

Warner Anne

Susan Clegg and Her Love Affairs



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I

SUSAN CLEGG'S COURTING

Mrs. Lathrop sat on her front piazza, and Susan Clegg sat with her. Mrs. Lathrop was rocking, and Susan was just back from the Sewing Society. Neither Mrs. Lathrop nor Susan was materially altered since we saw them last. Time had moved on a bit, but not a great deal, and although both were older, still they were not much older.

They were not enough older for Mrs. Lathrop to have had a new rocker, nor for Susan to have purchased a new bonnet. Susan indeed looked almost absolutely unaltered. She was a woman of the best wearing quality; she was hard and firm as ever, and if there were any plating about her, it was of the quadruple kind and would last.

If the reader knows Susan Clegg at all, he will surmise that she was talking. And he will be right. Susan was most emphatically talking. She had returned from the Sewing Society full to the brim, and Mrs. Lathrop was already enjoying the overflow. Mrs. Lathrop liked to rock and listen. She never went to the Sewing Society herself – she never went anywhere.

"We was talking about dreams," Susan was saying; "it's a very curious thing about dreams. Do you know, Mrs. Lathrop," wrinkling her brow and regarding her friend with that look of friendship which is not blind to any faults, "do you know, Mrs. Lathrop, they said down there that dreams always go by contraries. We was discussing it for a long time, and they ended up by making me believe in it. You see, it all began by my saying how I dreamed last night that Jathrop was back, and he was a cat and your cat, too, and he did something he wasn't let to, and you made one jump at him, and out of the window he went. Now that was a very strange dream for me to have dreamed, Mrs. Lathrop, and Mrs. Lupey, who's staying with Mrs. Macy to-day and maybe to-morrow, too, says she's sure it's a sign. She says if dreams go by contraries, mine ought to be a sign as Jathrop is coming back, for the contraries is all there: Jathrop *wasn't* a cat, and he never done nothing that he shouldn't – nor that he should, neither – and you never jump – I don't believe you've jumped in years, have you?"

"I – " began Mrs. Lathrop reminiscently.

"Oh, that time don't count," said Susan, "it was just my ball of yarn, even if it did look like a rat; I meant a jump when you meant it; you didn't mean that jump. Well, an' to go back to the dream and what was said about it and to tell you the rest of it, there wasn't any more of it, but there was plenty more said about it. All of the dream was that the cat went out of the window, and I woke up, but, oh, my, how we did talk! Gran'ma Mullins wanted to know in the first place how I knew that the cat was Jathrop. She was most interested in that, for she says she often dreams of animals, but it never struck her that they might be any one she knew. She dreamed she found a daddy-long-legs looking in her bureau drawer the other night, but she never gave it another thought. She'll be more careful after this, I guess. Well, then I begun to consider, and for the life of me I can't think how I knew that that cat was Jathrop. As I remember it was a very common looking cat, but being common looking wouldn't mean Jathrop. Jathrop was common looking, but not a common cat kind of common looking. It was a very strange dream, Mrs. Lathrop, the more I consider it, the more I can't see what give it to me. I finished up the doughnuts just before I went to bed, for I was afraid they'd mold in another day with this damp weather, but it don't seem as if doughnuts ought to result in cats like Jathrop. If I'd dreamed of mice, it'd been different, for some of the doughnuts was gnawed in a way as showed as there'd been mice in the jar. It does beat all how mice get about. Maybe it was the mice made me

think Jathrop was a cat. But even then I can't see how I did come to dream that dream. Unless it was a sign. Mrs. Lupey's sure it was a sign. We talked about signs the whole of the Sewing Society. Dreams and signs. Everybody told all they knew. Mrs. Macy told about her snow dream. Whenever Mrs. Macy has her snow dream, somebody dies. She says it's so interesting to look in a paper the next time she gets hold of one and see who it was. One time she thought it was Edgar Allen Poe, but when she read it over twice, she see that it was just that he'd been born. She says her snow dream's a wonderful sign; it's never failed once. She dreamed it the night before the earthquake in Italy, and she says to think how many died of it that time!

"This started Gran'ma Mullins, and Gran'ma Mullins told about that dream she had the year before she met her husband. That was an awful dream. I wonder she met her husband a *tall* after it. She thought she was alone in a thick wood, and she saw a man coming, and she was scared to death. She says she can feel her trembling now. She didn't know what to do, 'cause if she'd hid among the trees he couldn't have seen her, and that idea scared her as bad as the other. So she just stood and shook and watched the man coming nearer and nearer. I've heard her tell the story a hundred times, but my blood always sort o' runs cold to hear it. The man come nearer and nearer and, my, but she says he *was* a man! She was just a young girl, but she was old enough to be afraid, and old enough not to want to hide from him, neither. She says it was an awful lesson to her about going in woods alone, because of course you can't never expect any sympathy if the man does murder you or kiss you – everybody'll just say, 'Why didn't she hide in the woods?' Well, Gran'ma Mullins says there she stood, and she can see herself still standing there. She says she's never been in the woods since just on account of that dream – and then, too, she's one of those that the mosquitos all get on in the woods. And then, besides, she doesn't like woods, anyway. And then, besides, there ain't no thick woods around here. But, anyhow, you know what happened – just as he got to her she woke up, and I must say of all the tame stories to have to sit and listen to over and over, that dream of Gran'ma Mullins is the tamest. I get tired the minute she begins it, but my dream had started every one to telling signs, and so of course Gran'ma Mullins had to tell hers along with the rest.

"When she was done Mrs. Lupey told us about her mother, Mrs. Kitts, and a curious kind of prophetic dream she used to have and kept right on having up to the day she died. Mrs. Lupey said she never heard the like of those dreams of her mother's, and I guess nobody else ever has, either. No, nor never will. Well, it seems Mrs. Kitts used to dream she was falling out of bed, and the curious part is that she always *did* fall out of bed just as she dreamed it, so it never failed to come true. She'd dream she hit the floor *bang!* and the next second she'd hit the floor *bang!* Mrs. Lupey said she never saw such a dream for coming true; if old Mrs. Kitts dreamed she hit her head, she'd hit her head, and the time she dreamed she sprained her wrist, she sprained her wrist, and the time she had her stroke, as soon as her mind was got back in place she told them she'd dreamed she had a stroke in her chair just before she fell out of her chair with the stroke. Even the minister's wife didn't have a word to say.

"Mrs. Lupey said her mother was a most remarkable woman. She's very sorry now she didn't board that painter for a portrait of her. The painter was so awful took with old Mrs. Kitts that he was willing to do her for six weeks and with the frame for two months. But Mrs. Lupey was afraid to have a painter around. She'd just read a detective story about a painter that killed the woman he was painting because he didn't want any one else to paint her. Mrs. Lupey said it was a very Frenchy story – there was a lot between the lines and on the lines, too – as she couldn't make out, but it taught her never to have painters around, for you never could be sure in a house with four other women that he'd kill the one he was painting. But she's sorry now, for she's older now and wiser and a match for any painter going, long-haired, short-haired or no hair at all. But it's too late now, and there's Mrs. Kitts dead unpainted, and all they've got left is a sweet memory and that cane she used to hit at 'em with when they weren't spry enough to suit her, and her hymn-book which she marked up without telling any one and left for a remembrance. Mrs. Lupey says such markings you never heard of.

"When Mrs. Lupey was all done, Mrs. Brown took her turn and told us some very interesting things about Amelia. Seems Amelia is so far advanced in learning what nobody can understand that she can see quite a little ways ahead now and tell just what she's going to do. She can't see for the rest of the family, but she can see for herself. Sometimes it's just a day ahead, and sometimes it's a long way ahead. The longest way ahead that she's seen yet is that she can't see herself ever getting up to breakfast again. Mrs. Brown says of course she respects Amelia's religious views, but it's trying when Amelia wants to go to church, but doesn't see herself going, so has to stay at home. She says Amelia just loves to sew, but she can't see herself sewing any more, so she's given it all up. She says Amelia's got a superior mind – anybody can tell that only to see the way she's took to doing her hair – but she says it's a little hard on young Doctor Brown and her, who haven't got superior minds, to live with her. Amelia don't want to kill flies any more, for fear they're going to be her blood relations a million years from now, and Mrs. Brown says she never was any good once a mouse was caught, but now she won't even hear to setting a trap; she says all things has equal rights, and if she feels a spider, some one has got to take it off her and set it gently outside on the grass. Oh, Mrs. Brown says, Amelia's very hard to live up to, even with the best will in the world. Mrs. – "

Here Susan was interrupted by Brunhilde Susan, the minister's youngest child, who brought the evening milk and the evening paper.

"There was a letter, so I brought that, too," said Brunhilde Susan.

"A letter!" said Susan in surprise.

"It's for Mrs. Lathrop," said Brunhilde Susan.

"For me!" said Mrs. Lathrop in even greater surprise.

"Yes'm," said Brunhilde Susan.

A letter for Mrs. Lathrop was indeed a surprise, as that good lady had only received two in the last five years. As those had been of the least interesting variety, she looked upon the present one with but mild interest. The next minute she gave a scream, for, turning it over as some people always do turn a letter over before opening it, she read on the back "Return to Jathrop Lathrop..." and her fingers turning numb with surprise and her head dizzy for the same reason, she dropped it on the floor forthwith.

Brunhilde Susan had turned and gone back down the walk. Miss Clegg, who had been regarding her friend's slowness to take action with ill-concealed impatience, now made no attempt at concealing anything, but leaned over abruptly and picked up the letter. As soon as she looked at it she came near dropping it, too. "From Jathrop!" she exclaimed, in a tone appalled. "Well, Mrs. Lathrop!"

Mrs. Lathrop was quite speechless. Susan held the letter and began to regard it closely. It was quite a minute before another sound was made, then suddenly a light burst over the younger woman's face. "It's my dream. I told you so. It *was* a sign, just as Mrs. Lupey said. He's coming back!"

She looked toward Mrs. Lathrop, but Mrs. Lathrop still sat quite limp and gasping for breath.

"Shall I open it and read it to you?" Susan then suggested.

"Y – y – " began Mrs. Lathrop and could get no further.

At that Susan promptly opened the letter. It was written on the paper of a Chicago hotel, and ran thus:

"Dear Mother:

"Years have passed by, and here I am on my way home again. I've been to the Klondike and am now rich and on my way home. I hope that you are well and safe at home. You'll be glad to see me home again, I know. How is everybody at home? How is Susan Clegg? I shall get home Saturday morning.

"Your afft. son,

"J. LATHROP, ESQ."

That was all and surely it was quite enough.

"Well, I declare!" Susan Clegg said, staring first at the letter and then at the mother. "Well, Mrs. Lathrop! Well, I declare. It *was* a sign. You and me'll never doubt signs after *this*, I guess."

Mrs. Lathrop made an effort to rally, but only succeeded in just feebly shaking her head.

Susan continued to hold the letter in her hand and contemplate it. Another slow minute or two passed.

But at last the wheels of life began to turn again, and that active mind, which grasped so much so readily, grasped this news, too. Miss Clegg ceased to view the letter and began to take action regarding it.

"Did you notice what he says here, Mrs. Lathrop? He says he's rich. I don't know whether you noticed or not as I read, but he says he's rich. I wonder how rich he means!"

Mrs. Lathrop opened and shut her eyes in a futile way that she had, but continued speechless.

"Rich," repeated Miss Clegg, "and me dreaming of him last night; that's very curious, when you come to think of it, 'cause I'm rich, too. And I was dreaming of him! It doesn't make any difference my thinking he was a cat; I knew it was Jathrop, even if he was only a cat in a dream. Strange my dreaming of him that way! I can see him flying out of the window right now. He was one of those lanky, long cats that eat from dawn till dark and every time your back's turned and yet keep the neighbors saying you starve it. And to think it was Jathrop all the time! Thinking of me right that minute, probably. And he says, 'How's Susan Clegg?' And he's rich. I *do* wonder what he'd call rich!"

Susan paused and looked at her friend, but Mrs. Lathrop remained dumb.

"The Klondike, that's where he went to, was it? Goodness, I wonder how he ever got there! Well, I'll never be surprised at nothing after this. I've had many little surprises in my life, but never nothing to equal this. Jathrop Lathrop come back rich! Why, the whole town will be at the station to meet him to-morrow. I wonder if he'll come in the parlor-car! Think of Jathrop being a cat overnight and coming in a parlor-car next day! And he says, 'How's Susan Clegg?'"

The last three words seemed to make quite an impression on Susan, but Mrs. Lathrop appeared smashed so supremely flat that nothing could make any further impression on her. She continued dumb, and Susan continued to hold the letter and comment on it.

"I wonder what he looks like now. I wonder if he's grown any better looking! I certainly do wonder if he's got any homelier. And he's rich! Why, nobody from this town has ever gone away and got rich before, not that I can remember. I call myself a rich woman, but I ain't rich enough to dream of writing it in a letter. I certainly should like to know what Jathrop calls being rich. He couldn't possibly have millions, or it would have reached here somehow. Maybe he's been digging under another name! I suppose three or four thousand would seem enough to make him call himself rich. If he comes home with three or four thousand and calls that being rich, I shall certainly feel very sorry for you, Mrs. Lathrop. He'll be very airy over his money, and he'll live on yours. If you've got to have any one live with you, it's better for them to have no money a *tall*, because if they've got ever such a little, they always feel so perky over it. Mrs. Brown says if Amelia didn't have that six dollars and seventy-five cents a month from her dead mother, she'd be much easier to live with. Mrs. Brown says whenever Doctor Brown tries to control Amelia, Amelia hops up and says she'll pay for it with her own money. Mrs. Brown says to hear Amelia, you'd think she had at least ten dollars a month of her own. Mrs. Brown's so sad over Amelia. Amelia sees herself doing such outlandish things some days. Mrs. Brown says your son's wife is the biggest puzzle a woman ever gets. I guess Mrs. Brown would have liked young Doctor Brown never to marry."

Mrs. Lathrop opened her mouth and shut it again.

"I suppose you're thinking where to put Jathrop when he comes," Susan said quickly. "I've been thinking of that, too. Where can you put him, anyway? He never can sleep in that little shed bedroom where he used to sleep, if he's really rich, and he'll have to have some place to wash before we can find out."

Mrs. Lathrop looked distressed. "I – " she began.

"Oh, that wouldn't do," said Susan, knitting her brows quickly. "Think of the work of changing all your things. No, I'll tell you what's the best thing to do; he can sleep over at my house. Father's room was all cleaned last week, and I'll make up the bed, and Jathrop can sleep there until we find out how to treat him. Maybe his old shed bedroom will do, after all, or maybe he's so awfully rich he'll enjoy sleeping in it, like the president liked to stack hay. Maybe he'll ask nothing better than to chop wood and take the ashes out of the stove just for a change. I do wonder how rich he is. If he's rich enough to have a private car, I expect this town *will* open its eyes. You'll see a great change in your position, Mrs. Lathrop, if Jathrop comes in a private car to-morrow morning. There's something about a private car as makes everybody step around lively. I don't say that I shan't respect him more myself if he comes in a private car. But he can sleep one night in father's room, anyway, although if he calls it being rich to come home with just two or three thousand, I think he'd better understand it's for just one night right from the start. I wouldn't want Jathrop to think that I had any time to waste on him if he calls just two or three thousand being rich. It'd be no wonder I dreamed he was a cat, if he's got the face to call that being rich. But that would be just like Jathrop. You know yourself that if Jathrop could ever do anything to disappoint anybody, he never let the chance slide. I never had no use for Jathrop Lathrop, as you know to your cost, Mrs. Lathrop. But, still, if he really is rich, I haven't got anything against him, and I'll tell you what I'll do right now: I'll go home and put that room in order and get my supper, and then after supper I'll just run down to the square and see if anybody else knows, and then I'll come back and tell you if they do. It's no use your trying to put things a little in order, because you couldn't straighten this place up in a month, and, besides, it isn't worth fussing till we know how rich he is. He may just have writ that in for a joke – to break it to you gently that he's coming back again to live here. Heaven help you if that's the case, Mrs. Lathrop, for Jathrop never will. It isn't in me to deceive so much as a fly on the window, and I never have deceived you and I never will."

With which promise Susan took her departure.

It was all of three hours – quite nine in the evening – when Susan came back. She found Mrs. Lathrop transferred to her back porch and seemingly in a somewhat less complete state of total paralysis than when she had left her.

Mrs. Lathrop looked up as her friend approached and smiled.

"Nobody knew," Susan announced as she mounted the steps, "but every one knows now, for I told them. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, you never saw anything like it. There isn't a person in town as ever expected to see Jathrop again, and only about three as always thought he'd come back rich. Every one's going to the station to-morrow morning, even Mrs. Macy. Mrs. Macy says if it's one of the mornings she can't walk, she'll hire Hiram and his wheelbarrow just as she does for church those Sundays. Everybody's so interested. I told them about the private car, and everybody hopes that he's got one, and that he'll come in it. Mr. Dill says he must be rich if he's been to the Klondike and come back a *tall*. He says there's no halfway work about the Klondike. Either you come back a millionaire or else you eat first your dog and then your boots and that's the last of you. Gran'ma Mullins says she never heard of eating boots in the Klondike; she thought you rode on a sled there and that there weren't any women. She says Hiram's spoken of going there once or twice, and Lucy thought maybe the coasting would do him good, but Gran'ma Mullins says not while she's alive, no, sir. Why, it's 'way across America and up a ways, and so many people want to go up that they have to sleep three in a berth, and she says will you only think of Hiram, with the way she's brought him up, three in a berth. If the bed ain't tucked in with Gran'ma Mullins' own particular kind of tuck, Hiram kicks at night and don't get any proper nourishment out of his sleep. No, Gran'ma Mullins says she couldn't think of Hiram in the Klondike sleeping under a snow-pile and having to hunt up a whale whenever he was in need of more kerosene oil. And she says what good would millions do her with the bones of the only baby she ever had feeding whatever kind of creature they have up there. No, she says, no, and a million times more, no; she's been reading about it in a New York paper that came wrapped

around her new stove lid, and she knows all there is to know on that subject now. She says a New York paper is so interesting. She says the way they print them makes it very entertaining. She was reading about a sea serpent, and when she turned, she turned wrong, and she read twelve columns about the suffragettes, looking eagerly to see when the sea serpent was going on again. She says she give up trying to see why they print them so or ever trying to finish any one subject at a time; she just goes regularly through the paper now and lets the subjects fight it out to suit themselves. She says it makes the last part very interesting. You read about a baby, and after a while you find out whether it's the Queen of Spain's or just a race-horse. She says she supposes next Sunday there'll be a picture of Jathrop in the paper; maybe there'll be a view of this house with you and me. I think that that would be very interesting."

Susan paused to consider the idyllic little picture thus presented to her mind's eye, and Mrs. Lathrop continued to say nothing. After a while Susan went on again:

"I've been thinking a good deal about that letter, Mrs. Lathrop. I don't know whether you noticed or not, but to my order of thinking it was very strange his saying, 'How's Susan Clegg?' That's a curious thing for an unmarried man to ask his mother about an unmarried woman. When you come to consider how Jathrop was wild to marry me once, it really means a terrible lot. I was the first woman except you he ever kissed; he wasn't but a year old, and I was thirteen, but those things make an impression. I don't mind telling you that I've often thought about Jathrop nights – and days, too. And lately I've been thinking of him more and more. And you can see that he's been feeling the same about me, for he's showed that plain enough by saying in black and white, 'How's Susan Clegg?' Jathrop is a very silent nature, you can see that from his never writing even to his own mother in all these years. It means a good deal when a silent nature opens its mouth all of a sudden and writes, 'How's Susan Clegg?' And then my dreaming of him was so strange. He had soft gray fur and big bright yellow eyes, and the way he flew out of the window! Even in my dream I noticed how nice he jumped. He made a beautiful cat. And you know I always stood up for him, Mrs. Lathrop, I always did that. Even when I thought he needed lynching as much as anybody, I never said so. And now he's come back rich, and he's coming home to you and me, and he says, 'How's Susan Clegg?' 'How's – Susan – Clegg?'"

Susan's voice died dreamily away. Mrs. Lathrop said nothing. After a minute Susan's voice went on again: "It's too bad I haven't time to sort of freshen up my striped silk. It's got awful creasy laying folded so long. I'd of put some new braid around the bottom if I'd known, and if this town wasn't so noticey, I'd put my hair up on rollers to-night. A little crimp sets my wave off so. But, laws, everybody'd be asking why I did it, and if Jathrop's got any idea of me in his head, it'll be very easy to knock it right straight out if this town gets first chance at him. But I don't intend that this town shall get first chance at him. I shall be on that platform to-morrow morning, and I'll be the nearest to that train, and once he gets off that train, I shall bring him right straight up here to you and me. It's safest, and it's his duty, too. As soon as you've seen him, I'll take him over to my house to wash. Then I'll give him his breakfast, and by the time he's done his breakfast, if he really means anything, I'll know it. If he really means anything, we'll come over after breakfast, and it'll do your heart good to see how happy we'll look. He can leave his bag in father's room then, for we'll have so much to talk over it'll be more convenient to take him over there. You can see that for yourself, Mrs. Lathrop – you know how young people like to be alone together when they're engaged, and a woman of my age don't need no looking after any longer. I'm no Gran'ma Mullins to be worrying over woods nor yet any Mrs. Lupey as supposes every man you let into your house may be going to hit you over the head when you're thinking of something pleasant.

"No, I ain't afraid of Jathrop Lathrop nor of any other man alive, thank heaven. *But*, if I find out as he don't mean anything, I shall march him over to you in sharp order, bag and all. If he don't mean anything, I'll soon know the reason why, and as soon as I know the reason why, I'll send Mr. Jathrop Lathrop flying. 'How's Susan Clegg?' indeed! He'll find it's a very dangerous joke to go joking about

me, no matter how much money he's scraped out of the Klondike. A joke is a thing as I never stand, Mrs. Lathrop, and if you'd been one as joked, you'd have found that out to your deep and abiding sorrow long ago. Very few people have ever tried to have any fun with me, and I've got even with the most of them, I'm happy to remark. I shall find out yet who sent me that comic valentine with the man skipping over the edge of the world and me after him with a net, and when I do find out, I'll get even about that, too. Me with a net! I'd like to see myself skipping after any man that was skipping away from me. If he was skipping toward me, I wouldn't marry him – not 'nless I loved him. I know that. Love is a thing as you can't raise and lower just as the fancy strikes you. A woman can't love but once, and I've got a kind of warm bubbling all around my heart as tells me that I've loved that once and that it was Jathrop. It's very strange, Mrs. Lathrop, but I've been thinking of Jathrop a great deal lately. I keep remembering more and more how much I've been thinking about him. I suppose he was thinking of me, and that's what started me. 'How's Susan Clegg?' I can just seem to hear Jathrop's voice; Jathrop had a very strange voice. 'How's Susan Clegg?'

"The mind is a curious thing, when you stop to consider, Mrs. Lathrop. Mrs. Brown says Amelia says minds can communicate if you know how. Mrs. Brown says if she calls to Amelia when she's in the hammock and Amelia don't answer, Amelia always explains afterwards as she was communicating.

"It all shows that the mind is a wonderful thing. There was Jathrop and me communicating regularly, and me so little understanding what it all meant that I dreamed he was a cat. I can't get over that dream. I wonder if that meant that he's got whiskers now. If he's got whiskers, and he loves me, he's got to cut 'em right straight off. You'll have to speak to him about that as soon as you see him, Mrs. Lathrop, for I won't be able to, of course. And you can see for yourself that I couldn't have whiskers around. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, and I've had no experience with whiskers."

Mrs. Lathrop promised to remonstrate with Jathrop if he really had whiskers, and after some further conversation Susan went home and to bed and slept soundly. In the morning she was up very promptly, and Mrs. Lathrop saw her off for the station.

The whole town was at the station. But in front of them all – closest to the track – stood Susan Clegg.

It was a breathless moment when Johnny ran out with the flag and the train stopped. Susan motioned the rest back with dignity and stood her ground alone. The car door opened, and a stout, homely man, with eyes set wide apart and a very large mouth, appeared on the platform. He was well dressed and carried an alligator-skin traveling-bag.

Everybody gasped. But it was not his appearance nor the alligator-skin bag that caused them to gasp. It was that Jathrop Lathrop, returning after his long absence, had brought back a lady with him.

II

SUSAN CLEGG AND THE CHINESE LADY

And not merely a lady, but a Chinese lady at that. A particularly chubby, solemn, Chinese lady, who descended from the train which brought Jathrop Lathrop back to his native town after making a fortune in the Klondike, and meekly trotted along in his wake, carrying the large valise, while Jathrop carried the small one.

Susan walked off straightway with Jathrop and the Chinese lady, while the town remained stock and staring behind. The town was frankly "done did up." That Jathrop might return with a wife had never once entered the head of any one. Still less had the idea of any one of that community ever wedding a Chinese been entertained. It was a peculiarly overwhelming sensation, and one which led Gran'ma Mullins to lean against Hiram, while Mrs. Macy leaned against the equally firm side-wall of the station itself. It was several seconds before people came to their senses enough to go around by the track gate and look to see how far the bewildering party had got on their way. They were just crossing the square.

"Well, if that doesn't beat the Dutch," said Mr. Kimball, and his words seemed to break the deadlock; everybody scattered forthwith, all talking at once.

Meanwhile Jathrop, arriving at his mother's gate, paused and said quite easily:

"I'll go in alone, Susan; mother will like the first hour or so quite alone with me, I know. Won't you take Hop Loo to your house for breakfast?"

Susan, who had by no means as yet recovered from the shock of the Celestial bride, opened and shut her mouth once and her eyes twice, and yielded. For the nonce she seemed as speechless as Mrs. Lathrop herself. Jathrop's appealing ease of manner had overawed her all the way up from the station, and the walk had been accomplished in stately silence. If the Klondike Prodigal had been surprised over the alteration in Susan, he had not said so, and now he quietly handed Hop Loo his alligator-skin traveling-bag (or hers, whichever it was), and passing in through his mother's gate, shut it forthwith behind him, and went on up the walk. Susan cast one look, which would have thrown a basilisk into everlasting darkness, after him; and then, turning, marched back to her own gate. Hop Loo followed, Susan opened her own gate and passed through it; Hop Loo passed through after her. Susan went up her walk; Hop kept close to her heels. Together they mounted the steps and then entered the house.

It was all of half an hour before Mrs. Macy, the first completely to rally from the shock at the station, arrived to call. When she climbed the steps and rang the bell, Susan came to the door at once. She looked peculiarly grim and smileless. It was plain to be seen at the present moment that she was not pleased with the world in general.

"I thought I'd just come up for a little," began Mrs. Macy, smiling enough for two all alone by herself. Mrs. Macy always tried to keep up her own spirits in a laudable attempt, possibly, to heighten those of others. "I thought maybe you'd be glad to see a face you knew."

This allusion to the Chinese lady was not intended as unkindly as it might have been in better society, Mrs. Macy being wholly incapable of anything so subtle.

"Sit down," said Susan, briefly, indicating a porch chair. "There's no use taking you in; she's up-stairs unpacking, and she's already set about doing his cooking. It's plain to be seen that Jathrop Lathrop never come all this way from the Klondike to take any chances of being poisoned by me as soon as he got here. No, sir, Jathrop Lathrop has learned too many little tricks for that."

Susan's tone was extremely bitter. She had removed the famous striped silk and applied her hairbrush to both sides of her head after dipping it (the hairbrush, not her head) in water. It was easy to be seen that the vanities of this life had suddenly become offensive in her nostrils.

"Do you suppose she's really his wife?" asked Mrs. Macy, seating herself and looking eagerly in her friend's face.

"Oh, yes, she's his wife," said Susan.

"Oh, Susan," Mrs. Macy went on, her eyes becoming quite globular under the severe stress of her curiosity, "do you suppose anybody married 'em, or did he just buy her for beads?"

"I don't know," said Susan, rocking severely back and forth, "I don't know a *tall*. You must ask some one wiser than me what a white man does about a Chinese when he wants her to cook for him. You ought to have seen her in my kitchen, Mrs. Macy; she walked straight to my rack of pans and took down just whatever she fancied. I *never* saw the beat! No, nor nobody else. She's learned how to be cool from Jathrop and the North Pole together, looks to me. I never see such ways as Jathrop has picked up. He never said a word walking up – nothing but 'Ah' once. I don't call 'Ah' once much of a conversation for the woman as rocked your cradle and might have married you, too – if she'd wanted to. For I could have married Jathrop Lathrop, Mrs. Macy; nobody but me will ever know what passed between us, but I could have married him. I won't say what prevented, but I can tell you it wasn't him. And he's lived to regret it, too. Just like the minister regrets it. When the minister speaks of the treasure that layeth up in heaven, he doesn't mean no chicken – he means me."

Susan paused and shook her head angrily.

"I don't doubt but what he's sorry," said Mrs. Macy; "maybe he married a Chinese for fear any other kind would remind him of you."

Miss Clegg rejected this possible poetic view of Jathrop's action with a look of great disgust accompanied by another shake of the head.

"I don't believe it's very often that a man ever marries some other woman on account of any other woman. That's very pretty in books, but books ain't life. Life's life, and if Jathrop Lathrop's married that heathen Chinese, he's got very strange notions of life, and that's all I can say. Why, if she didn't lug that heavy bag along and walk a little back, and he never bothered to speak to her. She's very different from what I'd have been, I can tell you. You can maybe fancy me carrying Jathrop Lathrop's bag a little behind Jathrop Lathrop! I think I see myself. 'How's Susan Clegg?' He'll soon find out how Susan Clegg is. What do you think, Mrs. Macy, what *do* you think? When we came to his mother's gate, he just stopped, said he thought she'd like him alone best, said to me, 'Give Hop Loo some breakfast, will you?' – and then if my gentleman didn't walk through the gate and shut it after him! Well, I *never* did. There was me and his wife carefully shut out on the other side of the fence like we was pigs. And then I had to bring her over here and give her father's room. What would my dead and gone father say to a Chinese woman having his room, I wonder! Father had very fine feelings for a man as got about so little, and if he was alive, I don't believe no Jathrop Lathrop would have gone sending no heathen Chinese wife to live with *me*. She won't live with me long, I can tell you that to your face, Mrs. Macy. I took her because I was too dumb did up over having a gate shut in my face by Jathrop Lathrop to do anything else, but I ain't intending to have her long. I've always been for shutting the Chinese out, and I ain't going back on my principles at my time of life. No, indeed. 'How's Susan Clegg?'"

Susan paused angrily. Her repetition of the deceptive phrase in Jathrop's letter seemed to turn her boiling wrath into one of still, white menace. She sat perfectly still, snapping her eyelids up and down, and breathing hard.

"I don't blame you one mite, Susan," said Mrs. Macy warmly; "I wish Mrs. Lupey was here. She wanted to come, too, but she's got her bag to pack to go home. She only come for one night, and to-night'll make two, so she wants to get packed. But she knows all about the Chinese. Her husband's got a cousin who is a missionary in China, and she could have felt for you. The cousin's got eleven Chinese servants besides a Bible class of two as she's training to be missionaries after they're trained. Mrs. Lupey says she'd have known what to do when that Chinese lady got off the train this morning. They don't let 'em ride in the same cars in China."

Just here Jathrop came out of his mother's front door and walked down the path. Both ladies were freshly shocked by the sight. At the gate he turned in the opposite direction. Both ladies stared after him. Soon he was out of sight. Then they stared at each other.

"Well, what is he up to now?" Mrs. Macy finally ejaculated.

"I don't know," said Susan in a tone of complete despair as to ever again gaining any insight into the motives which moved Jathrop, "I d'n know, Mrs. Macy. Don't ask me anything about Jathrop Lathrop after he's gone home to see his mother and has handed me over a Chinese wife to board. He may be gone up to Mrs. Brown's to run off with Amelia for all I know. Nothing is ever going to surprise me any more after this day. I only know one thing, if he does run off with Amelia, that Chine'e'll find herself and his valises dumped off of my premises pretty quick. I never was one for false feelings, and I should see no call for Christian charity toward a heathen who comes to me with two black bags on her legs and a dressing-sack for an overcoat."

"I wonder if Jathrop likes her wearing such clothes," said Mrs. Macy. "Everybody is wondering."

"I don't know," said Miss Clegg, "men are very queer. There's no telling what they are going to fancy till they get out of the train married to it. Think of his having the face to write 'How's Susan Clegg?' and him married to that puzzle-blocks thing all the time. I wonder what his mother said when he told her!"

"Let's go over and see Mrs. Lathrop!" suggested Mrs. Macy, "she's over there alone now."

This idea immediately found favor with Susan. "But I'll have to go in and see what *she's* up to first," she said. "If she's caught a rat and is making soup in my teapot with it, I shan't feel to enjoy leaving her alone with my teapot."

Mrs. Macy could but feel the extreme justice of this view, and Susan, whose countenance indicated that she was sorely beset by misgivings, went into the house.

When she came out, her face wore a relieved expression.

"She's all safe," she said. "She's asleep on the floor. I must say it's changed my feelings toward her. It shows she knows her place."

They walked sedately to Mrs. Lathrop's. They climbed the back steps, and they knocked.

Mrs. Lathrop was busy making preparations for dinner. She came to the door with a promptitude which, in view of her well-known habit of deliberation, was little short of miraculous.

"We came to see how you were," said Mrs. Macy.

"Come in," said Mrs. Lathrop.

They walked in and seated themselves on two of the wooden-bottomed kitchen chairs. Mrs. Lathrop went on with her work. She was uncommonly active, and her face wore a broad, unusual smile. "Jathrop's gone up to the cemetery," she said. "He's going to have a monument put up to his father."

"What do you think of – ?" interrupted Susan.

"Yes, we come to – " began Mrs. Macy.

"He's going," continued Mrs. Lathrop, taking down a plate and blowing the thick dust from its surface, "to have an awful handsome monument put up. Not a animal like you put up to your father, Susan, but a angel hanging to a pillar with both hands and feeling for a cloud with its feet. He showed me the picture. And he's going to have the parlor papered and give the town a watering-trough for horses, with a tin cup on a chain for people, and he's – "

"Yes, but – " interrupted Susan.

"You know, of course – " began Mrs. Macy.

Mrs. Lathrop swept off the top of the rolling-pin with the stove-brush. "And he's going to build me on a bedroom right off the hall," she continued, "and put a furnace under the whole house. And one of those lamps that haul up and down, and a new set of kitchen things, and he'll come here every year and see if I want anything else, and if I do, I'm to have it. I'm to have a pew in church, even

if I never do go to church, and a paper every day, and his baby picture done big, and be fitted for new glasses."

"But, Mrs. Lathrop – " Susan interrupted, seeing that Mrs. Lathrop was surely still in ignorance as to her Mongolian daughter-in-law.

"Yes, you – " began Mrs. Macy.

"Liza Em'ly is to do all the sewing I want," went on Mrs. Lathrop, proceeding with her baking preparations at a great rate, "and Jathrop'll pay the bill. And any things I want, I'm just to send for, and Jathrop'll pay the bill; and anything I can think of what I want done, I'm just to say so, and Jathrop'll pay the bill."

It seemed as if Susan Clegg would burst at this. It was plain now that Jathrop really was rich, and here was his mother supposing the rose was utterly thornless.

"But did he tell you about his wife?" she broke in desperately. "That's what I want to know."

Mrs. Lathrop, who was mixing butter and sugar together in a yellow bowl, stopped suddenly and stared.

"His wife!" she said blankly.

"Yes, his wife," repeated Susan.

"The wife he brought back with him," explained Mrs. Macy.

"The wife he – " Mrs. Lathrop pushed the yellow bowl a little back on the table and rested her hands on the edge. They trembled visibly; "the wife he – " she repeated.

"Surely you know that he brought his wife back with him?" said Mrs. Macy. "Surely he's told you?"

Mrs. Lathrop – turned her usual dumb self again – looked at Mrs. Macy with almost unseeing eyes.

"I – " she ejaculated faintly, "no, he – "

"Now, you see," exclaimed Susan, half to the friend and half to the stricken mother, "it don't make any difference what a man turns into outside, he stays just the same inside. What have I always said to you, Mrs. Lathrop? You can't make no kind of a purse out of ears like Jathrop's. Jathrop Lathrop could turn into fifty millionaires, and he'd still be Jathrop Lathrop. He can hang all the angels he pleases and water all the horses from here to Meadville, and still he never could be any other man but just himself. And being himself, he never by no manner of means could be frank and open. He was always one that held things back. You thought it was because he didn't have no brains, but you was his mother and naturally looked on the best side of him. But he never deceived me, Mrs. Lathrop; I saw through Jathrop right from the start. There was a foxiness about Jathrop as nobody never fully saw into but me. That was my reason for never marrying him – one of my many reasons, for his foxiness hasn't been the only thing about Jathrop that I've seen through. I never was one to soften the blows to a tempered lamb, so I will say that so many reasons for not loving a man as I've seen in Jathrop I never see in any other man yet. But none of my reasons for not marrying him has ever equalled this new reason as has cropped up now in his bringing home a wife. When a man comes home with a wife, then you do see through him for good and all, and when Jathrop come scrambling out from between those two cars this morning with a heathen Chinee at his heels – "

Mrs. Lathrop screamed loudly. "A – "

"Heathen Chinee," repeated Susan.

"You know what a Chinee is, don't you?" interposed Mrs. Macy; "they're from China, you know."

Mrs. Lathrop retreated to her rocker with a totter.

"Yes, she's a heathen Chinee," said Susan, with unflinching firmness, "the kindest heart in the world couldn't mistake her for anything even as high up as a nigger. Her eyes cross just under her nose, and she's got her hair wound round her head with a piece of black tape to hold it on. She wears divided skirts as is most plainly divided, and not a gore has she got to her name or her figure. She

is a Chinese and no mistake, and you may believe me or not, just as you please, Mrs. Lathrop, but Jathrop without a so much as by-your-leave dumped her onto me for breakfast, and she's asleep on father's floor now."

"On your – " gasped Mrs. Lathrop.

"No, on father's," said Susan, "and now, Mrs. Lathrop, you see what he is at last. He not only marries a Chinese when if he'd been patient he might have got a white one, but he brings her home, and don't even tell you he's brought her home, or even that he's got her, or even that he's married her, or anything. A man might line my house with furnaces and have his baby picture done big in every room, and I'd never forgive his acting in such a way. I never hear the beat. It throws all the other calamities as ever come upon anybody in this community clean out of the shade. What will be the use of your having a pew in church; you won't even be able to face the minister now with your son's marrying one of them as we have to give our good money to teach to wear clothes. What good will your having the parlor papered be with everybody ashamed to go to see a woman who has got a Chinese daughter. To my order of thinking, you was better off poor. Why, they eat the hen's nests, the Chinese do, and prefer 'em to the eggs. It's small wonder I dreamed Jathrop was a cat, with him descending on us like the wrath of heaven married to a China woman. Jathrop's no fool though, and if you'd seen that humble heathen going along back of him with his big valise, you'd have to see as the man as picks out a wife like that never could have been a fool. I felt for her, I really did, only she was watching me with the wrong eye all the time, and it made me dizzy to try and look at her kindly. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Lathrop, when Jathrop comes back, you'll just go for him and give it to him good. Men must learn as they can't bring their Chinese wives into this community. There's a principle as we'd ought to live up to whether we enjoy it or not, and it's all against marrying Chinese. The Chinese are all right, I hope and trust, but nothing as feeds itself with a toothpick had ever ought to be held pressed to the bosom of families like you and me, Mrs. Lathrop. It isn't the way we're brought up to look at them, and it's a well-known fact as no matter what the leopard does to the Ethiopian, he sticks to his spot just the same as before – "

"But – " broke in Mrs. Lathrop.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mrs. Lathrop, – we've been friends too long for me not to feel kindly to you, – but Mrs. Macy is a witness to his bringing her, even if I wasn't well known to be one as never lies. Mrs. Macy is a witness, too, to how he's got her dressed, and a more burning disgrace than this keeping your chosen wife in loose overalls and a jacket as any monkey on a hand-organ would weep to see the fit of, I never see. It may be the custom in the Klondike and may be convenient for sliding, but this is no sliding community, and, to my order of thinking, Jathrop would have showed you more affection and us more respect if he'd bought his wife a bonnet and a shawl before he brought her here."

Susan paused for breath. Mrs. Lathrop continued speechless. Mrs. Macy tried to lighten the atmosphere by remarking, "Lands, she's got a pigtail, too."

Susan picked up the cudgels afresh at that. "Wound twice around her head," she said bitterly; "oh, she *is* a figure of fun and no mistake. I d'n know, I'm sure, what Jathrop was ever thinking of the day he picked her out, but this I do know, and that is, that he'd better pick her off of me pretty quick. You know, Mrs. Lathrop, as a friend is a friend and I've always been a good friend to you, but I never was one to stand any nonsense – not now and not never – and when a man writes, 'I'm rich' and 'How's Susan Clegg?' he gets me where no Chinese wife ain't going to please me in a hurry. I'm glad Jathrop is rich, on your account, Mrs. Lathrop, but his being rich don't alter my views of him a mite. I look upon him as a gray deceiver, that's what I look upon him as, and if he's brought a piece of carnelian or anything back to me, you can tell him to give it to his lawfully wedded wife, for I don't want to have nothing more to do with him."

"But, Susan – " broke in poor Mrs. Lathrop.

"Don't interrupt me, Mrs. Lathrop; I'm in no mood to listen to no one just now. I ain't mad, but I'm hurt. It's no wonder I dreamed he was a cat, for of all the sly, back-door things a cat is the meanest. And there was always something very cat-like about Jathrop Lathrop – something soft and slow and creepy – nothing bold and out-spoken. I might have known as even if he did come home rich, he'd find a way to even it up. And now look how he has evened it up. Think of your grandchildren; there won't be one of 'em able to ever look anybody straight in more'n one eye at once. Marrying Chinese is terrible, anyway – in some States it's forbidden. It's to be hoped Jathrop'll keep out of those States or he may land in the penitentiary yet."

Just here the front door slammed, and Jathrop's voice was heard calling, "Where are you, mother?"

He didn't wait for an answer, but came straight through the kitchen. Entering there, what he saw startled him so much that he came to a sudden halt.

"We've been telling your – " began Mrs. Macy.

" – mother about your wife," finished up Susan.

Jathrop looked at all three in great astonishment. "About my *wife!*" he repeated. "Did you say 'my wife'?"

"Yes," said Susan, absolutely undaunted. "I think it would have been kinder in you to have broke it to her yourself; but anyhow, we've done it now."

"Oh, Jathrop, my son, my son!" wailed poor Mrs. Lathrop in heart-wringing Biblical paraphrase.

"But I haven't got any wife," said Jathrop. "What under the sun do you mean?"

There was a clammy pause; Susan and Mrs. Macy clasped hands.

"What made you think I had one?" Jathrop asked, quite bewildered. "Who said I had one?"

Susan rose with dignity and coughed. Mrs. Macy rose, too, looking at Susan. Poor Mrs. Lathrop seemed fairly terror-stricken.

"I think I'll go now," said Susan. "I hope I needn't board her much longer, that's all. Even if she's only using the floor, it's a floor as has been sacred to my dead father up to now, and a dead father is not to be lightly took in vain by a heathen Chineese."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Jathrop, appearing genuinely bewildered. "I don't understand. What are you talking about?"

Susan moved toward the door; Mrs. Macy faltered. "Maybe it was all right in the Klondike," she began, trying to put a brace under the situation.

"Maybe what was all right in the Klondike?" asked Jathrop.

"To buy her with beads."

"To buy who with beads? Who's her?" Jathrop's voice was becoming exasperated.

"Hop Loo," said Susan, in a tone of piercing scorn, "the Chinese lady as you brought with you and gave me to board."

Jathrop looked at them all in amazement. "But Hop Loo's a boy – my boy," he said.

"Your boy!" said Susan.

"Yes, my boy."

Miss Clegg turned and gave him a long look fraught with disgust, pity, and hopeless resignation.

"Jathrop Lathrop," she said, "I *did* suppose you had some sense even in the view of all that's dead and gone, but I guess now I'll have to give up. I did have some respect for you while I thought she was maybe your wife, but if you've gone so clean crazy that you believe that that is your boy – well!"

Susan thereupon sailed out of Mrs. Lathrop's house with Mrs. Macy wobbling in her wake.

III

SUSAN CLEGG SOLVES THE MYSTERY

Susan Clegg and Mrs. Macy walked down to Mrs. Lathrop's gate, and out of her gate and to Miss Clegg's gate; the whole in a silence deadly and impressive. Mrs. Macy paused there.

"I don't believe I'll come in," she said doubtfully.

"I don't blame you," said Susan, "I wouldn't if it was me. Jathrop's boy, indeed! What kind of a man is it as'll have a Chinese family and go forcing them onto the true and long-tried friends of his one and only mother!"

"I can't see why he didn't leave the boy in the Klondike," said Mrs. Macy slowly and reflectively. "I thought men always left their Chinese families just where they found 'em. It's strange Jathrop brought him home with him."

"You see now what my dream meant," said Susan darkly, "a cat, indeed. It's small wonder I knew the cat was Jathrop Lathrop. Of all the mean, sly, creeping creatures that ever come up against the back of your legs sudden a cat is the worst. A snake is open and aboveboard beside a cat. You can see a snake. You don't see 'em often around here, thank heaven."

"Well, we haven't seen Jathrop often around here for a long time," said Mrs. Macy, whose mind was as given to easy logical deduction as many of her mental caliber, "and we do see a lot of cats – you know that, Susan."

"How's Susan Clegg?" quoted Susan in a tone of reflective wrath. "I don't know whether you know it or not, Mrs. Macy, but Jathrop asked after me in his letter to his mother, and him with a Chinese wife. 'How's Susan Clegg?' What did he write that for if he was married, I'd like to know."

"Maybe he wanted to know how you were," suggested Mrs. Macy.

The look she received in recognition of this offered explanation led to her immediately proposing to go on home. "You've got the Chinaman to look after, anyhow," she added.

"You'd better come in while I go up and look at him again," said Susan shortly. "It's a very strange sensation to be alone in your house with what you fully and freely take to your dead father's bed and board, supposing it's a wife, and then find out as it's her son instead. Come on in."

Mrs. Macy was easily persuaded, and they thereupon went up the walk. "I guess I'll go see if he's still asleep," Susan said when they reached the piazza, and Mrs. Macy forthwith sat down to await what might come of it.

Susan was absent but a few minutes; she returned with a fresh layer of disapproval upon her face.

"Is he still sleeping?" Mrs. Macy asked.

"Yes, he's still sleeping," Miss Clegg replied, jerking a chair forward for herself. "You'd know he was Jathrop Lathrop's child just by the way he sleeps. You remember what a one Jathrop always was for sleeping. I don't know as I remember Jathrop's ever being awake till he was fairly grown. Whatever you set him at always just made him more sleepy. You know yourself, Mrs. Macy, as he wouldn't be no grasshopper with Mrs. Lathrop for his mother, but a cocoon is a comet beside what Jathrop Lathrop always was. I don't know whether he's rich or not, but I do know that heathen Chinese is his son, and I know it just by the way he sleeps."

"And so Jathrop's rich," said Mrs. Macy, rocking agreeably to and fro, and evidently striving toward more pleasant conversation.

"Yes," said Susan darkly, "rich and with a Chinese wife somewhere. Just as often as I think of Jathrop Lathrop writing, 'How's Susan Clegg,' with a Chinese wife I feel more and more tempered, and I can't conceal my feelings. I never was one to conceal anything; if I had a Chinese wife the whole world might know it."

Just here Gran'ma Mullins hove in sight, coming slowly and laboriously up the street.

"Why, there's Gran'ma Mullins!" Mrs. Macy exclaimed. "She's surely coming to see you, too." Both ladies remained silent, watching the progress of Gran'ma Mullins.

Gran'ma Mullins arrived a good deal out of breath. Susan brought a chair out of the house for her.

"I come to – tell you," panted the new visitor as soon as she had attained unto the chair, "that Jathrop's – things is – coming."

"What things?" asked Susan.

"They all come on – the ten o'clock – from the junction; Hiram is helping unload."

"What's he brought?" Susan asked.

"Well, he's brought an automobile," said Gran'ma Mullins, "and a lot of other trunks and boxes."

"An automobile!" exclaimed Mrs. Macy, "well, he *is* rich then!"

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Susan, "some very poor folks is riding that way nowadays."

"And he brought three trunks and seventeen big wooden boxes," continued Gran'ma Mullins, "big boxes."

"Three trunks and sev-en-teen – Three trunks and sev-en – " Susan's voice faded into nothingness.

"Goodness knows what's in them," said Gran'ma Mullins. "Hiram was getting so hot unloading that I wanted him to stop and let me fan him, but he wouldn't hear to it. Hiram's so brave. If he said he'd unload something, he'd unload it if he dropped dead under it and was smashed to nothing."

There was a pause of unlimited bewilderment while Mrs. Macy and Susan raised Jathrop upon the pedestal erected by his three trunks, seventeen boxes and the automobile.

"And to think of his having a Chinese wife," Susan exclaimed, the keen edge of sorrow cutting crossways through all her words.

It was just here that Mrs. Lupey now appeared, approaching at a good pace. Mrs. Lupey was a large, imposing woman and wore a silk dolman with fringe. It was immediately necessary for the party to adjourn to the sitting-room, as the piazza was strictly limited.

It was Mrs. Lupey who without loss of time did away with the Lathrop parentage of the young Chinese.

"Why, he's his servant, of course," she said in a lofty scorn. "I'm surprised you didn't know that by his age."

"I did think of his age," Susan said, "but I read once in some paper as the women in China get married when they're four years old, so you'd never be able to tell nothing by the age of no one there. Well, well, and so she isn't his wife, nor yet his son. Well, I'm glad – for Mrs. Lathrop's sake."

"But if Jathrop's really got a automobile and seventeen trunks, he *must* be awful rich," said Mrs. Macy. "It'll be a great thing for this town if Jathrop's rich. He'd ought to be very grateful to the place where his happy childhood memories run around barefoot."

"Oh, he'll remember," said Gran'ma Mullins, "it's easy to remember when you've got the money to do it. But I hope to heaven he won't set Hiram off on that track again. Hiram does so want to go away and make a fortune; I'm worried for fear he will all the time. And Lucy wants him to, too. I can't understand a woman as wants a fortune worse than she wants Hiram. Lucy doesn't seem to want Hiram 'round at all any more. If he's asleep, she starts right in making the bed the same as if he wasn't in it, and if she's sewing, he don't dare go within the length of her thread."

"Life has come to a pretty pass when a wife'll run a needle into a husband just for the simple pleasure of feeling him go away when she sticks him." Gran'ma Mullins sighed.

"I wonder what they're doing now!" Mrs. Macy said.

All four turned at this and looked toward the Lathrop house together. It was quiet as usual.

"I d'n know as it changes my opinion of Jathrop much, that being his servant," said Miss Clegg suddenly. "It's kind of different, his handing his wife or his son over to me; but his heathen Chinese servant! I don't know as I'm very pleased."

"Pleased!" said Mrs. Lupey. "Why, in San Francisco they make 'em live underground like rats."

"Maybe that was why you dreamed he was a cat, Susan?" suggested Mrs. Macy, whose brain seemed to grasp at the subject under consideration with special illumination.

Susan rose. "I think you'd better go," she said abruptly, "I've got to get dinner. My mind's in no state to deal with all these sides of Jathrop and his Chinaman just now."

What the day brought up the street and in and around Mrs. Lathrop's house would take too long to catalogue. Suffice it to say that poor Mrs. Lathrop, who had been for long years the veriest zero in the life of the community, became suddenly its center and apex.

When Jathrop went to New York at the end of the week, he left his mother not only sitting, but rocking in the lap of luxury, with her head leaning back against more luxury and her feet braced firmly on yet more luxury. Even her friend over the way was rendered utterly content.

And the pleasantest part of it all was the way that it affected Susan Clegg. As Susan sat by Mrs. Lathrop and turned upon her that tender gaze which one old friend may turn on another old friend when the latter's son has suddenly bloomed forth golden, her full heart found utterance thus:

"Well, Mrs. Lathrop – well, Mrs. Lathrop, I guess no one will ever doubt anything again. Talk about dreams, *now!* I dreamed Jathrop was a cat, and the reason was that it's a well-known fact that cats *always* come back. Why, Mrs. Macy told me once how she chloroformed a cat, and put it in a flour sack with a stone, and put the sack in a hogshead of water, and put the cover on the hogshead, and put a stone – another stone – on that, and went to church to hear the minister preach on 'Do unto others as you do unto others,' and when she came back, the cat was asleep on top of the hogshead, and Mrs. Macy got the worst shock she ever got. So you can easy see why I dreamed Jathrop was a cat; and he *did* come back.

"I declare that'll always be the pleasantest recollection of my life, how I met him at the station and how we came chatting up the street together. How he has improved, Mrs. Lathrop – not but what he was always handsome! There was always something noble about Jathrop. Gran'ma Mullins said yesterday as he made her think of a man she saw in a play once as stood on his crossed legs in front of a fire and smoked. So careless.

"And then his bringing Mrs. Macy that polar-bear skin! Mrs. Macy says if there was one spot in the whole wide world where she never expected to set foot it was on top of a polar bear, and now she can stand on her head on one if the fancy takes her. I saw the minister when I was down in the square to-night, and he told me not to speak of it, but he thought a service of prayer for any stocks and mines as Jathrop has would be the only fitting form of gratitude which a reverent and affectionate congregation might offer to the great and glorious generosity of him who is going to give us a steeple after all these years of finishing flat at the top. Mr. Kimball came out to tell me to ask you if you'd like some one to come regularly for your order, and he says he'll keep caviare from now on, just on the chance of Jathrop's being here to eat it; he says why he didn't keep it before was he thought it was a kind of chamois skin.

"It's beautiful to see the faces down-town, Mrs. Lathrop; you never saw nothing like it. Everybody's just so happy. Hiram is grinning from ear to ear over being took to the Klondike, and everybody is sworn to not let Gran'ma Mullins know he's going. He's going to climb out of the window at night and get away that way, and Gran'ma Mullins won't mind what she feels when he really does come back a millionaire, too. She'll be just like you, Mrs. Lathrop; no one minds anything once it's over. Little misunderstandings are easy forgot.

"And to think there's been a blue automobile puffing at these very kitchen steps! To think you and me was over to Meadville and back between dinner and supper one day! I guess Mrs. Lupey never got such a start. She'd been all the morning getting home on the train and was only just putting her bonnet away in its box when we rolled up. I never enjoyed nothing like that roll up in all my life! I never see automobiles from the automobile's side before, but now I can. When a automobile goes over a duck it makes all the difference in the world whether it's your automobile or your duck.

"And then Jathrop's generosity! Not but what he was always generous. Deacon White says he will say that for Jathrop, he was always generous. And look what he brought home. Every child in town is just about out of their senses. Felicia Hemans is crazy about the earrings, and 'Liza Em'ly won't never take off the bracelet. Mr. Shores can't keep the tears back when he looks at his watch charm. I think it was so kind of Jathrop. But Jathrop was always kind; you know yourself that a kinder creature never lived than Jathrop. I always said that for him.

"And then his having a new fence built around the cemetery. It was thoughtful, and Judge Fitch says nobody can't say more. But Judge Fitch says Jathrop was always thoughtful; he says he's been interested in him always just for that very reason. Judge Fitch says Jathrop's nature was always that deep kind that's easy overlooked. He says he'll have to confess to his shame that some of the time he overlooked him himself. He says it's very difficult to understand a deep nature, because if a deep nature don't make money, there's hardly any way of ever knowing that it really was deep; people just think you're a fool then – like we always thought Jathrop was. You know, nobody ever thought he ever could amount to nothing. You know that yourself, Mrs. Lathrop. But making money lets you see just what a person's got in 'em and see it plain.

"I'm sure for all I've loved Jathrop as if he was going to be my own, for years and years and years, still I never credited him with being the man he is. I supposed he was a tramp somewhere – yes, I really did, Mrs. Lathrop, you may believe me or not, but that's just what I thought when I thought anything at all about him – which wasn't often.

"Everybody in the whole place is busy remembering pleasant things about him now. The minister's wife remembers his coming to a Christmas tree once a long time ago when they both was little; she says she hasn't thought of it in thirty years, but she remembers it as plain as day now, – he had on a coat and a little tie.

"And Gran'ma Mullins says she never will forget the day before he was born, for she went to town and dropped her little bead bag, and you know how much she thinks of her little bead bag now when the beads is all worn off, so you can think what store she set by it when the beads were still on, and so she was all back and forth along the road hunting for it the whole blessed afternoon, and when she found it and went home, she *was* tired, and she slept late next morning because her husband was out very late the night before, and when he slept late she always slept late, 'cause she said sleeping late was almost the only treat he ever give her, and, anyhow, when they did wake up and get up and get out, there was Jathrop, and she says she shall never forget her joy over having found the bead bag again.

"Mrs. Macy says she remembers the day he hid, and you thought he was in the cistern, and you was kneeling down looking in when he jumped out from behind the stove and give you such a start you went in head first.

"I remember that day myself, too – father was insisting he was paralyzed then, and mother and me wouldn't take his word for it, and we fully expected he'd race over and help haul you out, but all he said was, 'She'll have to manage the best she can – I'm paralyzed,' and we really began to believe him from then on.

"The minister says he shall always remember how well he looked when he put on long trousers; the minister's preparing a little paper on Jathrop to read at the Sunday-school annual, and he says he shall begin with the day he put on long trousers and then mark his rise step by step. The minister's so pleased over Jathrop's patting Brunhilde Susan on the head; he says there are pats and pats, but that pat that Jathrop give Brunhilde Susan was what he calls, in pure and Biblical simplicity, *a pat*."

Susan paused. Mrs. Lathrop just felt her diamond solitaires, glanced at the new kitchen range, and was silent.

"And then, Mrs. Lathrop, that dear blessed little Chinese angel – I tell you I shall never forget that boy. I liked his face when I first laid eyes on him, and when I thought he was Jathrop's lawful wife, I loved him as I'd loved even a Chinaman if he was your daughter; but when I saw him cleaning up my sink, polishing my pans, washing out my cupboards and all that, just the same as yours, *then*

was when I see that a heathen Chinee has just the same right to go to heaven that anybody else has, and from then on I just trusted him completely and let him do every bit of the work till he left.

"I see now why everybody's so happy being a missionary if you can just get away and live with the Chinee. I'd have kept that boy if Jathrop hadn't wanted him – I'd have been very glad to; and it's awful to think we're keeping quiet, lovable natures like his from settling here. A girl might do much worse than marry that Chinese —*very* much worse. A very great deal worse. Though I suppose many would hesitate."

Mrs. Lathrop rose, went to the cupboard, took out a bottle of homemade gooseberry wine, poured out a little, and took a sip. She did not offer any to Susan.

"It'll do you good," said Susan encouragingly. "I don't like the taste myself, but it'll do you good. Besides, Mrs. Lathrop, you must begin to get used to it. When you go around with Jathrop in his private car, you'll have to drink wine, and if I was you, I'd stop tying a stocking around your neck nights, for you'll have to wear a very different cut of gowns soon. If Jathrop buys that yacht he's gone to look at, you'll have to wear a sailor blouse."

"Oh," said Mrs. Lathrop faintly, "oh, Susan, I – " Miss Clegg put her hastily back into her chair.

"Never mind if it does make your head go 'round a little, Mrs. Lathrop; you must learn how. It may be hard, but it'll make Jathrop happy, and now he's come back rich, that's what everybody wants to do.

"Mrs. Brown says next time he comes she's going to make him a jet-black pound-cake, and Mrs. Allen says she's going to work him a pincushion. She says it'll be a plain, simple token of affection, but those whom Fortune smiles on soon learn to know the true worth of a simple gift of purest love. She says no one has ever known how she loved Jathrop, 'cause she kept it to herself for fear you'd think she was after him for Polly."

Mrs. Lathrop rocked dreamily.

Susan rose to go.

"Don't – " said Mrs. Lathrop.

"I must," said Susan. "Oh, Mrs. Lathrop, think of his giving me those fifty shares of stock just on account of my long-suffering friendship for you. I declare he's a great character – that's all I can say.

"I always had a feeling he'd end in some unusual way; when they started to lynch him, I thought that was the way, but now I see that this was the way, and I thank heaven that I wasn't right the other time and am right this time. For human nature is human nature, Mrs. Lathrop, and people are always kinder to a woman whose son comes home from the Klondike a millionaire than they are if they had the bother of lynching him, no matter how much he may have deserved it."

Mrs. Lathrop continued to finger her solitaire earrings in happy silence. Miss Clegg, who never exhibited any tenderness toward anything, went over and arranged the fold-over of her friend's gold-embroidered, silk-quilted kimono.

"I'll be glad when your new hair gets here, Mrs. Lathrop," she said tenderly, "it'll make a different woman of you. It's astonishing what a little extra hair can do; I always feel that when I put on my wave.

"You and me will have to be getting used to all kinds of new things now. And that beautiful dream of mine letting us know he was coming. Mrs. Brown says Amelia says the Egyptians worshipped cats and used to pickle them when they died.

"It's astonishing how, if you know enough, you can see how any dream is full of meaning. There's Jathrop so fond of pickles, and you and me worshipping him. And he writing in every letter he has time to get somebody to write for him, 'How's Susan Clegg?'"

Mrs. Lathrop lapsed into beatific slumber. Susan Clegg went quietly home.

IV

SUSAN CLEGG AND THE OLIVE BRANCH

It was not in reason to suppose that the return of Jathrop Lathrop should continue to occupy wholly the attention of the community. Each week – even each day – brought its fresh interests. Not the least exciting of the provocative elements was borne back from the metropolis to which 'Liza Em'ly, that hitherto negatively regarded olive branch of the ministerial family, had but recently emigrated. 'Liza Em'ly, it was whispered one day, had written a book.

The Sewing Society, at its next meeting, discussed it, as a matter of course; and Susan Clegg, equally as a matter of course, promptly reported the proceedings to her friend and neighbor, Mrs. Lathrop.

"Well," she began, sitting down with the heavy thump of one who is completely and utterly overcome, "I give up. It's beyond me. I was to the Sewing Society, and it's beyond them all, too. The idea of 'Liza Em'ly's writing a book! No one can see how she ever come to think as she could write a book. No one can see where she got any ideas to put in a book. I don't know what any one thought she *would* do when she set out for the city to earn her own living, but there wasn't a soul in town as expected her to do it, let alone writing a book, too. I can't see whatever gives any one the idea of earning their living by writing books. Books always seem so sort of unnecessary to me, anyway – I ain't read one myself in years. No one in this community ever does read, and that's what makes everybody so surprised over 'Liza Em'ly, after living among us so long and so steady, starting up all of a sudden and doing anything like this. And what makes it all the more surprising is she never said a word about it either – never wrote home to the family or told a living soul. And so you can maybe imagine the shock to the minister when he got word as his own flesh and blood daughter had not only written a book but got it all printed without consulting him. His wife says he was completely done up and could hardly speak for quite a little while, and later when the newspaper clippings begin to come, he had to go to bed and have a salt-water cloth over his eyes. I tell you, Mrs. Lathrop, the minister is a very sensitive nature; it's no light thing to a sensitive nature to get a shock like a daughter's writing a book."

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