the box, as robust a stage-driver as ever extricated a coach from a quagmire. The team, playful through long confinement, tugged at the reins, and Sandy, who was at the bits, occasionally shot through space like an erratic meteor.

The manager was flourishing his whip impatiently when Constance and Susan appeared, the former in a traveling costume of blue silk; a paletot of dark cloth, and, after the fashion of the day, a bonnet of satin and velvet. Susan was attired in a jupe sweeping and immensely full–to be in style!–and jacquette with sleeves of the pagoda form. The party seemed in high spirits, as from his dormer window Mauville, adjusting his attire, peered through the lattice over the edge of the moss-grown roof and leaf-clogged gutters and surveyed their preparations for departure. How well the rich color of her gown became the young girl! He had told himself white was her best adornment, but his opinion veered on the moment now, and he thought he had never seen her to better advantage, with the blue of her dress reappearing in the lighter shade, above the dark paletot, in the lining of the bonnet and the bow of ribbons beneath her chin.

"On my word, but she looks handsome!" muttered the patroon. "Might sit for a Gainsborough or a Reynolds! What dignity! What coldness! All except the eyes! How they can lighten! But there's that adventurer with her," as the figure of the soldier crossed the yard to the property wagon. "No getting rid of him until the last moment!" And he opened the shutters wider, listening and watching more closely.

"Are you going to ride in the property wagon?" he heard Saint-Prosper ask.

"Yes; when I have a part to study I sometimes retire to the stage throne," she answered lightly. "I suppose you will ride your horse?"

Of his reply the listener caught only the words, "wind-break" and "lame." He observed the soldier assist her to the throne, and then, to Mauville's surprise, spring into the wagon himself.

"Why, the fellow is going with them!" exclaimed the land baron. "Or, at any rate, he is going with her. What can it mean?" And hurriedly quitting his post, his toilet now being complete, he hastened to the door and quickly made his way down-stairs.

During the past week his own addresses had miscarried and his gallantry had been love's labor lost. At first he had fancied he was making progress, but soon acknowledged to himself he had underestimated the enterprise. Play had succeeded play–he could not have told what part favored her most! Ophelia sighed and died; Susan danced on her grave between acts, according to the program, and turned tears into smiles; the farewell night had come and gone–and yet Constance had made no sign of compliance to reward the patient wooer. Now, at the sight of these preparations for departure, and the presence of the stalwart stranger in the property wagon, he experienced a sudden sensation of pique, almost akin to jealousy.

Stepping from the tavern, it was with an effort he suppressed his chagrin and vexation and assumed that air of nonchalance which became him well. Smilingly he bade Susan and the other occupants of the chariot farewell, shook Barnes by the hand, and turned to the property wagon.

"The noise of your departure awakened me," he said to the young girl. "So I have come to claim my compensation–the pleasure of seeing you–"

"Depart!" she laughed quickly.

Momentarily disconcerted, he turned to the soldier. "You ride early."

"As you see," returned the other, immovably.

"A habit contracted in the army, no doubt!" retorted Mauville, recovering his easy self-possession. "Well, a bumping trunk is as efficacious as a bugle call! But *au revoir*, Miss Carew; for we may meet again. The world is broad–yet its highways are narrow! There is no need wishing you a pleasant journey."

His glance rested on Saint-Prosper for a moment, but told nothing beyond the slight touch of irony in his words and then shifting to the young girl, it lingered upon each detail of costume and outline of feature. Before she could reply, Barnes cracked his whip, the horses sprang forward, and the stable boy, a confused tangle of legs and arms, was shot as from a catapult among the sweet-williams. The abrupt departure of the chariot was the cue for the property wagon, which followed with some labor and jolting, like a convoy struggling in the wake of a pretentious ship. From the door Mauville watched it until it reached a toll-gate, passed beneath the portcullis and disappeared into the broad province of the wilderness.

CHAPTER VII
SOJOURNING IN ARCADIA

Calm and still was the morning; the wandering air just stirred the pendulous branches of the elms and maples, and, in the clear atmosphere, the russet hills were sharply outlined. As they swung out into the road, with Hans, the musician, at the reins, the young girl removed her bonnet and leaned back in the chair of state, where kings had fretted and queens had lolled.

The throne, imposing on the stage, now appeared but a flimsy article of furniture, with frayed and torn upholstering, and carving which had long since lost its gilded magnificence. Seated amid the jumble of theatrical appliances and accoutrements–scenery, rolled up rug-fashion, property trunks, stage clock, lamps and draperies–she accepted the situation gracefully, even finding nothing strange in the presence of the soldier. New faces had come and gone in the company before, and, when Barnes had complacently informed her Saint-Prosper would journey with the players to New Orleans in a semi-business capacity, the arrangement appeared conformable to precedent. The manager's satisfaction augured well for the importance of the semi-business rôle assumed by the stranger, and Barnes' friendliness was perhaps in some degree unconsciously reflected in her manner; an attitude the soldier's own reserve, or taciturnity, had not tended to dispel. So, his being in the property wagon seemed no more singular than Hans' occupancy of the front seat, or if Adonis, Hawkes, or Susan had been there with her. She was accustomed to free and easy comradeship; indeed, knew no other life, and it was only assiduous attentions, like those of the land baron's, that startled and disquieted her.

As comfortably as might be, she settled back in the capacious, threadbare throne, a slender figure in its depths–more adapted to accommodate a corpulent Henry VIII!–and smiled gaily, as the wagon, in avoiding one rut, ran into another and lurched somewhat violently. Saint-Prosper, lodged on a neighboring trunk, quickly extended a steadying hand.

"You see how precarious thrones are!" he said.

"There isn't room for it to more than totter," she replied lightly, removing her bonnet and lazily swinging it from the arm of the chair.

"Then it's safer than real thrones," he answered, watching the swaying bonnet, or perhaps, contrasting the muscular, bronzed hand he had placed on the chair with the smooth, white one which held the blue ribbons; a small, though firm, hand to grapple with the minotaur, Life!

She slowly wound the ribbons around her fingers.

"Oh, you mean France," she said, and he looked away with sudden disquietude. "Poor monarchs! Their road is rougher than this one."

"Rougher truly!"

"You love France?" she asked suddenly, after studying, with secret, sidelong glances his reserved, impenetrable face.

His gaze returned to her–to the bonnet now resting in her lap–to the hand beside it.

"It is my native land," he replied.

"Then why did you leave it–in its trouble?" she asked impulsively.

"Why?" he repeated, regarding her keenly; but in a moment he added: "For several reasons. I returned from Africa, from serving under Bugeaud, to find the red flag waving in Paris; the king fled!"

"Oh," she said, quickly, "a king should–"

"What?" he asked, as she paused.

"I was going to say it was better to die like a king than–"

"Than live an outcast!" he concluded for her, a shadow on his brow.

She nodded. "At any rate, that is the way they always do in the plays," she added brightly. "But you were saying you found your real king fled?"

His heavy brows contracted, though he answered readily enough: “Yes, the king had fled. A kinsman in whose house I had been reared then bade me head a movement for the restoration of the royal fugitive. For what object? The regency was doomed. The king, a May-fly!”

“And so you refused?”

“We quarreled; he swore like a Gascon. His little puppet should yet sit in the chair where Louis XIV had lorded it! I, who owed my commission to his noble name, was a republican, a deserter! The best way out of the difficulty was out of the country. First it was England, then it was here. To-morrow–where?” he added, in a lower tone, half to himself.

“Where?” she repeated, lightly. “That is our case, too.”

He looked at her with sudden interest. “Yours is an eventful life, Miss Carew.”

“I have never known any other,” she said, simply, adding after a pause: “My earliest recollections are associated with my mother and the stage. As a child I watched her from the wings. I remember a grand voice and majestic presence. When the audience broke into applause, my heart throbbed with pride.”

But as her thoughts reverted to times past, the touch of melancholy, invoked by the memory of her mother, was gradually dispelled, as fancy conjured other scenes, and a flickering smile hovered over the lips whose parting displaced that graver mood.

“Once or twice I played with her, too,” she added. “I thought it nice to be one of the little princes in Richard III and wear white satin clothes. One night after the play an old gentleman took me on his knee and said: I had to come, my child, and see if the wicked old uncle hadn’t really smothered you!’ When he had gone, my mother told me he was Mr. Washington Irving. I thought him very kind, for he brought me a bag of bonbons from the coffee-room.”

“It’s the first time I ever heard of a great critic laden with sweetmeats!” said the soldier. “And were you not flattered by his honeyed regard?”

“Oh, yes; I devoured it and wanted more,” she laughed.

Hans’ flourishing whip put an end to further conversation. “Der stage goach!” he said, turning a lumpish countenance upon them and pointing down the road.

Approaching at a lively gait was one of the coaches of the regular line, a vehicle of ancient type, hung on bands of leather and curtained with painted canvas, not unlike the typical French diligence, except for its absence of springs. The stage was spattered with mud from roof to wheel-tire, but as the mire was not fresh and the road fair, the presumption followed that custom and practice precluded the cleaning of the coach. The passengers, among whom were several ladies, wearing coquettish bonnets with ribbons or beau-catchers attached, were too weary even to view with wonder the odd-looking theatrical caravan. Only the driver, a diminutive person with puckered face the color of dried apples, so venerable as to be known as Old Hundred, seemed as spry and cheery as when he started.

“Morning,” he said, briskly, drawing in his horses. “Come back, have ye, with yer troupe? What’s the neuws from Alban-y?”

“Nothing, except Texas has been admitted as a State,” answered Barnes.

“Sho! We air coming on!” commented the Methuselah of the road.

“Coming on!” groaned a voice in the vehicle, and the florid face of an English traveler appeared at the door. “I say, do you call this ‘coming on!’ I’m nearly gone, don’t you know!”

“Hi!–ge’ long!–steady there!” And Old Hundred again whipped up his team, precipitating a lady into the lap of the gentleman who was “nearly gone,” and well-nigh completing his annihilation.

In less time than when a friendly sail is lost in the mist, Old Hundred’s bulky land-wherry passed from view, and the soldier again turned to his companion. But she was now intent on some part in a play which she was quietly studying and he contented himself with lighting that staple luxury of the early commonwealth, a Virginia stogie, observing her from time to time over the glowing end. With the book upon her knee, her head downcast and partly turned from him, he could, nevertheless, through the mazy convolutions and dreamy spirals of the Indian weed, detect the changing emotions

which swept over her, as in fancy she assumed a rôle in the drama. Now the faintest shadow of a smile, coming and going; again beneath the curve of her long lashes, a softer gleaming in the dark eyes, adding new charm to the pale, proud face. Around them nature seemed fraught with forgetfulness; the Libyan peace that knows not where or wherefore. Rocked in the cradle of ruts and furrows, Hans, portly as a carboy, half-dozed on the front seat.

Shortly before noon they approached an ancient hostelry, set well back from the road. To the manager's dismay, however, the door was locked and boards were nailed across the windows. Even the water pail, hospitably placed for man or beast, had been removed from its customary proximity to the wooden pump. Abandoned to decay, the tenantless inn was but another evidence of traffic diverted from the old stage roads by the Erie Canal Company. Cold was the fireplace before which had once rested the sheep-skin slippers for the guests; empty was the larder where at this season was wont to be game in abundance, sweet corn, luscious melons–the trophies of the hunt, the fruits of the field; missing the neat, compact little keg whose spigot had run with consolation for the wanderer!

Confronted by the deserted house, where they had expected convivial cheer, there was no alternative but to proceed, and their journey was resumed with some discomfiture to the occupants of the coach which now labored like a portly Spanish galleon, struck by a squall. They had advanced in this manner for some distance through furrow and groove, when the vehicle gave a sharper lurch down a deeper rut; a crash was followed by cries of affright and the chariot abruptly settled on one side. Barnes held the plunging horses in control, while the gentlemen scrambled to the ground and assisted the ladies to dismount.

"Any one hurt?" asked the manager from his box.

"No damage done–except to the coach," said Hawkes.

By this time the horses had become quiet and Barnes, now that the passengers were rescued, like a good skipper, left the quarter deck.

"We couldn't have chosen a better place for our lunch," he remarked philosophically. "How fortunate we should have broken down where we did!"

"Very fortunate!" echoed the old lady ironically.

The accident had happened upon a slight plateau, of which they accordingly took possession, tethering the horses to graze. From the branches overhead the squirrels surveyed them as if asking what manner of people were these, and the busy woodpecker ceased his drumming, cocking his head inquisitively at the intruders; then shyly drew away, mounting spirally the trunk of the tree to the hole, chiseled by his strong beak for a nest. As Barnes gazed around upon the pleasing prospect, he straightway became the duke in the comedy of the forest.

"Ha, my brothers in exile," he exclaimed, "are not these woods more free from peril than the envious court?"

"All it wants," said the tragedian, hungrily, "is mutton, greens and a foaming pot."

"I can't promise the foaming pot," answered the manager. "But, at least, we have a well-filled hamper."

Soon the coffee was simmering and such viands as they had brought with them–for Barnes was a far-sighted and provident manager–were spread out in tempting profusion. Near them a swift-flowing stream chattered about the stones like one of nature's busiest gossips; it whispered to the flowers, murmured to the rushes and was voluble to the overhanging branch that dragged upon the surface of the water. The flowers on its brim nodded, the rushes waved and the branch bent as if in assent to the mad gossip of the blithesome brook. And it seemed as though all this animated conversation was caused by the encampment of the band of players by the wayside.

The repast finished, they turned their attention to the injured chariot, but fortunately the damage was not beyond repair, and Barnes, actor, manager, bill-poster, license-procurer, added to his already extensive repertoire the part of joiner and wheelwright. The skilled artisans in coachmaking and coach-repairing might not have regarded the manager as a master-workman, but the fractured parts

were finally set after a fashion. By that time, however, the sun had sunk to rest upon a pillow of clouds; the squirrels, law-abiding citizens, had sought their homes; the woodpecker had vanished in his snug chamber, and only forest dwellers of nocturnal habits were now abroad, their name legion like the gad-abouts of a populous city.

"There!" exclaimed the manager, surveying his handiwork. "The 'bus is ready! But there is little use going on to-night. I am not sure of the road and here is a likely spot to pass the night."

"Likely to be devoured by wild beasts," said Kate, with a shudder.

"I am sure I see two glistening eyes!" exclaimed Susan.

"Fudge!" observed the elastic old lady. "That's the first time you have been afraid of two-glistening eyes."

"There's a vast difference between wolves and men," murmured Susan.

"I'm not so sure of that," returned the aged cynic.

But as the light of day was withdrawn a great fire sprang up, illumining the immediate foreground. The flames were cheering, drawing the party more closely together. Even Hawkes partly discarded his tragedy face; the old lady threw a bundle of fifty odd years from her shoulders as easily as a wood-carrier would cast aside his miserable stack of fagots, while Barnes forgot his troubles in narrating the harrowing experience of a company which had penetrated the west at a period antedating the settlement of the Michigan and Ohio boundary dispute.

The soldier alone was silent, curiously watching the play of light and shade on the faces of the strollers, his gaze resting longest, perhaps, on the features of the young girl. Leaning against an ancient oak, so old the heart of it was gone and it towered but a mighty shell, the slender figure of the actress was clearly outlined, but against that dark and roughly-furrowed background she seemed too slight and delicate to buffet with storms and hardships. That day's experience was a forerunner of the unexpected in this wandering life, but another time the mishap might not be turned to diversion. The coach would not always traverse sunny byways; the dry leaf floating from the majestic arm of the oak, the sound of an acorn as it struck the earth presaged days less halcyon to come.

"How do you enjoy being a stroller?" asked a voice, interrupting the soldier's reverie. "It has its bitters and its sweets, hasn't it? Especially its sweets!" Susan added, glancing meaningly at the young girl. "But after all, it doesn't much matter what happens to you if you are in good company." The semi-gloom permitted her to gaze steadfastly into his eyes. He ignored the opportunity for a compliment, and Susan stifled a little yawn, real or imaginary.

"Positively one could die of *ennui* in this wilderness," she continued. "Do you know you are a welcome addition to our band? But you will have to make yourself very agreeable. I suppose"–archly–"you *were* very agreeable in the property wagon?"

"Miss Carew had a part to study," he returned, coldly.

"A part to study!" In mock consternation. "How I hate studying parts! They say what you wouldn't, and don't say what you would! But I'm off to bed," rising impatiently. "I'm getting sleepy!"

"Sleepy!" echoed Barnes. "Take your choice! The Hotel du Omnibus"–indicating the chariot–"or the Villa Italienne?"–with a gesture toward a tent made of the drop curtain upon the walls of which was the picture of an Italian scene.

"The chariot for me," answered Susan. "It is more high and dry and does not suggest spiders and other crawling things."

"Good-night, then, and remember a good conscience makes a hard bed soft."

"Then I shall sleep on down. I haven't had a chance"–with a sigh–"to damage my conscience lately. But when I strike civilization again"–and Susan shook her head eloquently to conclude her sentence. "Oh, yes; if beds depend on conscience, boughs would be feathers for me to-night." With which half-laughing, half-defiant conclusion, Susan tripped to the chariot, pausing a moment, however, to cast a reproachful glance over her shoulder at Saint-Prosper before vanishing in the cavernous depths of the vehicle of the muses.

Her departure was the signal for the dispersing of the party to their respective couches. Now the fire sank lower, the stars came out brighter and the moon arose and traveled majestically up the heavens, taking a brief but comprehensive survey of the habitations of mortals, and then, as if satisfied with her scrutiny, sailed back to the horizon and dropped out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII
FLIPPING THE SHILLING

Shortly after the departure of the strolling players from the tavern, Mauville summoned his servant and ordered his equipage. While waiting he strode impatiently to and fro in the dining-room, which, dismantled of the stage, by very contrast to the temporary temple of art, turned his thoughts to the players. The barrenness of the room smote him acutely with the memory of those performances, and he laughed ironically to himself that he should thus revert to them. But as he scoffed inwardly, his eyes gleamed with vivacity, and the sensations with which he had viewed the young girl night after night were reawakened. What was one woman lost to him, his egotism whispered; he had parted from many, as a gourmand leaves one meal for another. Yes; but she had not been his, insinuated vanity; another had whipped her off before his eyes.

"Why the devil didn't you tell me he was going with them?" he demanded of the landlord while settling his account.

"He–who?" asked the surprised inn-keeper.

"That adventurer you have been harboring here. How far's he going with them?"

"I don't know. The night after the performance I heard the manager ask him to join the company; to write a temperance play."

"Temperance play!" sneered Mauville. "The fool's gone with them on account of a woman."

"I did think he was mighty attentive to one of the actresses," said the landlord, reflectively. "The one with them melting eyes. Purty good-looking! Quiet and lady-like, too! So he's gallivanting after her? Well, well, I guess actresses be all alike."

"I guess they are," added the heir savagely. "And this one took me in," he thought to himself. "Holding me off and playing with him, the jade!" Then he continued aloud: "Where are they going?"

"Didn't hear 'em say," answered the other, "and I didn't like to appear too curious."

"You didn't?" returned Mauville, ironically. "You must have changed lately."

"I don't know as I understand you quite," replied the landlord with sudden dignity. "But here's your carriage and your things are all on. I guess your tenants will be glad to see you," he continued, not resisting a parting shot.

"Curse the tenants!" muttered the guest in ill-humor, as he strode from the tavern without more ado.

He was soon on his way, partly forgetting his vexation in new anticipations, and traveling with spirit to his destination, which he reached late that afternoon. The residence of the old patroons, a lordly manor where once lavish hospitality had been displayed, was approached through great gates of hammered iron in which the family arms were interwoven, leading into a fine avenue of trees. The branches of the more majestic met overhead, forming a sylvan arch that almost obscured the blue sky by day and the stars by night. Gazing through this vista, a stately portico appeared, with Corinthian columns, affording an inviting termination of the view. The grounds bore evidence of neglect in the grass growing knee-high and rank with weeds; the flower beds almost obliterated; a corn-crib sunk to one side like a quadruped gone weak-kneed; and the stream that struggled vainly through the leaves and rubbish barring its passage across the estate. The fence resembled the "company front" of an awkward squad, each picket being more or less independent of its neighbor, with here and there a break or gap in the ranks.

Passing through the leafy archway over a noiseless road and drawing near the manor, the heir could see that the broad windows, with their quaint squares of glass, were unwashed, the portico unswept and the brass finishings of the front door unpolished. At the right of the steps leading to the portico, moss-covered and almost concealed by a rose-bush, stood a huge block of granite upon which rested the "lifting-stone," as it was called, of one of the early masters. This not inconsiderable weight

the new retainers had been required to lift in days of old, or failing, the patroon would have none of their services, for he wanted only lusty, broad-backed varlets for farmers or–when need were–soldiers.

In answer to repeated summons from the ponderous knocker, shuffling footsteps were finally heard within, the door was opened a few inches and the gleaming teeth of a great, gaunt dog were thrust into the opening, followed by an ominous growling. Mauville sprang back a step; the snarling resolved itself into a yelp, as some one unceremoniously dragged the canine back; the door was opened wider and a brawny figure, smoking a long-stemmed pipe, barred the way. The dog, but partly appeased, peered from behind the man's sturdy legs, awaiting hostilities. The latter, an imperturbable Dutchman, eyed the intruder askance, smoking as impassively in his face as one of his ancestors before William the Testy. From his point of vantage on the threshold the care-taker looked down upon the master so indifferently, while the dog glared so viciously that the land baron cried angrily:

"Why the devil don't you get out of the way and call off that beast?"

The man pondered. "No one but the heir would give orders like that," he said, so accustomed to speaking his thoughts in the solitude of the great rooms, that he gave way to the habit now. "This must be the heir."

Slowly the care-taker moved aside, the hound shifting his position accordingly, and Mauville entered, gazing around with some interest, for the interior of the manor realized the pretensions of its outward aspect. The floor of the hall was of satinwood and rosewood, and the mahogany wainscoting, extending almost to the ceiling, was black with age. With its rich carvings, the stairway suggested woody rioting in balustrades lifting up to the support of the heavy beams in the ceiling. The furnishings were in keeping, but dust obscured the mirror-like surface of the mahogany tables, the heavy draperies were in need of renovation, while a housewife would have viewed with despair the condition of brass and ebony inlaid cabinets, ancient tapestries, and pictures, well-nigh defaced, but worthy, even in their faded aspect, of the brush of Sir Godfrey Kneller, Benjamin West and the elder Peale.

Having casually surveyed his new home, the heir was reminded of the need for refreshment after his long journey, and, turning to the care-taker, asked him what there was in the house? The servant smoked silently as though deeply considering this momentous question, while the rear guard maintained unabated hostility between the man's firmly-planted feet. Then abruptly, without removing his pipe, the guardian of the manor ejaculated:

"Short-cakes and oly-koeks."

The other laughed, struck his knee with his light cane and demanded to be shown to the library, where he would have these outlandish dishes served.

"And bring with them, Mynheer Oly-koeks, a bottle of wine," he continued. "At the same time, chain up the dog. He eyes me with such hungry hostility that, gad! I believe he's an anti-renter!"

Mauville was ushered into a large room, where great leather-bound volumes filled the oak shelves to the ceiling. The care-taker turned, and, with echoing footsteps, slowly departed, followed by his faithful four-footed retainer. It is true the latter paused, swung half-around and regarded the land-owner with the look of a sulky and rebellious tenant, but, summoned by a stern "Oloffe!" from his master, the dog reluctantly pattered across the hard-wood floor.

In surveying his surroundings, the land baron's attention was attracted by a coat-of-arms deeply carved in the massive wood of the book-case–on a saltire sable, a fleur-de-lys or. This head of heraldic flowers appeared to interest Mauville, who smiled grimly. "From what I know of my worthy ancestors," he muttered, "and their propensities to prey on their fellow-men, I should say a more fitting device would be that of Lovett of Astwell: Gules, three wolves passant sable, in pale."

Pleased with his own humor, he threw himself upon a couch near the window, stretching himself luxuriously. Soon the man reappeared with the refreshments and a bottle of old-fashioned, substantial girth, which he uncorked with marked solicitude.

"Where are the oly-koeks?" exclaimed the heir.

The watchman pointed to a great dish of dark blue willow-ware pattern.

"Oh, doughnuts!" said Mauville. "You know where the family lawyer lives? Have my man drive you to his house and bring him here at once."

As the care-taker again disappeared the heir bent over the curiously shaped bottle in delight, for when the cork was drawn a fragrance filled the musty apartment as from a bouquet.

"Blessings on the ancestor who laid down this wine!" he muttered. "May his ghost wander in to sniff it! These oly-koeks are not bad. I suppose this man, Ten Breecheses, or whatever he is called, is at once cook and housekeeper. Although I don't think much of his housekeeping," ruminated Mauville, as he observed a herculean spider weaving a web from an old volume of Giraldus Cambrensis, antiquary, to the classical works of one Joseph of Exeter. There is a strong sympathy between wine and cobwebs, and Mauville watched with increasing interest the uses to which these ponderous tomes had sunk–but serving the bloodthirsty purpose of the nimble architect, evolving its delicate engineering problem in mid air.

A great blundering fly had just bobbed into the net and the spider, with hideous, carnivorous zest, was scrambling for it, when the guardian of the manor returned with the family solicitor, a little man who bore in his arms a bundle of papers which, after the customary greetings, he spread upon the table. He helped himself to a glass of burgundy and proceeded forthwith to enter into the history of his trust.

Mynheer, the patroon, Mauville's predecessor, a lonely, arrogant man, had held tenaciously to the immense tracts of land acquired in the colonial days by nominal purchase. He had never married, his desire for an heir being discounted by his aversion for the other sex, until as the days dragged on, he found himself bed-ridden and childless in his old age. Unfortunately the miser can not take his acres into Paradise, and the patroon, with many an inward groan, cast about him for some remote relative to whom he would reluctantly transfer his earthly hereditaments. These were two: one a man of piety, who prayed with the tenants when they complained of their lot; the other, Mauville, upon whom he had never set eyes.

When the earliest patroons had made known to the West India Company their intention of planting colonies in New Netherland, they had issued attractive maps to promote their colonization projects. Among those who had been lured to America by these enticing advertisements was an ancestor of Edward Mauville. Incurring the displeasure of the governor for his godless views, this Frenchman was sent to the pillory, or whipping post, and his neighbors were about to cast out the devil of irreverence in good old-fashioned manner, when one of Mynheer's daughters interceded, carried off the handsome miscreant, and–such was her imperious way!–married him! He was heard in after years to aver that the whipping would have been the milder punishment, but, be that as it may, a child was born unto them who inherited the father's adventuresome and graceless character, deserted his home, joined hands with some ocean-rovers and sailed for that pasture-ground of buccaneers, the Caribbean sea. Of his subsequent history various stories may be found in the chronicles of New Orleans and Louisiana.

The only other person who might have any pretensions to the estate was a reverend gentleman who had been a missionary among the Indians, preaching from a stump, and called "Little Thunder" by the red men because of his powerful voice; a lineal descendant of the Rev. Doctor Johannes Vanderklonk, the first dominie of the patroons, who served for one thousand guilders, payable in meat or drink, twenty-two bushels of wheat and two firkins of butter. He saved the souls of the savages, while the white men cheated their bodies. Now and then, in those early days, the children of the forest protested against this evangelizing process and carried off the good dominie to the torture stake, where they plucked out his finger nails; but he returned with as much zest to his task of landing these simple souls in Paradise as those who employed him displayed in making an earthly Paradise out of the lands the red men left behind them.

When by this shrewd system the savages were gradually saved, and incidentally exterminated, Little Thunder's occupation was gone and he became a pensioner of Mynheer the Patroon, earning his bread by an occasional sermon to the tenants, exhorting them to thrift and industry, to be faithful and multiply, and to pay their rents promptly. As Mynheer's time drew near he sent for his attorney and commanded him to look up the life, deeds and character of Edward Mauville.

"This I did," said the lawyer, "and here it is." Waving a roll of papers before his interested listener.

"A nauseating mess, no doubt," carelessly remarked the land baron.

"Oh, sir!" deprecated the lawyer, opening the roll. "'Item: Religion; pupil of the brilliant Jesuit, Abbé Moneau. Item: Morals; Exhibit A, the affair with Countess – in Paris, where he was sent to be educated after the fashion of French families in New Orleans; Exhibit B–'"

"Spare me," exclaimed Mauville. "Life is wearisome enough, but a biography–" He shrugged his shoulders. "Come to your point."

"Of course, sir, I was only trying to carry out his instructions. The same, sir, as I would carry out yours!" With an ingratiating smile. Whereupon the attorney told how he had furnished the patroon this roll and fastened it to his bed, so that he might wind and unwind it, perusing it at his pleasure. This the dying man did, sternly noting the damaging facts; thinking doubtlessly how traits will endure for generations–aye, for ages, in spite of the pillory!–the while Little Thunder was roaring petitions to divinity by his bedside, as though to bluster and bully the Almighty into granting his supplications. The patroon glanced from his pensioner to the roll; from the kneeling man to that prodigious list of peccadillos, and then he called for a shilling, a coin still somewhat in use in America. This he flipped thrice.

"*Roué* or sham," he said the first time.

"Rake or hypocrite," he exclaimed the second time.

"Devil or Pharisee," he cried the third time.

He peered over the coin and sent for his attorney. His soul passed away, mourned by Little Thunder until the will was read, when his lamentations ceased; he soundly berated Mynheer, the Patroon, in his coffin and refused to go to his burying. Then he became an ardent anti-renter, a leader of "bolters," a thunderer of the people's cause, the devoted enemy of land barons in general, and one patroon in particular, the foreign heir of the manor.

"But let him thunder away, sir," said Scroggs, soothingly. "The estate's yours now, for the old patroon can't come back to change his mind. He's buried sure enough in the grove, a dark and sombrous spot as befitted his disposition, but restful withal. Aye, and the marble slab's above him, which reminds me that only a month before he took to his bed he was smoking his pipe on the porch, when his glance fell upon the lifting-stone. Suddenly he strode towards it, bent his back and raised it a full two inches. 'So much for age!' said he, scoffing-like. But age heard him and now he lies with a stone on him he can not lift, while you, sir"–to his listener, deferentially–"are sole heir to the estate and to the feud."

"A feud goes with the property?" remarked Mauville carelessly.

"The tenants object to paying rent," replied Scroggs, sadly. "They're a sorry lot!"

"Evade their debts, do they?" said the land baron languidly. "What presumption to imitate their betters! That won't do; I need the money."

"They claim the rights of the landlord originated in fraud–"

"No doubt!" Yawning. "My ancestors were rogues!"

"Oh, sir"–deprecatorily.

"If the tenants don't pay, turn them out," interrupted Mauville, listlessly, "if you have to depopulate the country."

Having come to an understanding with his client, the lawyer arose to take his departure.

"By the way," he said, obsequiously, selecting a yellow, well-worn bit of paper from his bundle of documents, "it may interest you to keep this yourself. It is the original deed for all these lands from the squaw Pewasch. You can see they were acquired for a few shillings' worth of 'wet and dry goods' and seventeen and a half ells of duffels."

"The old patroons could strike a rare bargain," muttered the heir, as he casually surveyed the ancient deed, and then, folding it, placed it in his breast pocket. "For a mere song was acquired–"

"A vast principality," added the solicitor, waving his hand toward the fields and meadows far in the distance.

CHAPTER IX
SAMPLING THE VINTAGES

Having started the wheels of justice fairly moving, with Scroggs at the throttle, the new land baron soon discovered that he was not in consonance with the great commoner who said he was savage enough to prefer the woods and wilds of Monticello to all the pleasures of Paris. In other words, those rural delights of his forefathers, the pleasures of a closer intimacy with nature, awoke no responsive chord in Mauville's breast, and he began to tire before long of a patriarchal existence and crullers and oly-koeks and playing the fine lord in solitary grandeur.

The very extent of the deserted manor carried an overwhelming sense of loneliness, especially at this season when nature was dying and triumphal tints of decay were replacing the vernal freshness of the forests, flaunting gaudy vestments that could not, however, conceal the sadness of the transition. The days were growing shorter and the leaden-colored vapors, driven by the whip of that taskmaster, the wind, replaced the snow-white clouds becalmed in the tender depths of ether. Soon would the hoar frost crystallize on grass and fence, or the autumn rains descend, dripping mournfully from the water spouts and bubbling over the tubs. Already the character of the dawn was changed to an almost sullen awakening of the day, denoting a seeming uneasiness of the hidden forces, while an angry passing of the glowing orb replaced the Paphian sunset.

In nook and cranny, through the balustrades and woody screens of the ancient house, penetrated the wandering currents of air. The draperies waved mysteriously, as by a hidden hand, and, at nightfall, the floor of satin and rosewood creaked ominously as if beneath the restless footsteps of former inmates, moving from the somber hangings of the windows to the pearl-inlaid harpsichord whose melody was gone, and thence up the broad staircase, pausing naturally at the landing, beneath which had assembled gay gatherings in the colonial days. And such a heedless phantom group–fine gentlemen in embroidered coats, bright breeches, silk stockings and peruke, and, peeping through ethereal lace wristbands, a white hand fit for no sterner toil than to flourish with airy grace a gold-headed cane; ladies with gleaming bare shoulders, dressed in "cumbrous silk that with its rustling made proud the flesh that bore it!" The imaginative listener could almost distinguish these footfalls, as the blind will recognize the tread of an unseen person.

To further add to the land baron's dissatisfaction over his heritage, "rent-day"–that all-important day in the olden times; when my lord's door had been besieged by the willing lease-holders, cheerful in rendering unto Caesar what was due Caesar!–seemed to have been dropped from the modern calendar, as many an ancient holiday has gradually been lost in the whirligig of time. No long procession now awaited the patroon's pleasure, when it should suit him to receive the tribute of guilders, corn or meal; the day might have been as obsolete as an Hellenic festival day to Zeus, for all the observance it was accorded.

"Your notices, Scroggs, were wasted on the desert air," said the patroon, grimly, to that disappointed worthy. "What's the use of tenants who don't pay? Playing at feudal lord in modern times is a farce, Scroggs. I wish we had lived about four hundred years ago."

"Yes, if four hundred years ago were now," assented the parasite, "I'd begin with Dick, the tollman! He's a regular Goliath and,"–his face becoming purple–"when I threatened him with the law, threw me out of the barn on an obnoxious heap of refuse."

"You weren't exactly a David, then?" laughed the patroon, in spite of his bad humor.

"I'll throw the stone yet," said the little man, viciously showing his yellow teeth. "The law's the sling."

That evening, when the broad meadows were inundated by the shadow of the forest that crept over it like an incoming tide, the land baron ordered lights for every room. The manor shone in isolated grandeur amid the gloomy fields, with the forest-wall around it; radiant as of old, when strains

of music had been heard within and many figures passed the windows. But now there was light, and not life, and a solitary anti-renter on the lonely road regarded with surprise the unusual illumination.

"What does it mean?" asked Little Thunder–for it was he–waiting and watching, as without the gates of Paradise.

Well might he ask, for the late Mynheer, the Patroon, had been a veritable bat for darkness; a few candles answered his purpose in the spacious rooms; he played the prowler, not the grand lord; a recluse who hovered over his wine butts in the cellar and gloated over them, while he touched them not; a hermit who lived half his time in the kitchen, bending over the smoky fireplace, and not a lavender-scented gentleman who aired himself in the drawing-room, a fine fop with nothing but the mirrors to pay him homage. Little Thunder, standing with folded arms in the dark road, gloomy as Lucifer, almost expected to see the brilliant fabric vanish like one of those palaces of joy built by the poets.

Hour after hour passed, midnight had come and gone, and still the lights glowed. Seated in the library, with the curtains drawn, were the land baron and Scroggs, a surveyor's map between them and a dozen bottles around them. Before Mauville stood several glasses, containing wines of various vintages which the land baron compared and sipped, held to the light and inhaled after the manner of a connoisseur sampling a cellar. He was unduly dignified and stately, but the attorney appeared decidedly groggy. The latter's ideas clashed against one another like pebbles in a child's rattle, and, if the round table may be supposed to represent the earth, as the ancient geographers imagined it, Scrogg's face was surely the glowing moon shining upon it.

Readily had the attorney lent himself to the new order of procedure. With him it was: "The king is dead! Long live the king!" He, who had found but poor pickings under the former master–dry crust fees for pleadings, demurrers or rejoinders–now anticipated generous booty and spoil. Alert for such crumbs as might fall from a bountiful table; keen of scent for scraps and bits, but capable of a mighty mouthful, he paid a courtier's price for it all; wheedling, pandering, ready for any service, ripe for any revelry. With an adulator's tact, he still strove strenuously to hold the thread of his companion's conversation, as Mauville said:

"Too old, Scroggs; too old!" Setting down a glass of burgundy in which fine particles floated through the magenta-hued liquid. "It has lost its luster, like a woman's eyes when she has passed the meridian. Good wine, like a woman, has its life. First, sweetly innocent, delicately palatable, its blush like a maiden of sixteen; then glowing with a riper development, more passionate in hue, a siren vintage; finally, thin, waning and watery, with only memories of the deeper, rosy-hued days. Now here, my good, but muddled friend, is your youthful maiden!" Holding toward the lamp a glass, clear as crystal, with luster like a gem. "Dancing eyes; a figure upright as a reed; the bearing of a nymph; the soul of a water lily before it has opened its leaves to the wooing moonlight!"

"Lord! How you go on!" exclaimed Scroggs. "What with a sampling this and sampling that, my head's going round like a top. If there's anything in the cellar the old patroons put down we haven't tried, sir, I beg to defer the sampling. I am of the sage's mind–'Of all men who take wine, the moderate only enjoy it,' says Master Bacon, or some one else."

"Pass the bottle!" answered the other. "Gently, man! Don't disturb its repose, and remember it disdains the perpendicular."

"So will I soon," muttered Scroggs. "I hope you'll excuse me, sir, but that last drop of Veuve Cliquot was the whip-cord that started the top going, and, on my word"–raising his hands to his head–"I feel like holding it on to keep it from spinning off."

"Spinning or not, you shall try this vintage"–the young man's eyes gleamed with such fire as shone in the glass–"and drink to Constance Carew!"

"Constance Carew!" stammered the other, desperately swallowing the toast.

Mauville slowly emptied the glass. "A balsamic taste, slightly piquant but agreeable," he observed. "A dangerous wine, Scroggs! It carries no warning; your older kind is like a world-worn

coquette whose glances at once place you on the defensive. This maiden vintage, just springing into glorious womanhood, comes over you like a springtime dream."

"Who–who is she?" muttered Scroggs.

"She is not in the scroll you prepared for my lamented kinsman, eh? They are, for the most part, deep red, dark scarlet–that list of fair dames! She doesn't belong to them–yet! No title, man; not even a society lady. A stroller, which is next door to a vagrant."

"Well, sir, she's a woman and that's enough," replied the lawyer. "And my opinion is, it's better to have nothing to do with 'em."

This sententious remark seemed to arouse Scroggs to momentary vivacity.

"Now there was my Lord Hamerton, whose picture is upstairs," he went on quickly, like a man who is bent on grasping certain ideas before they escape him. "He brought a beautiful woman here–carried her off, they say from England–and installed her as mistress of the manor. I have heard my father say that his great-grandfather, who was my lord's solicitor, said that before his death my lord desired to make her his wife, having been brought to a sense of the sinful life he had led by a Puritan preacher. But at that, this woman straightened herself up, surveyed him with scorn, and, laughing like a witch, answered: 'They say marriages are made in heaven, my lord–and you are the devil!' So my lord died without having atoned, and, as for my lady who refused to become an honest woman, I am sure she was damned!" concluded Scroggs triumphantly.

"No doubt! So this wicked lord abducted her, Scroggs?" he added thoughtfully. "A man of spirit, until the Puritans got after him and showed him the burning pit and frightened him to that virtue which was foreign to his inclinations. My lady was right in refusing to honor such a paltry scoundrel with her hand. But it takes courage, Scroggs, to face everlasting damnation."

"They say, too, there was a spice of revenge about her unwillingness to give her hand to my lord," resumed the narrator, unmindful of the interruption. "This Puritan father said nothing but marriage with her would save Hamerton from the sulphurous flames and so my lady refused to sanctify their relations and rescue her lord from perdition!"

"A pleasant revenge!" laughed the land baron. "He made life a hell for her and she gave him an eternity of it. But take a little of this white wine, man. We've drunk to the roses of desire, and now should drink to the sanctified lilies. Her neck, Scroggs, is like a lily, and her hand and her brow! Beneath that whiteness, her eyes shine with a tenderness inviting rays of passion to kindle them. Drink!"

But the other gave a sudden lurch forward. "My lady–refused–perdition!" he muttered, and his head dropped to the board.

"Wake up, man, and drink!" commanded the master.

"Jush same–they ought to have been married," said his companion drowsily. "They lived together so–so ill!" And then to place himself beyond reach of further temptation from the bottle, he quietly and naturally slid under the table.

The patroon arose, strode to the window, which he lifted, and the night air entered, fanning his hot brow. The leaves, on high, rustled like falling rain. The elms tossed their branches, striking one another in blind confusion. The long grass whispered as the breeze stirred it like the surface of an inland lake. Withering flowers gave up their last perfume, while a storm-cloud fled wildly across the heavens. Some of the restlessness of the external world disturbed that silent dark figure at the window; within him, conflicting passions jarred like the boughs of the trees and his fancies surged like the eddying leaves.

"The roses of desire–the sanctified lilies!" he muttered.

As he stood there the stars grew pale; the sky trembled and quivered before the advent of morn. A heavy footstep fell behind him, and, turning, he beheld the care-taker.

"Not in bed yet, Oly-koeks?" cheerfully said the land baron.

"I am just up."

"In that case, it is time for me to retire," returned the master, with a yawn. "This is a dull place, Oly-koeks; no life; no variety. Nothing going on!"

The servant glanced at the formidable array of bottles. "And he calls this a quiet life!" thought the care-taker, losing his impassiveness and viewing the table with round-eyed wonder.

"Nothing going on?" he said aloud. "Mynheer, the Patroon, complained of too much life here, with people taking farms all around. But, if you are dull, a farmer told me last night there was a company of strolling players in Vanderdonkville–"

"Strollers!" exclaimed Mauville, wheeling around. "What are they called?"

"Lord; I don't know, sir. They're show-folks, and that's all–"

"Do many strolling players come this way?"

"Not for weeks and months, sometimes! The old patroon ordered the *schout* to arrest them if they entered the *wyck*."

"Is Vanderdonkville in the *wyck*?" asked the land baron quickly.

"No. It was separated from the *wyck* when Rickert Jacobus married–"

"Never mind the family genealogy! Have the coach ready at nine–"

"To-night?"

"This morning," replied Mauville, lightly. "And, meanwhile, put this to bed," indicating Scroggs, who was now snoring like a bag-pipe with one arm lovingly wound around a leg of the library table.

The care-taker hoisted the attorney on his broad shoulders, his burden still piping as they crossed the hall and mounted the stairway. Having deposited his load within the amazing depths of a Dutch feather mattress, where he lay well-nigh lost to sight, but not unheard, the *wacht-meester*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.