

Quick Herbert

Yellowstone Nights



Herbert Quick

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CHAPTER I

It was August the third – and the rest of it. Being over Montana, and the Rockies, the skies were just as described by Truthful James. In the little park between the N. P. Station and the entrance to Yellowstone Park a stalwart young fellow and a fluffy, lacy, Paquined girl floated from place to place with their feet seven or eight inches from the earth – or so it seemed. They disappeared behind some shrubbery and sat down on a bench, where the young man hugged the girl ferociously, and she, with that patient endurance which is the wonder and glory of womanhood, suffered it uncomplainingly. In fact she reciprocated it.

Note that we said a moment ago that they disappeared. From whose gaze? Not from ours, for we saw them sit and – and what followed. Their disappearance was from the view of a slender man of medium height who was off toward the station, inspecting the salvias, the phloxes, the cannas, the coleis, the materials with which the walks were paved, and the earth in the flower-beds. He looked the near things over with a magnifying-glass, and scrutinized the far landscape with field-glasses. When he removed his traveling cap, one saw that he was bald, though not so bald as he seemed – his weak and neutral hair blended so in color with the neutral shades of his face and garb.

As he looked at things near and far, from the formal garden of the little park to the towering peak of Electric Mountain, which flew a pennon of cloud off to the west, or Sepulcher Mountain, half lost in an unaccustomed haze to the south, but displaying above the blue its enormous similitude of a grave, with the stone at head and foot, he made notes in his huge pocket-book, and in making notes he approached closer and closer to the big boy and little girl on the bench. In fact, he stopped on the other side of the bush, and as the lovers kissed for the tenth time, at least, he stepped round toward them, peering into the top of the bushes, pencil poised to jot down the cause of the chirping sound which had greeted his ears.

"I think I heard young birds in this bush," said he.

"You did," responded the young man, blushing.

"This park is full of them," said the girl, rather less embarrassed.

"Did you note the species?" queried he of the glasses. "I seem quite unable to catch sight of them."

"They are turtle-doves," said the girl.

"Gulls!" said the man.

The girl giggled hysterically. The naturalist was protesting that gulls never nest in such places, and the young man was becoming hopelessly confused, when a fourth figure joined the group. He was clad in garments of the commonest sort – but the girl was at once struck by the fact that he wore a soft roll collar on his flannel shirt, and a huge red silk neckerchief. Moreover, he carried a long whip which he trailed after him in the grass.

"Local color at last!" she whispered to her lover. "I know we're going to have a shooting or a cow-boy adventure!"

"Well," the new-comer said, "do you go with us, or not, Doc?"

"Go with you?" asked the ornithologist. "Go where?"

"Tour of the Park?" replied the man with the whip. "I'm having hard work to get a load."

"I think," said the person addressed, "that I can finish my inspection of the Park on foot. It is, in fact, surprisingly small, and not at all what I had expected. I have been pacing it off. There are very few acres in it – "

"I'll be dog-goned," said the man with the whip, "if he don't think *this* is the Yellowstone Park! Stranger, look at yon beautiful arch, erected by Uncle Sam out of hexagonal blocks of basalt! That marks the entrance to the Wonderland of the World, a matchless nat'ral park of more'n three thousand square miles, filled with unnat'ral wonders of nature! This is the front yard of the railroad station. It'll take you days and days to do the Park – an' years to do it right."

"Oh, in that case," responded the investigator, "of course you may rely upon my joining you!"

"I want two more, lady," said the driver. "What say?"

"No," said the young man. "We've decided to cut the Park out."

"I've changed my mind, I believe," said the girl. "Let's go!"

"But I thought – "

And so the party was made up. It was like one of those strange meetings that take place on shipboard, on the wharves of ports – wherever fate takes men in her hands, shakes them like dice, and throws them on the board – and peeps at them to see what pairs, threes, flushes and other harmonies make up the strength of the cast.

There were seven of them. In the rear seat of the surrey sat two young men wearing broad-brimmed Stetsons, and corduroys. Their scarfs were pronouncedly Windsor, and the ends thereof streamed in the breeze as did the pennon of cloud from the top of Electric Peak off there in the west. The one with the long hair and the Dresden-china complexion starting to peel off at the lips, was the Minor Poet who eked out a living by the muck-raker's dreadful trade. He spoke of our malefactors of great wealth as "burglars" and grew soft-eyed and mute as the splendors of the Yellowstone Wonderland grew upon him. With him was a smaller man, shorter of hair, and younger in years – which youth was advertised by its disguise: a dark, silky Vandyke. He was an artist who was known to the readers of *Puck*, *Judge* and *Life* for his thick-lipped "coons" and shapeless hoboes, and who was here in the Park with the Poet for the purpose of drawing pictures for a prose poem which should immortalize both. So much for the rear seat.

The next seat forward was sacred to love. That is, it was occupied by the Bride and Groom, who called each other by the names of "Billy" and "Dolly," and tried to behave as if very mature and long-married – with what success we have seen. It was in pursuance of this scheme that they deliberately refused to take the rear seat when it was pointedly offered them by the Poet and the Artist. They were very quiet now, the Bride in stout shoes, mountain-climbing skirt and sweater, the Groom in engineer's boots and khaki. In the next seat forward sat the man of note-books, field-glasses, magnifying-glasses and drabs. The driver called him at first "Doc"; but soon adopted the general usage by which he was dubbed "Professor." He was myopic; but proud of his powers of observation. So wide was his reading that he knew nothing. His tour of the Park was made as a step toward that mastery of all knowledge which he had adopted as his goal. At once he saw that the rest of the party were light-minded children, frittering life away; and at once they took his measure. This made for mutual enjoyment. Nothing so conduces to good relations as the proper niching of the members of the party.

With him sat Colonel Baggs, of Omaha, who smoked all the time and quoted Blackstone and Kent for his seat-mate's Epictetus and Samuel Smiles. Whenever time hung heavy on the party for sheer lack of power to wonder, Colonel Baggs restored tonicity to their brains by some far-fetched argument to which he provoked Professor Boggs, wherein the Colonel violated all rules and escaped confusion by the most transparent fakir's tricks, solemnly regarding the Professor with one side of his face, and winking and grimacing at those behind with the other.

In the driver's seat sat Aconite Driscoll, erstwhile cow-boy, but now driver of a Yellowstone surrey, with four cayuses in hand, and a whip in place of the quirt of former years. When you tour the Yellowstone may he be your guide, driver, protector, entertainer and friend.

So they were seven, as I remarked. The Bride counted out as for I-spy, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven; All good children go to heaven!" The Minor Poet said, "We are seven." The Artist quoted, "Seven men from all the world" – and looked at the Bride. "Back to Docks again," she

continued, knowing her Kipling, "'Rolling down the Ratcliffe Road, drunk and raising Cain.' Thanks for including me as a man." The Artist bowed. "Anyhow," said the Poet, "'We are seven.'"

They were all in the surrey and Aconite had the reins in hand, his whip poised, and his lips pursed for the initiatory chirrup, when there put his foot on the hub the Hired Man, who looked the part and presently explained that he worked on farms as a regular thing, and who was to be number eight. "If this seven business is eatin' yeh so bad," said he, "'kain't I make a quadrille of it? I never pay fare, nowheres; but I kin cook, 'n drive, 'n rustle firewood, 'n drive tent-pins – an' you seem to have an empty seat. What say?" Aconite looked back into the faces of his load. All looked at the Bride as commander-in-chief – the Bride nodded. "Shore!" said Aconite. "Hop in!"

They rolled through the great arch at the entrance, and bowled along the road in breath-taking style as they crossed bridge after bridge, the walls of Gardiner Cañon towering on each side with its left-hand copings crumbling into pinnacles like ruined battlements, on which sat fishing-eagles as sentinels, their eyes scanning the flashing stream below. The wild roses were still in sparse bloom; the cottonwood groves showed splotches of brilliant yellow; the cedars gloomed in steady and dependable green. Autumn leaves and spring flowers, and over all a sky of ultramarine.

"See there!" exclaimed the Bride, pointing at the huge stream of hot water where Boiling River bursts from its opening in the rocks, and falls steaming into the Gardiner. "What in the world is it – a geyser?"

"That there little spurt," said Aconite, "is where the sink-pipe dreens off from Mammoth Hot Springs. Don't begin bein' surprised at things like them!"

The Professor made notes. Colonel Baggs asserted that hot water is hot water, no matter where found or in whatever quantities, and couldn't be considered much of a wonder. The Professor took up the gage of battle, while the carriage wound up the hill, away from the river; but even he forbore discourse, when the view opened, as the afternoon sun fell behind the hills, on the steaming terraces and boiling basins of Mammoth Hot Springs.

They scattered to the near-by marvels, and returned to camp where Aconite, assisted by the Hired Man, had prepared camp fare for the party. The Bride and Groom announced their intention to take pot luck with the rest, though the great hotel was ready for their reception.

"We are honored, I am sure," said Colonel Baggs. "Would that we had a troupe of performing nightingales to clothe the night with charm fit for so lovely a member of the party."

"Oh, thank you ever so much," said the Bride, "but I've just proposed to Billy a plan that will be better than any sort of troupe. We can make this trip a regular Arabian Nights' entertainment. Tell them, Billy!"

"We're to make a hat pool," said Billy, "and the loser tells a story."

"Good thought!" said the Poet

"I don't understand," protested the Professor.

"Well, then, here you are!" said Billy. "I write all our names on these slips of paper – Driver, Poet, Artist, Professor – and the rest of us. I mix them in this Stetson. I pass them to the most innocent of the party, and one is drawn –"

"Well, let me draw, then!" said the Bride.

"Not on your life!" said Billy. "Here, Professor!"

Amid half-hidden chuckling, the Professor took a slip from the hat and handed it to the Groom.

"On this ballot," said he, "is written 'The Poet.' That gentleman will now favor the audience, ladies and gentlemen, with a story."

The moon was climbing through the lodge-pole pines, and the camp was mystic with the flicker of the firelight on the rocks and trees. The Poet looked about as if for an inspiration. His eyes fell on the Bride, so sweet, so cuddleable, so alluring.

"I will tell you a story that occurred to me as we drove along," said he. "If you don't like tragedy, don't call on a poet for entertainment in a tragic moment."

A TELEPATHIC TRAGEDY

BEING THE STORY TOLD BY THE MINOR POET

He sat reading a magazine. Chancing upon a picture of the bronze Sappho which, if you have luck, you will find in the museum at Naples, he began gazing at it, first casually, then intently, then almost hypnotically. The grand woman's head with its low masses of hair; the nose so high as to be almost Roman, so perfect in chiseling as to be ultra-Greek; the mouth eloquent of divinest passion; the neck, sloping off to strong shoulders and a bust opulent of charm – it shot through him an unwonted thrill. It may have arisen from memories of Lesbos, Mytilene, and the Leucadian Rock. It may have been the direct influence from her peep-hole on Olympus of Sappho's own Aphrodite. Anyhow, he felt the thrill.

Possibly it was some subtle effluence from things nearer and more concrete than either, for as he closed the magazine that he might rarefy and prolong this pulsing wave of poetry by excluding the distracting pages from his sight, his vision, resting for an instant upon the ribbon of grass and flowers flowing back beside the train, swept inboard and was arrested by a modish hat, a pile of ruddy hair, a rosy ear, the creamy back and side of a round neck, and the curve of a cheek. A most interesting phenomenon in wave-interference at once took place. The hypnotic vibrations of the Sapphic thrill were affected by a new series, striking them in like phases. The result was the only possible one. The vibrations went on, in an amplitude increased to the height of their superimposed crests. No wonder things happened: it is a matter of surprise that the very deuce was not to pay.

For the hair combined with the hat in a symmetrical and harmonious whole, in an involved and curvilinear complexity difficult to describe; but the effect is easy to imagine – I hope. The red-brown coils wound in and out under a broad brim which drooped on one side and on the other curled jauntily up, as if consciously recurving from the mass of marvelous bloom and foliage under it. Dark-red tones climbed up to a climax of quivering green and crimson in a natural and, indeed, inevitable inflorescence. But, engrossed by sundry attractive details below it, his attention gave him a concept of the millinery vastly more vague and impressionistic than ours.

The sunburst of hair was one of the details. It radiated from a core of creamy skin from some mystic center concealed under fluffy laciness. The ear, too, claimed minute attention. It was a marvel of curves and sinuosities, ivory here, pearl-pink there, its lines winding down to a dainty lobe lit by a sunset glow, a tiny flame from the lambent furnace of the heart. Cold science avers that these fairy convolutions are designed for the one utilitarian purpose of concentrating the sound-waves for a more efficient impact upon the auditory nerve; but this is crudely false. They are a Cretan labyrinth for the amazing of the fancy that the heart may be drawn after – and they are not without their Minotaur, either!

"Pshaw!" said he to himself. "What nonsense! I'll finish my magazine!"

This good resolution was at once acted upon. He turned his eyes back along the trail by which they had so unwarrantably wandered – along the line of coiffure, window, landscape, page, Sappho; describing almost a complete circle – or quite. As he retraced this path so virtuously, the living picture shifted and threw into the problem – for a problem it had now become – certain new factors which seemed to compel a readjustment of plans. These were a fuller view of the cheek, a half profile of the nose, and just the tiniest tips of the lips and chin. He forgot all about Sappho, but the Sapphic vibrations went on increasingly.

The profile – the new one – was, so far, Greek, also. It was still so averted that there was no danger in amply verifying this conclusion by a prolonged gaze.

No danger?

Foolhardy man, more imminent peril never put on so smooth a front! Read history, rash one, and see thrones toppled over, dungeons filled with pale captives, deep accursed tarns sending up bubbling cries for vengeance, fleets in flames, plains ravaged, city walls beaten down, palaces looted, beauty dragged at the heels of lust, all from such gazes as this of thine. And if you object to history, examine the files of the nearest *nisi prius* court. It all comes to the same thing.

Would she turn the deeper seduction of those eyes and lips to view? Seemingly not, for with every sway of the car they retreated farther behind the curve of the cheek. This curve was fair and rounded, and for a while it satisfied the inquiry. What if another cheek be pressed against that tinted snowy fullness! And what if that other were the cheek we wot of!

Clearly, said the inward monitor, this will never do! This Sappho-Aphrodite-Sunburst Syndicate must be resisted.

At the same time – the half concealed being traditionally the most potent snare of the devil – would it not be in every way safer, as well as more satisfactory, to have a full view of the face? Were there any truth in the theory of telepathy the thing might be accomplished. A strong and continuous exercise of the will acting upon that other will, and the thing is done.

You see the extent to which the nefarious operations of the syndicate have been pushed? Unaffected by the malign influence of those waves meeting in like phases, he would have felt himself no more at liberty to do this thing than to put his rude hand under the dimpled chin and ravish a look from the violated eyes.

For all that, he found himself fixing his will upon the turning of that head. He fancied he saw a rosier glow in the cheek and ear. Surely this can be no illusion – even the creamy neck glows faintly roseate. And still he sent out, or imagined he sent out, the thought-waves commanding the face to turn. And mingled with it was the sense of battle and the prevision of victory.

Slowly, slowly, like a blossom toward the sun, the head turned, the eyes directed upward, the lips a little apart. The mouth, the chin, the Greek nose, the violet eyes, enthralled him for a moment, and swung back out of sight again. He had won, and, winning, had lost. The neck was rosy now. He felt himself tremble as once more she turned her head until the fringed mystery of those upturned eyes lay open to his gaze, though her glance never really met his. He saw, in one intense, lingering look, the blue irises, the lighter border about the pupils, the wondrous rays emanating from those black, mystic flowers; he saw the fine dilated nostrils, the rosy, perfect lips; he saw the evanescent quiver of allurement at the corners of the mouth, the white teeth just glinting from their warm concealment. He saw —

"Oak Grove! All out for Oak Grove! Remember your umbrellas and parcels!"

Thus the brakeman raucously rescuing the victims of wave-interference. Thus Terminus baffling Aphrodite. Yet not without a struggle do the sea-born goddess and the sea-doomed poet surrender their unaccomplished task. He rose, stepped into the aisle, and passed her; then he turned, looked gravely for a moment into her eyes, and sadly whispered, "Good-by!"

If surprised, she did not show the fact by the slightest start. Soberly she dropped her eyelids, seriously she raised them, and with the manner of one who, breaking intimate converse at the parting-place, bids farewell to a dear companion, she breathed, "Good-by!"

Said the lady who drove him from the station, "My dear, is it a guilty conscience or the fate of the race that makes you so – abstracted?"

"A guilty conscience," he laughed, laying a hand on hers. He looked after the flying train, and smiled, and sighed. "After all," he added, "I believe it's the fate of the race!"

"Is that all?" asked the Hired Man.

The pipes went on glowing and dying like little volcanoes with ephemeral periods of activity and quiescence. The campers rose one by one and went to their tents.

"Wasn't that a curious tale?" asked the Bride when they were alone. "What do you suppose made him think of it as we drove along?"

"Dunno," returned the Groom, kissing the back of her neck. "Don't you think we'd better take the rear seat to-morrow?"

CHAPTER II

"I shall never, never be able to feel anything like astonishment again!"

So said the Bride as the party took the road again after two days at Mammoth Hot Springs. Bunsen Mountain had been circumnavigated. Cupid's Cave had charmed. The Devil's Kitchen had stimulated a flagging faith in a Personal Adversary, dealing with material utensils of vengeance. The Stygian Cave, whose deadly vapors had strewed its floor with dead birds, had been pronounced another of his devices and satanically "horrid." The iridescent springs, each of which has built up its own basin, like hanging fountains, were compared to the hanging gardens of Babylon, and pronounced far more worthy of place among the wonders of the world. The lovely Undine Falls had comforted them with prettiness after wildness; and the ogreous Hoodoo Rocks had turned them back to the realm of shivers. The Professor's note-books were overflowing with memoranda; and Colonel Baggs alone went unastounded.

"If the place only had a history," said the Minor Poet, "like the Venusberg, or almost any spot in Europe – "

"Well," said the Colonel, "it's got some history, anyhow. When I was here before – "

"When was that?" asked the Artist, adding a line or two to a surreptitious sketch of the Colonel.

"It was thirty-three years ago the latter part of this month," said the Colonel. "I carried a knapsack in the chase after Chief Joseph and the Nez Percès. There were pretty average lively times right in this vicinity with the first tourists, so far as I know, that ever came into the Park. Some fellows had been up in the Mount Everts country, and to the lower falls. The Nez Percès rushed them. A fellow named Stewart found himself looking into the muzzle of the rifle of a Nez Percè, and made the sign of the cross. The red with the gun, being a pretty fair Christian as Christians go – the tribe had been converted for thirty years – as conversions go – refrained from shooting when he saw the sign. Stewart had a horse that was wild and hard to catch – was wounded and had no idea he could get within reach of the steed; but when he called, the horse came to him and stood for him to climb on, for the first and last time in the history of their relations. Stewart got off with his life."

"Very remarkable," said the Professor, jotting down a note. "Now, how do you account for that on any known scientific law?"

"It simply wasn't Stewart's time," said the Colonel. "Or there's an intelligence that operates on other intelligences – even those of beasts – for our protection. Or we have guardian spirits that can tame horses. Take your choice, Professor. And right here – maybe where we are camped – another bit of history was enacted that in the childhood of the race might ripen into one of those legends the artists deplore the lack of. The campers here had a nigger cook named Stone – Ben Stone – I arrested and confined for giving thanks to the Lord after we picked him up. He was here at Mammoth Hot Springs when a fellow – I forget his name – was shot. The Nez Percès went by one day and saw him here. Next day they came back more peeved than before and shot the man. Ben, the cook, ran, and they after him. He shinned up into one of these trees – maybe that one there. The Indians lost sight of him, and stopped under the tree for a conference. Stone nearly died of fright for fear they would hear his heart beating. He said it sounded like a horse galloping over rocks. They gave him up and went away. The coast being clear, a bear – probably an ancestor of these half-tamed beasts that the Bride photographed last evening – came along and began snuffing about the trees. Ben's heart began galloping again. The bear reared up and stretched as if he meant to climb the tree. Ben's heart stopped. After a while the bear went away. After a day or so the cook came into our camp and went about giving thanks to the Lord continually, and howling hallelujahs until nobody could sleep. So we put him under guard, and I watched him under orders to bust his head if he bothered the throne of grace any more."

"The army is an irreverent organization," said the Professor.

"It isn't what you'd call devout," assented the Colonel.

"Confound this modern world, anyway!" complained the Poet. "Five hundred years ago, we'd have evolved a cycle of legends out of those occurrences!"

"The tales are just as astonishing without legends," insisted the Bride, "as anything in the world, no matter how deep in fable."

Faring on southward, they passed toward Norris Basin in unastonished quietude. A flock of pelicans on Swan Lake created no sensation. A trio of elk in Willow Park crossed the road ahead of the surrey with no further effect than to arouse the Artist to some remarks on their anatomical perfection, and to bring to the surface the buried note-book of Professor Boggs. They stopped at Apollinaris Spring for refreshment, where the Groom held forth on the commercial possibilities of the waters, if the government would get off the lid, and let the country be developed.

"Nix on this conservation game," said he; and nobody argued with him.

At Obsidian Cliff, Mr. Driscoll whoaed up his cayuses to call the attention of his fares to the fact that here is the only glass road in the world.

"Glass?" queried the Professor, alighting, microscope in hand. "Really?"

"Shore," assured Aconite. "They cracked the road out of the cliff by building fires to heat the glass and splashin' cold water to make the chunks pop out – jelluk breakin' a tumbler washin' up the dishes."

"Oh, I see," said Professor Boggs. "Merely obsidian."

"Merely!" repeated Aconite. "Some folks always reminds me of the folks that branded old Jim Bridger as a liar becuz o' what he told of this here region eighty or ninety years ago. He built Fort Bridger, and Bridger's Peak was named after him, and he discovered Great Salt Lake, and I guess he wouldn't lie. He found this glass cliff and told about it then – and everybody said he was a liar. An' he found lots o' things that ain't on the map. We see a little thread o' country along this road, but the reel wonders of this Park hain't been seen sence Jim Bridger's time – an' not then. W'y, once back in this glass belt, he saw an elk feedin' in plain sight. Blazed away an' missed him. Elk kep' on feedin'. Blazed away ag'in. Elk unmoved. Bridger made a rush at the elk with his knife, and run smack into a mountain of this glass so clear that he couldn't see it, and shaped like a telescope glass that brought things close. That elk was twenty-five miles off."

"Giddap!" said Colonel Baggs to the horses. "Time to be on our way."

"After all," said the Poet, "we may not have lost the power to create a mythology."

"Bridger for my money," said the Artist, with conviction.

"Jim Bridger said that," asserted Aconite, "an' I believe him. They found Great Salt Lake where he said it was, all right, an' Bridger's Peak, an' the few things we've run across here. You wouldn't believe a mountain would whistle like a steam engine, would yeh? Well, I'll show you one – Roarin' Mountain – in less'n four miles ahead – in the actual act of tootin'."

"I believe all you said, Mr. Driscoll," said the Bride as they sat about the fire that night. "The glass mountain, the elk and all. After those indescribable Twin Lakes, the Roaring Mountain, and the Devil's Frying Pan, stewing, stewing, century after century – that's what makes it so inconceivable – the thought of time and eternity. The mountains are here for ever – that's plain; but these things in action – to think that they were sizzling and spouting just the same when Mr. Bridger was here ninety years ago, and a million years before that, maybe – it flabbergasts me!"

"Yes'm," said Aconite. "It shore do."

"You're it, Bride!" said the Hired Man, handing her a slip with "Bride" written upon it.

"I'm what?" asked the Bride.

"They've sawed the story off on you," returned the Hired Man. "I hope you'll give a better one than that there Poet told. I couldn't make head nor tail to that."

"It *was* rotten," said the Poet, looking at the Bride, "wasn't it?"

"I'm still living in a glass house," said the Bride. "Don't you know there's only one story a bride can tell?"

"Tell it, tell it!" was the cry – from all but the Poet and the Groom.

"I think I'll retire," said the Groom.

"Off with you into the shadows," said the Poet. "I'll contribute my last cigar – and we'll smoke the calumet on the other side of the tree where we can hear unseen."

About them the earth boiled and quivered and spouted. Little wisps of steam floated through the treetops. There were rushings and spoutings in the air – for they were in the Norris Geyser Basin. And here the Bride, sitting in the circle of men, her feet curled under her on a cushion of the sully laid on the geyser-heated ground, fixed her eyes on the climbing moon and told her story.

THE TRIUMPH OF BILLY HELL

THE STORY TOLD BY THE BRIDE

Now that so many of the girls are writing, the desire to express myself in that way comes upon me awfully strongly, sometimes.

She looked at the Poet, who nodded encouragement and understanding.

And yet a novel seems so complex and poky in the writing, as compared with a play, which brings one ever so much more exciting success. Louise Amerland says that all literature is autobiographical. If this is so, why can't I use my own romance in making a play? I think I could, if I could once get the scenario to – to discharge, as Billy says. He calls me a million M. F. condenser of dramatic electricity, but says that it's all statical, when it ought to flow. But the scenario must be possible, if I could only get the figures and events juggled about into place. There's Billy for the hero, and Pa, and the Pruntys, and me for the heroine, and comic figures like the butler and Miss Crowley and Atkins, and the crowds in Lincoln Park. I want the statue of Lincoln in it for one scene.

"That would be great," said the Artist.

After I was "finished" at St. Cecilia's I went into Pa's office as his secretary. He wasn't very enthusiastic, but I insisted on account of the sacredness of labor and its necessity in the plan of woman's life having revealed themselves to me as I read one of Mrs. Stetson's books. Pa fumed, and said I bothered him; but I insisted, and after a while I became proficient as a stenographer, and spelled such terms as "kilowatt," and "microfarad," and "electrolyte," in a way that forced encomiums from even Pa. Upon this experience I based many deductions as to the character of our captains of industry, one of which is that they are the most illogical set in the world, and the more illogical they are the more industry they are likely to captain.

Take Pa, for instance. He began with a pair of pliers, a pair of climbers, a lineman's belt, and a vast store of obstinacy; and he has built up the Mid-Continent Electric Company – for we are an electric family, though Billy says magnetic is the term.

"Spare me!" prayed the Groom.

But how does Pa order his life? He sends me to St. Cecilia's, which has no function but to prepare girls for the social swim, and is so exclusive that he had to lobby shamefully to get me in: and all the time he gloats – simply *gloats* – over the memory of the pliers, the climbers, the lineman's belt, and the obstinacy – no, not over the obstinacy, of course: that is merely what makes him gloat. And he hates Armour Institute graduates and Tech men poisonously, and wants his force made up of electricians who have come up, as he says, by hard knocks, and know the practical side. As if Billy Helmerston – but let me begin at the beginning.

I was in the office one day superintending Miss Crowley, the chief stenographer, in getting together the correspondence about an electric light and power installation in Oklahoma, when, just at the door of the private office, I met a disreputable figure which towered above me so far that I could barely make out that it had good anatomical lines and a black patch over one eye.

I will here deceive no one: it was Billy. He explained afterward that he possessed better clothes, but had mislaid them somehow, and that the cut over his eye he got in quelling a pay-night insurrection in his line-gang out in Iowa, one of whom struck him with a pair of four-hole connectors. I am sorry to confess that I once felt pride in the fact that Billy knocked the linemen's heads together – and yet Pa talks of hard knocks! – until they subsided, the blood, meanwhile, running all down over his face and clothing and theirs. It was very brutal, in outward seeming, no matter what plea of necessity may be urged for it.

I almost fell back into the doorway, he was so near and so big. His way of removing his abominable old hat, and his bow, gave me a queer little mental jolt, it was so graceful and elegant, in spite of the overalls and the faded shirt.

"I was referred to this place as Mr. Blunt's office," said he. "Can you direct me to him?"

Now Pa is as hard to approach as any Oriental potentate; but I supposed that Billy was one of the men from the factory, and had business, and I was a little fluttered by the wonderful depth and sweetness of his voice; so I just said: "This way, please" – and took him in to where Pa was sawing the air and dictating a blood-curdling letter to a firm of contractors in San Francisco, who had placed themselves outside the pale of humanity by failing to get results from our new Polyphase Generator. (Billy afterward told them what was the matter with it.) I saw that my workman had picked out an exceedingly unpsychological moment, if he expected to make a very powerful appeal to Pa's finer instincts.

"Well," roared Pa, turning on him with as much ferocity as if he had been a San Francisco contractor of the deepest dye, "what can I do for you, sir?"

"My name is Helmerston," started Billy.

"I'm not getting up any directory," shouted Pa. "What do you want?"

"I'm just through with a summer's line-work in the West," answered Billy, "and I took the liberty of applying for employment in your factory. I have – "

"The blazes you did!" ejaculated Pa, glaring at Billy from under his eyebrows. "How did you get in here?"

I was over at the filing-cases, my face just burning, for I was beginning to see what I had done. Billy looked in my direction, and as our eyes met he smiled a little.

"I hardly know, Mr. Blunt," said he. "I just asked my way and followed directions. Is it so very difficult to get in?"

I saw at once that he was a good deal decenter than he looked.

"Well, what can you do?" shouted Pa.

"Almost anything, I hope," answered Billy. "I've had no practical experience with inside work; but I have – "

"Oh, yes, I know!" said Pa, in that unfeeling way which experience and success seem to impart to the biggest-hearted men – and Pa is surely one of these. "It's the old story. As soon as a dub gets so he can cut over a rural telephone, or put in an extension-bell, or climb a twenty-five without getting seasick, he can do 'almost anything.' What one, definite, concrete thing can you do?"

"For one thing," said Billy icily, "I think I could help some by taking a broom to this factory floor out here."

"All right," said Pa, after looking at him a moment. "The broom goes! Give this man an order for a broom. Put him on the pay-roll at seven dollars a week. Find out who let him in here, and caution whoever it was against letting it occur again. Call up Mr. Sweet, and tell him I want a word with him on those Winnipeg estimates. Make an engagement with Mr. Bayley of the street-car company to lunch with me at the club at two." And Pa was running in his groove again.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, as he passed me going out.

"Thank you," I answered. "It's of no consequence – "

And then I noticed that he was looking into my eyes in a wistful and pathetic way, as if protesting against going out. I blushed as I showed him to the door: and he wasn't the first whose eyes had protested, either.

"You mustn't violate the rules, Dolly," said Pa, as we crossed the bridge in the bubble, going home. "You know perfectly well that I can't say 'no' to these tramps – "

"He wasn't a tramp," said I.

"A perfect hobo," answered Pa. "I know the type well. I have to let Burns handle them."

"He was very graceful," said I.

"Any lineman is," replied Pa. "They have the best exercise in the world. If he steals anything, you're responsible, my dear."

I supposed the incident to be closed with my statement that he had nice eyes, and Pa's sniff; but, in a few days, Pa, who watches the men like a cat, surprised me by saying that my graceful hobo was all right.

"He gathered up and saved three dollars' worth of beeswax the other men were wasting, the first day," said Pa. "Melted and strained and put it in the right place without asking any questions. And then he borrowed a blow-torch and an iron, and began practising soldering connections. He looks good to me."

"Me, too," said I.

"Blessed be the hobo," said the Colonel, "for he shall reach paradise!"

It seems strange, now, to think of my hearing these things unmoved. The dreadful humiliation to which Billy was subjected, the noble fortitude with which he bore it, and the splendid way in which he uplifted the menial tasks to which he was assigned, have always reminded me of Sir Gareth serving as a scullion in Arthur's kitchen. It is not alone in the chronicles of chivalry – but I must hasten this narrative.

I must not delay even to inform you of the ways in which it was discovered that Billy could do all sorts of things; that there was no blue-print through which his keen eye could not see, and no engineering error – like that in the Polyphase Generator – that he couldn't detect; or how he was pushed up and up by force of sheer genius, no one knowing who he was until he found himself, like an eagle among buzzards, at the head of a department, and coming into the office to see Pa quite in a legitimate way.

"Hooray! Hooray!" came from behind the tree.

"Shut up, Poet!" commanded the Artist, "or I'll come back there!"

I didn't know these things personally, because I had left the office. I had found out that there seemed to be more soul-nurture in artistic metal work than in typewriting, and had fitted up a shop in the Fine Arts Building, where Louise Amerland and I were doing perfectly enchanting stunts in hammered brass and copper – old Roman lamps and Persian lanterns, after designs we made ourselves. Pa parted with his secretary with a sigh, the nature of which may be a question better left unsettled.

This romance really begins with my visit, after months and months of absence, to the restaurant which I had dined at Pa until he had instituted for the help. I told him that the social side of labor was neglected shamefully, and for the work people to eat at the same table with their superintendents and employers would be just too dear and democratic, and he finally yielded growlingly. He was awfully pleased afterward when the papers began to write the thing up. He said it was the cheapest advertising he ever got, and patted me on the shoulder and asked me if I wasn't ashamed to be so neglectful of my great invention. So one day I got tired of working out Rubáiyát motifs in brass, and I went over to the café for luncheon, incog. And what do you think? Billy came in and sat down very informally right across from me!

"Hello!" said he, putting out his hand. "I've been looking for you for eons, to – to thank you, you know. Don't you remember me?"

Before I knew it I had blushing given him my hand for a moment.

"Yes," I replied, taking it away, and assuming a more properly dignified air. "I hope you have risen above seven a week and a broom; and I am glad to see that your head has healed up."

"Thank you," he replied. "I am running the installation department of the dynamo end of the business. And you? I'm no end glad to see you back. Did you get canned for letting me in? I've had a good many bad half-hours since I found you gone, thinking of you out hunting a job on – on my account. You – pardon me – don't look like a girl who would have the E. M. F. in the nerve-department to go out and compete, you know."

I was amazed at the creature's effrontery, at first; and then the whole situation cleared up in my mind. I saw that I had an admirer (*that* was plain) who didn't know me as Rollin Blunt's heiress at all, but only as a shop-mate in the Mid-Continent Electric Company's factory – a stenographer who had done him a favor. It was more fun than most girls might think.

"How did you find out," said I, "that I had been – ah – canned?"

"I watched for you," he replied. "Began as soon as my promotion to the switchboard work made it so I could. After a couple of months' accumulation of data I ventured upon the generalization that the old man –"

"The who?"

"Mr. Blunt, I mean, of course," he amended, "had fired you for letting me in. Out of work long?"

"N-no," said I; "hardly a week."

"Where are you now?" he asked.

"I'm in a shop," I stammered, "in Michigan Avenue."

I looked about to see if any of the employees who knew me were present, but could see none except Miss Crowley, who wouldn't meet a man in the same office in a year, and a dynamo-man never, and who is near-sighted, anyhow. So I felt safe in permitting him to deceive himself. It is thus that the centuries of oppression which women have endured impress themselves on our more involuntary actions in little bits of disingenuousness against which we should ever struggle. At the time, though, to sit chatting with him in the informal manner of co-laborers at the noon intermission was great fun. It was then that I began to notice more fully what a really fine figure he had, and how brown and honest and respectful his eyes were, even when he said "Hello" to me; as if I were a telephone, and how thrilling was his voice.

"I'd like," said he, "to call on you – if I might."

I was as fluttered as the veriest little chit from the country.

"I – I can't very well receive you," said I. "My – the people where I – I stop wouldn't like it."

"I'm quite a respectable sort of chap," said he. "My name's Helmerston, and my people have been pretty well known for two or three hundred years up in Vermont, where we live – in a teaching, preaching, book-writing, rural sort of way, you know. I'm a Tech man – class of '08 – but I haven't anything to boast of on any score, I'm merely telling you these things, because – because there seems to be no one else to tell you, and – and I want you to know that I'm not so bad as I looked that morning."

"Oh, this is quite absurd!" cried I. "I really – it doesn't make any difference; but I'm quite ready to believe it! I must go, really!"

"May I see you to your car?" said he; and I started to tell him that I was there in the victoria, but pulled up, and took the street-car, after he had extracted from me the information that I lived close to Lincoln Park. But when he asked if I ever walked in the park, I just refused to say any more. One really must save one's dignity from the attacks of such people. I had to telephone Roscoe where to come with the victoria.

Soon after, quite by accident, I saw him on two successive evenings in Lincoln Park, both times near the Lincoln statue. I wondered if my mentioning the south entrance had anything to do with this. He never once looked at the motorists, and so failed to see me; but I could see that he took a deep interest in the promenaders – especially slender girls with dainty dresses and blond hair. It appeared almost as if he were looking for some one in particular, and I smiled at the thought of any one being so silly as to search those throngs on the strength of any chance hint any person might have dropped. I was affected by the pathos of it, though. It seemed so much like the Saracen lady going from port to port hunting for Thomas à Becket's father – though, of course, he wasn't any one's father then, but I can't think of his name.

The next evening I took Atkins, my maid, and walked down by the Lincoln monument to look at some flowers. It seems to me that we Chicagoans owe it to ourselves to become better acquainted

with one another – I mean, of course, better acquainted with our great parks and public places and statues. They are really very beautiful, and something to be proud of, provided as they are for rich and poor alike by a paternal government.

Strangely fortuitous chance: we met Billy!

"Well, *well!*" exclaimed Aconite.

He came striding down the path to meet me – Atkins had fallen behind – his face perfectly radiant with real joy.

"At last!" he ejaculated. "I wondered if we were *ever* to meet again, Miss – Miss – "

"Blunt," said I, heroically truthful, and suppressing one of those primordial impulses which urged me to say Wilkinson – now, as a scientific problem, why Wilkinson? But I did not wish to lose Atkins' respect by conversing with a man who did not know my name.

"Miss Blunt?" cried he interrogatively. "That's rather odd, you know. It's not a very common name."

"Oh, I don't know," said I, uncandid again, as soon as I saw a chance to get through with it – little cat. "It seems awfully common to me. Why do you say that it's odd?"

"Because I happen to have a letter of introduction to Miss Blunt, daughter of the old – of Mr. Blunt of the Mid-Continent – "

"You have?" I broke in. "From whom?"

"From my cousin, Amelia Wyckoff," said he, "who went to school with her at St. Cecilia's."

"Well, of all things!" I began; and then, with a lot of presence of mind, I think, I paused. "Why don't you present it?" I asked.

"Well, it's this way," said Billy. "You saw how Mr. Blunt sailed into me and put me in the broom-brigade without a hearing? I didn't have the letter then, and when I got it I didn't feel like pulling on the social strings when I was coming on pretty well for a dub lineman and learning the business from the solder on the floor to the cupola, by actual physical contact. And then there's another thing, if you'll let me say it: since that morning I've had no place in my thoughts for any girl's face but one."

We were sitting on a bench. Atkins was looking at the baby leopards in the zoo, ever so far away. Billy didn't seem to miss her. He was looking right at me. My heart fluttered so that I knew my voice would quiver if I spoke, and I didn't dare to move my hands for fear he might notice their trembling. The idea of *my* behaving in that way!

I was glad to find out that he was Amelia's cousin; for that insured his social standing. That was what made me feel so sort of agitated. One laborer ought not to feel so of another, for we are all equal; but it *was* a relief to know that he was Amelia's aunt's son, and not a tramp.

"I must be allowed to call on you!" he said with suppressed intensity. "You don't dislike me very much, do you?"

"I – I don't like cuts over the eye," said I, evading the question.

"I don't have 'em any more," he urged.

And then he explained about the émeute in the line-gang, and the four-hole connectors, and confessed to the violent and sanguinary manner in which he had felt called upon to put down the uprising. I could feel my face grow hot and cold by turns, like Desdemona's while Othello was telling the same kind of things; and when I looked for the scar on his forehead he bowed his head, and I put the curls aside and found it. I would have given worlds to – it was so much like a baby coming up to you and crying about thumping its head and asking you to kiss it well. Once I had my lips all puckered up – but I had the self-control to refrain – I was so afraid.

It was getting dusk now, and Billy seized my hand and kissed it. I was quite indignant until he explained that his motives were perfectly praise-worthy. Then I led him to talk of the rich Miss Blunt to whom he had a letter of introduction, and advised him to present it, and argued with appalling cogency that one ought to marry in such a way as to better one's prospects, and Billy got perfectly furious at such a view of love and marriage – explaining, when I pretended to think he was mad at

me, that he knew I was just teasing. And then he began again about calling on me, and seeing my parents, or guardians, or assigns, or *any one* that he ought to see.

"Because," said he, "you're a perfect baby, with a baby's blue eyes and hair of floss, and tender skin, and trustfulness; and I ought to be horsewhipped for sitting here in the park with you in – in this way, with no one paying any attention but Mr. Lincoln, up there."

Then I did feel deeply, darkly crime-stained; and I could have hugged the dear fellow for his simplicity —*me* helpless, with Atkins, and the knowledge of Amelia Wyckoff's letter; not to mention Mr. Lincoln – bless him! – or a park policeman who had been peeking at us from behind a bunch of cannas! I could have given him the addresses of several gentlemen who might have certified to the fact that I wasn't the only one whose peace of mind might have been considered in danger.

I grew portentously serious just before I went home, and told Billy that he must see me on my own terms or not at all, and that he mustn't follow me, or try to find out where I lived, but must walk around the curve to the path and let me mingle with the landscape.

"May I not hope," said he, "to see you again soon?"

"I may feed the elephant some peanuts," said I, "on Thursday evening – no, I shall play in a mixed foursome, and then dine on Thursday afternoon at the Onwentsia – "

"Where?" said he, in a sort of astonished way.

"I believe I could make you believe it," said I with more presence of mind, "if I stuck to it. But I can't come on Thursday. Let us say on Friday evening."

He insisted that Friday is unlucky, and we compromised on Wednesday. This conversation was on Tuesday.

"May I turn for just one look at my little wood nymph," said he, "when I get to the curve?"

Of course I said "Yes" – and he turned at the curve, and came striding back with such a light in his eyes that I had to allow him to kiss my hand again, under the pretense that I had got a sliver in my finger.

I went back Wednesday, and again and again, and sneaked off once with him to an orchestra concert, and it wasn't long before Billy knew that his little stenographer was willing to allow him to hope. But I refused to let him call it an engagement until he promised me that he would present the letter to the other Miss Blunt.

"Why, Dolly? Why, sweetheart?" he asked; for it had got to that stage now. Oh, it progressed with dizzying rapidity!

"Because," I replied, "you may like her better than you do me."

"Impossible!" he cried with a gesture absolutely tragic in its intensity. "I dislike her very name – 'Miss Aurelia Blunt!'"

"That's unjust!" I cried, really angry, "Aurelia is a fine name; and she may have a pet name, you know."

"Only one Miss Blunt with a pet name for little Willie!" said he. "My little Dolly!"

But I tied him down with a promise that before he saw me again he'd call on Aurelia. When I saw him next he looked guilty, and said he had found her out when he called. I scolded him cruelly, and made him promise again. The fact was that when he called I couldn't find it in my heart to sink to the prosaic level of Miss Aurelia Blunt. I had had the sweetest, most delicious courtship that any girl *ever* had, up to this time, and I was afraid of spoiling it all. I was afraid sort of on general principles, you know, and so was "out." And after he went away I stole down into the park in my electric runabout and talked to Mr. Lincoln about it. He seemed to know. When I went away, I left a little kiss on the monument.

Billy was perfectly cringing that next day when he had to confess that he had failed on what he called "this Aurelia proposition." He begged to be let off.

"You see," said he, "she may give me a frigid reception, and take offense at my delay in presenting this letter. Amelia may have written her, and she may be furious. There may be some sort

of social statute of limitations on letters of introduction, and the thing may have run out, so that I'll be ejected by the servants, dearie. And, anyhow, it will place me in an equivocal position with Mr. Blunt – my coming to him as a tramp, and holding so very lightly the valuable social advantage of an acquaintance with the family. He won't remember that he jumped on me with both feet and gave me six months on bread and water. It – it may queer me in the business."

I here drew myself up to my full height, and froze him as I have seldom done.

"Mr. Helmerston," said I, "I have indicated to you a fact which I had supposed might have some weight with you as against sordid and merely prudential considerations – I mean my preferences in this matter. It seems, however, that – that you don't care the least little bit what *I* want, and I just know that you don't – care for me at all as you say you do; and I'm going home at once!"

Well, he was so abject, and so sorry to have given me pain, that I wanted to hug him, but I didn't.

Oh, I almost neglected to say that all our behavior had been of the most proper and self-contained sort. I would almost be willing to have Miss Featherstonehaugh at St. Cecilia's use a kinetoscope picture of all our meetings in marking me in deportment. Of course, conversations in parks and at concerts do not lend themselves to transports very well, and the kinetoscopes do not reproduce what is said, do they? Or the way one feels when one is grinding into the dust, in that manner, the most splendid fellow in the whole terrestrial and stellar universe.

"I'll go, by George!" he vowed. "And I'll sit on Aurelia's doorstep without eating or drinking until she comes home and kicks me down the stairs!" I was wondering as I went home how soon he would come; but I was astonished to learn that Mr. Helmerston was in my reception-room.

"Hi informed 'im," said the footman, "that you would 'ardly be 'ome within a reasonable time of waiting; but 'e said 'e would remain until you came, Miss, nevertheless."

I went down to him just as I was, in my simple piqué dress, wearing the violets he had given me. "Mr. Helmerston," said I, "I must apologize for the difficulty I have given you in obtaining the very slight boon of meeting me, and say how good you are to come again – and wait. Any friend of dearest Amelia's, not to mention her cousin, is – "

He had stood in a state of positive paralysis until now.

"Dolly! Dolly! Dearest, dearest Dolly!" he cried, coming up to me and taking – and doing what he hadn't had a chance to do before. "Oh, my darling, are *you* here?"

After quite a while he started up as if he had forgotten something.

"What is it?" said I. "There isn't a promenader or a policeman this side of the park, sweetheart!"

"No," he answered after another interval – for I hadn't called him anything like that before – "but I was thinking that – that Aurelia – is a long time in coming home."

"Why, don't you know *yet*, you goosey," said I. "*I'm* Aurelia!"

And this brings me to the point where dalliance must cease – most of the time – while the drama takes on the darker tinge given it by Pa's cruel obstinacy, and the misdeeds of the Pruntys – whom I should have brought on in the first act, somehow, on a darkened stage, conspiring across it over a black bottle, and once in a while getting up to peek up and down the flies, meanwhile uttering the villain's sibilant "Sh!" I don't suppose it is artistic, from the Augustus Thomas viewpoint, but I wanted the honeyed sweets of this courtship of mine without a tang of bitter; and, honestly now, isn't it a lovely little plot for a love-drama?

"Gee!" exclaimed the Hired Man. "I was afraid you was through!"

"I am," said the Bride softly, "for to-night. If you'll excuse me now. Maybe I'll tell the rest of it at the next camp – if you want me to."

"I assure you," said the Professor, "that your tale does credit to your teachers in elocution."

"We all thank you," said the Artist, "for what we've had – and won't you continue at the next session – Scheherazade?"

"I'll see," said she. "Billy! Where are you!"

"I have mysteriously disappeared," replied the Groom from behind the tree. "Come hunt me!"

CHAPTER III

At the behest of Aconite, the party refrained from expressions of more than mild interest at the Norris Basin. Aconite assured them that they ought to save their strong expressions for things farther on. The Poet wrote some verses for the purpose of creating a legend to account for the fact that the Monarch Geyser ceased to spout some ten years ago. But when he came to the Growler, and the Hurricane, and the new Roaring Holes, which are really gigantic steam whistles, he dismounted from his Pegasus and threaded his way through the dead forest – killed by escaping steam – in a trance of wonder. But Aconite's advice to economize language until the Lower Geyser Basin should be reached was followed so far as superlatives were concerned. Night found them scattered, and it was only when they took the road once more that the party was whole again. The Artist stopped the surrey at the Gibbon Paint Pots so that he might use some of their bubbling sediment as a pigment with which to paint a souvenir picture for each of the party. Cañons, boiling springs and waterfalls – rocks, mountains, wild beauty on every hand – all these they were assured were inconsiderable parts of the prelude to the marvels awaiting them at the next halt. But when they came to the crossing of Nez Percè Creek, the Bride expressed a desire to wait, to stop, to rest her eyes and quiet her spirits before anything more striking should be imposed upon her powers of observation.

"I fell like Olger the Dane and King Desiderio, when they watched on the tower for Charlemagne; and if we go on, I shall, like Olger, fall 'as one dead at Desiderio's feet!"

The Poet looked in the Bride's eyes, and nodded sympathetically. Mr. Driscoll pondered the mysteries of the Bride's statement for a while, and threw down his lines.

"If that's the way the Bride feels," said he, "we'll stop here and grub our systems up a little."

"The champion hard-luck story of this or any other age," said the Colonel, as they lighted their pipes after dinner, "was enacted right up this creek in that Nez Percè uprising wherein I fought and bled and died."

"More matter for myths," said the Artist. "Let's have it, e'en though it be as dolorous as the tale of the Patient Griselda."

"I don't recall more of Griselda's story," said the Colonel, "than that she was given the worst of it by her husband, the king. But this Nez Percè Creek story isn't any tale of the perfidy of our nearest and dearest, but of things just unanimously breaking bad for a man from Radersburg, Mr. Cowan. He and his wife and some friends were camped down here a couple of miles at the Lower Geyser Basin, right close by the Fountain Geyser, just beyond the hotel – only there wasn't any hotel yet for thirty years. Chief Joseph and his Nez Percès came through trying to get away from the United States. They picked up the Cowan party, and brought them right along where we now are, and a few miles up this creek, where Joseph, Looking-Glass, and the other chiefs held a conference and decided to let the Cowan party go, after destroying their transportation system by cutting the spokes out of their buggies. This they did, and the Indians went on. Some of the bucks, feeling that it was careless of the chiefs to overlook a bet like this, came back, and in process of correcting their leaders' mistake shot Mr. Cowan in the thigh – which was bad luck Item one. He slipped from his horse, stunned by the shock, and his wife ran to him and tried to shelter him from further harm. But in spite of her efforts another Indian shot him in the head, holding his rifle so close that the powder burned the flesh. He was not killed, however, though all parties to the affair supposed he was, and Mrs. Cowan was removed from the corpse to which she clung, and carried away by her friends. You see, the Indians were not unanimously for these killings, and allowed most of the whites to go. The Indians threw a cord or so of rocks on Cowan's head and went on with a consciousness of good work well and thoroughly done.

"Cowan revived, pulled his head from among the rocks, and drew himself to a standing posture by the limb of a tree. An Indian happening along, shot him with much care in the back, and left him for dead again.

"Cowan, however, refused to die, and though without food, and wounded in the thigh, the head, and the back, and with his head hammered to a jelly by the rocks thrown on it, started to crawl back to camp. He met Indians, and hid from them. He crawled day after day – being unable to walk a step. He had a chance – for an uninjured man – to catch a Nez Percè pony which had been abandoned, but could not walk. Hard luck, indeed! He met a body of friendly Bannock scouts who would have taken care of him, but he supposed them to be hostiles and hid from them. Harder luck still! After crawling seven or eight miles, which took several days, he reached his old camp and there was reunited to his faithful dog, which at first snapped at and then welcomed him.

"At the camp his first good luck came – he found matches, coffee and some food – not to mention the dog, which I venture to state helped him almost as much as the provisions. Next day he met some scouts sent out to trail the hostiles and incidentally with instructions to bury Cowan – but they praised him instead. They fixed him up as well as they could, and left him by their camp-fire to await the coming of General Howard with the main body of troops. The ground was peaty, and full of dead vegetable matter, and after a nap, Cowan awakened to find that the earth all about him was on fire, and wounded as he was he had to roll out of the fire zone, getting burned scandalously as he rolled."

"Here," said the Hired Man. "You tell the rest of this to marines!"

"I'm telling you," said the Colonel, "the historic truth. General Howard came along and the surgeons gave Cowan all the care they were able to afford him. They took him up to Bottler's Ranch, north of the Park, and there Mrs. Cowan rejoined the remains and fragments of her still living spouse. They went to Bozeman after a while, carrying Cowan in a wagon. At the top of the hill down which they had to go, the neck-yoke broke and the horses ran away, and spilled Cowan out on the rocks and the generally unyielding surface of Montana. A conveyance was brought from Bozeman, and the much-murdered man was taken to a hotel."

"Thank God!" breathed the Poet. "Even a Montana hotel was a sweet boon as bringing the end of these troubles."

"Who said it was the end?" inquired the Colonel. "It wasn't. In the hotel at Bozeman his hoodoo haunted him. People flocked to the hotel to see him. If the vaudeville stage had been invented then in its present form, he could have made a fortune. They crowded into his room and sat on his bed. The bed collapsed, and Cowan was hurled to the floor and killed again. The hotel-keeper, seeing that even a cat's supply of lives must be about used up, ordered the crowd out of the place. He said he thought of throwing Cowan out, too, being afraid his hotel would burn up, or be blown away, or something, with such a Jonah aboard. But Cowan succeeded in getting home. They asked him if he didn't often think of his soul's salvation while enduring all these sufferings and passing through all these perils. 'Not by a damned sight!' said the unreconstructed sinner. 'I had more important things to think of!'"

"And all that took place right here?" asked the Bride.

"Here and hereabouts," answered the Colonel. "I was here about the time, and I know."

"If Jim Bridger," said Aconite, "had narrated them adventures, what would folks have said? And yet, the Colonel's correct. The tale are true!"

"Here's where you can sleep under a roof, Bride," said the Hired Man, as they made camp at the Lower Geyser Basin.

"So you don't want the rest of the story?" she queried.

"Ma'am," said the Hired Man. "We should all be darned sorry to lose you from the camp; but –"

"But me no buts," said the Bride. "I stay with the – with – the what do you call it, Mr. Driscoll, that I'm staying with?"

"The outfit, Miss Bride," said Aconite. "And the outfit's shore honored." And after the tasks of camp had been done, amid the strange and daunting surroundings of the wonderful geyser basin, when the camp reached that lull that precedes slumber, and which over all the world, whether on prairie, in forest, or on desert, is devoted to tobacco, music and tales, the Bride went on with her story.

THE TRIUMPH OF BILLY HELL

THE SECOND PART OF THE BRIDE'S STORY

The Pruntys live near Saint Joe, where they have a town and stockyards and grain-elevators, and thousands and thousands of acres of land all of their own, just like mediæval barons – only instead of having a castle with a donjon-keep with battlements and mysterious oubliettes and drizzly cells and a moat, they live in a great wooden house with verandas all round, and of a sort of composite architecture – Billy says that it is Queen Anne in front and Mary Ann at the rear – and hot and cold water in every room, and with a stone windmill-tower with a wheel on the top that you couldn't possibly put in a picture, it is so round and machiney-looking. Old Mr. Prunty says it cost twenty-seven thousand five hundred and eighty-three dollars and thirty-six cents – says it every chance he gets, without the variation of a cent. The Pruntys are scandalously rich. Their riches bought them a place in this play.

When Pa had begun to forge to the front in Peoria, where he began, he had all the knack he ever possessed for getting business, but he didn't have much money. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't confess this here. So he went to old Mr. Prunty, with whom he had become acquainted while he was putting in a town lighting-plant in the Prunty private village, and showed him how remunerative it would be to put money into Pa's business. This Mr. Prunty did, and I once saw the balance-sheet showing the profits he made. They were something frightful to a mind alive to the evils of the concentration of wealth – and the necessity of dividing with other people; but I shouldn't care so much for *that*, I am afraid, if it hadn't brought us into relations with Enos Prunty, Junior, who was brought up to the business of taking over the Mid-Continent Electric Company, and incidentally, me. The very idea!

I must not be disingenuous any more, and therefore I will admit that at one time I should have consented to the merger if it hadn't been for Enos' perfectly impossible name. Not that I loved him; not at all. But he wasn't bad looking, and he had overcome a good deal of the Prunty *gaucherie*– I should think he ought to, the schools he had been through – and a girl really does like to think of trousseaux, and establishments and the like. One day, though, I hired a card-writer on the street to write out for me the name, "Mrs. Enos Prunty, Jr.," upon looking at which I fled as from a pestilence, and threw it into the grate, and had a fire kindled, although it was one of those awful days when the coroner never can tell whether it was the heat or the humidity.

I had met Billy in the restaurant the day before.

But Pa liked Enos, and sort of treated the matter as if it were all arranged; and when Billy came into the spotlight as our social superior – which the Helmerstons would be by any of the old and outworn standards – I began to pet Pa one evening, and ask him how he liked Mr. Helmerston; whereupon Pa exploded with a terrific detonation, and said he wanted the relations of Mr. Helmerston with the Blunt family confined strictly to the field of business; that he hated and despised all the insufferable breed of dubs – I never could get Pa to say "cad" – who crept into employments like spies, under false pretenses, and called an Institute of Technology a "Tech," and looked down on better electricians who had come up by hard knocks. And Pa insisted that a man must have been pretty tough who had acquired in college circles from the Atlantic to the Missouri the *nom de guerre* of "Billy Hell."

Pa is a good business man, and has exceptional facilities for looking up people's records; but it seemed a little sneaky to use them on Billy, and to know so much, when we were so sure he never suspected a thing. I told him so, too, but all he said was "Huh." I was very angry, and when Mr. Prunty, Junior, came to see me next time I repulsed his addresses with such scorn that he went

away in a passion. He said he laid no claim to being a human being, but he was, at least, a member of the animal kingdom, and that my way of treating him would have been inhuman had he been a toadstool. I retorted that I'd concede him a place among the mushrooms – fancy *my* twitting any one of mushroomery! But the old-family attitude of the Helmerstons was getting into my mental system.

Pa, in the meantime, was preparing to shunt Billy off to Mexico to superintend the installation of the Guadalanahuato power plant – a two years' job – at a splendid salary. But our Mr. Burns went over to the Universal Electric Company (after we had made him what he was!) and Mr. Aplin proved quite incapable of running the business, although he was *such* a genius in watts and farads and ohms and the coefficient of self-induction, and Billy was simply forked into the general charge of the main office, against his will, and shockingly against Pa's.

I forgot to say that Pa was ill, and confined to his room for a long time. This touches a tender spot in Pa's feelings, but the truth must be told; and you must understand that all his illness came from an ingrowing toe-nail. He had to have an operation, and then he had to stay in the house because it wouldn't heal; and there he was, using language which is really scandalous for a good church-worker like Pa, while Billy attended to the business.

I heaped coals of fire on Pa's head by staying with him hours and hours every day, and reading to him, until he asked me for goodness' sake to stop until he got the cross-talk out of his receiver. I said I'd be glad to dispense with all his cross talk, and he said: "There, now, don't cry" – and we had a regular love feast. Pa was a little difficult at this period. However, that day he got more confidential than he ever was before, and told me that serious business troubles were piling up, and worried him. We were likely, he said, to be spared the disgrace of dying rich. This was irony, for Pa despises this new idea that one should apologize for one's success.

He went on to tell me that Mr. Prunty had always had the most stock in the Mid-Continent, and that now that Enos had got so conceited about being able to run the business, and not being allowed to, the Pruntys seemed to want the whole thing, and hinted around about withdrawing, or buying Pa out.

I have this scene all in my mind for the play, with me sitting in "a dim religious light" and listening to the recital of our ruin and crying over Pa's sore foot. I did cry a good deal about this, truly, for I knew perfectly well that it was the nasty way I had treated Enos that made them so mean; but I still wished from the bottom of my heart that he would come back so I could search my soul for worse things to do to him. I told Billy about this trouble, and explained that Pa couldn't possibly raise money to buy out the Pruntys, and that they could be calculated upon not to pay Pa anything like what his stock was worth.

"I see," said Billy, "you are being squeezed by the stronger party."

He was looking out of the window in an abstracted sort of way, but he came to when I answered that, personally, I hadn't been conscious of anything of the sort.

When the conversation got around to the business again, Billy told me that Goucher – a Missourian that the Pruntys had injected into the business, and who was perfectly slavish in his subserviency to Enos – had been quizzing around Billy, trying to find out what ailed Pa, and if it was anything serious.

"I didn't like the little emissary," said Billy, "and so I told him that Mr. Blunt was precariously ill, with a complication of Bright's disease in its tertiary stage, and locomotor ataxia. He wrote down the Bright's disease and asked me how to spell the other. I told him that the Bright's disease would probably terminate fatally before he could master so much orthography; and still he didn't tumble! Goucher went away conscious of having performed well an important piece of work. I can't help thinking now that this incident has more significance than I then supposed."

He sat puckering up his brows for a long time, and I let him pucker.

At last he said: "Dolly, I shouldn't a bit wonder if they are trying to take some advantage of a dying man. I can see how they work the problem out. 'Here is a sick man,' they say, 'who has been doing the work of half a dozen for twenty years. He is going to pieces physically. If he has some fatal

disease, and knows it, we can settle with him, and make him pay a few hundred thousand dollars for the privilege of getting his daughter's inheritance disentangled from a business which she can't run, and in which she will be at the mercy of – of people with whom her relations are a little strained. But first, we'll find out just how sick he is, and whether he's likely to get well soon, or at all.' And so they send Goucher mousing about; and he reports Bright's disease, and something else he can't spell, and they make an appointment with Helmerston for to-morrow morning to find out more about it, Mr. Goucher not being very clear. And your father's rather fierce manner of hiding what his ailment really is makes them all the more suspicious."

"You tell them," said I, firing up, "that Pa is still able – "

But I saw that Billy had one of those epoch-making ideas which mark the crises of history, and I stopped spellbound. He finally struck himself a fearful blow upon the knee, and said that he had it, and one looking at him could easily believe it. Then he explained to me his plan for discomfiting the Pruntys and hoisting them by their own petard. This is deeply psychological, being based upon an intuitive perception of what a Prunty would do when he believed certain things and had money at stake.

"I must take responsibility in this," said Billy, squaring his shoulders, "and bet my job on my success, and put our happiness in jeopardy. But, if we win, Mr. Blunt can never again say that I am an engineer only, with no head for practical business; and I shall have outlived the disgrace of my Tech training – and the nickname. You must handle your father, and keep me informed of any engagement the Pruntys make with him. I must do the rest. And, if I lose, it's back to climbing poles again!"

I asked Billy if I couldn't do something in line work, and he said I might carry the pliers. And when I said I meant it, he behaved beautifully, and called me his angel, and – and violated the rules, you know – and went away in a perfect frenzy of determination. I felt a solemn joy in spying on Pa and reporting to Billy. It seemed like a foretaste of a life all bound up and merged with his. And this is what took place:

The elder Mr. Prunty called on Billy and said he was appalled at the news Mr. Goucher brought that Mr. Blunt had Bright's disease; and was there any hope that the doctors might be mistaken?

Billy told him that the recent progress in bacteriological science, with which Mr. Prunty was no doubt fully conversant, seemed to make the diagnosis a cinch. By this he meant that they were sure about it.

"I see," said the driver. "I've heard the word afore."

He used a term that Mr. Prunty understood, Billy said, owing to his having done business all his life with reference to it.

Mr. Prunty suggested that people live a long time with Bright's disease, sometimes.

Billy, who is really a great actor, here grew mysterious, and told Mr. Prunty that, being mixed up with Mr. Blunt in business, it seemed a pity that he, Mr. Prunty, should have the real situation concealed from him, and that, as a matter of fact, Mr. Blunt's most pronounced outward symptom was a very badly ulcerated index toe. This of Billy's own knowledge, and Mr. Prunty might depend upon it.

Mr. Prunty studied on this for a long time, and then remarked that he had known several people to recover from sore toes.

Billy then pulled a book – a medical work he had borrowed – from under the desk, and showed Mr. Prunty a passage in which it was laid down that people's toes come off sometimes, in a most inconvenient way, in the last stages of Bright's disease. Mr. Prunty read the whole page, including a description of the way that dread disease ruins the complexion, by making it pasty and corpse-like, and then laid the book down with conviction in his eyes.

"From this," said he, motioning at the book with his glasses, "it would seem to be all off."

"If it's Bright's disease," said Billy, "that causes this lesion of the major lower digit, the prognosis is, no doubt, extremely grave. But while there's life, you know – "

"Yes," answered Mr. Prunty, "that is a comfort, of course. Does he know what ails him?"

"He is fully aware of his condition," said Billy, "but, unfortunately, not yet resigned to it." (I should think not.)

"I see you have been studying this thing out," said Mr. Prunty, "as exactly as if it had been an engineering problem; and I want to say, Mr. Helmerston, that I like your style. If we ever control this business the future of such careful and competent and far-sighted men as yourself – in fact, I may say *your* future – will be bright and assured. Have you any more information for me as to this – this sad affair of Blunt's?"

Billy thanked him, and said he hadn't, at present, and Mr. Prunty went away, trying to look sad. Billy went to the bank in Pa's name and arranged for a lot of money to be used in acquiring the Prunty stock, if it should be needed. The stock was worth twice as much, and the bank people knew it, and couldn't have believed, of course, that we would get it for *that*. Then the Pruntys made an engagement with me for Pa over the telephone, for a certain hour of a certain day, and I told Billy.

"The time has come," said Billy, when the plot began thickening in this way, "for Little Willie to beard the lion in his den. Smuggle me into the room an hour before the Pruntys are due, darling, and we'll cast the die."

I was all pale and quivery when I kissed Billy – in that sort of serious way in which we women kiss people we like, when we tell them to come back with their shields or on them – and pushed him into the room.

I heard all they said. It was dark in there, and Pa thought at first that it was a Prunty. Pa was sitting in the Morris chair, with his foot on a rest.

"That you, Enos?" said he. "Help yourself to a chair. I'm kind of laid up for repairs."

"It's Helmerston," said Billy. "I called to talk to you about this affair with Mr. Prunty. I have some information which may be of value to you."

Pa sat as still as an image for perhaps a minute. I could almost hear his thoughts. He was anathematizing Billy mentally for butting in, but he was too good a strategist to throw away any valuable knowledge.

"Well," said he at last, "I'm always open to valuable information. Turn it loose!"

Then Billy told him all you know, and a good deal more, which I shall not here state, because it is not necessary to the scenario, and I did not understand it, anyhow. There was some awfully vivid conversation at times, though, when Pa went up into the air at what Billy had done, and Billy talked him down.

"Do you mean to say, you – you young lunatic," panted Pa, "that you've told Prunty that he's got a living corpse to deal with, when I need all the prestige I've won with him to hold my own?"

But Billy explained that he'd taken the liberty of thinking the whole thing out; and, anyhow, had merely refrained from removing a mistaken notion from Prunty's mind.

"But," said he, "you can assure him when he gets here that you are really in robust health."

"Assure him!" roared Pa. "He'd be dead sure I was trying to put myself in a better light for the dicker. I couldn't make him believe anything at all. I know Prunty."

Billy said that the psychology of the situation was plain. Mr. Prunty was convinced that Pa was in such a condition that he never could go back to the office, and could no more take sole ownership of the Mid-Continent than a baby could enter a shot-putting contest. What would they do when it came to making propositions? They would offer something that they were sure a case in the tertiary stage couldn't accept. They would probably offer to give or take a certain price for the stock. Believing that Pa wasn't in position to buy, but was really forced to sell, they would name a frightfully low price, so that when Pa accepted it perforce they would be robbing him out of house and home, almost. This was the way with these shrewd traders always, and to whipsaw a dying man would be nuts for a man like Prunty. (I am here falling into Billy's dialect when he was in deadly earnest.) Then the conversation grew mysterious again with Pa listening, and once admitting that "that would be like old Enos."

"But he'll back out," said Pa, "if he's thief enough ever to start in."

"Have him make a memorandum in writing, and sign it," answered Billy.

"But," rejoined Pa, in a disgusted way, as if to ask why he condescended to argue with this young fool, "you don't know Prunty. Unless he has the cash in hand he'll go to some lawyer and find a way out."

"I thought of that, too," said Billy; "and so I took the liberty of going to the bank and getting the cash – for temporary use, you know."

"I like your nerve!" moaned Pa angrily. "Do you know, young man, that you've built up a situation that absolutely forces me to adopt your fool plans? Absolutely infernal nonsense! To imagine it possible to get the Prunty stock at any such figures is – " And Pa threw up wild hands of desperation to an unpitying sky.

"Is it possible to imagine," said Billy, "such a thing as the Pruntys trying to get your stock at that figure? That's the thing I'm looking for and counting on." And when Pa failed to reply, but only chewed his mustache, Billy went on: "I thought the logic of the situation would appeal to you," said he. "And now let us set the stage. The time is short."

And then came the most astounding thing, and the thing that showed Billy's genius. First he took out the electric-light bulbs of the electrolier, and screwed in others made of a sort of greenish glass – just a little green tinge in it. He took some stage appliances and put just a little shade of dark under Pa's eyes, and at the corners of his mouth; and when the green lights were turned on Pa had the most ghastly, ghostly, pasty, ghoulis look any one ever saw. I was actually frightened when I came in: it was as bad as Doctor Jekyll turned to Mr. Hyde. Pa looked rather cheap while Billy was doing this, but the time was getting short, and he was afraid the Pruntys would come bursting in and catch them at it. Billy placed Pa right under the green lights, and shaded them so that the rest of us received only the unadulterated output of the side lamps. Then they arranged their cues, and Billy stepped into the next room. As he went, Pa swore for the first time since he quit running the line-gang, when, he claims, it was necessary.

"If this goes wrong, as it will," he hissed through his livid lips, "I'll kick you from here to the city-limits if it blows the plug in the power-house!"

"Very well, sir," answered Billy – and the footman announced the Pruntys.

I was as pale as a ghost, and my eyes were red, and the look of things was positively sepulchral when they came in, Enos tagging at his father's heels as if he was ashamed. The footman turned on the light, and almost screamed as he looked at poor Pa, with the pasty green in his complexion, and the cavernous shadows under his eyes. Billy had seen to it that the Pruntys had had plenty of literature on the symptoms of Bright's disease, and I could see them start and exchange looks as Pa's state dawned on them.

"I'm sorry to see you in this condition," said Mr. Prunty, after Pa had weakly welcomed them and told them to sit down.

"What condition?" snapped Pa, the theatricality wearing off. "I'm all right, if it wasn't for this blamed toe!"

"Is it very bad?" asked Mr. Prunty.

"It won't heal," growled Pa, and the visitors exchanged glances again. "But you didn't come here to discuss sore toes. Let's get down to business."

Then Mr. Prunty, in a subdued and sort of ministerial voice, explained to Pa that he was getting along in years, and that Pa wasn't long – that is, that Pa was getting along in years, too – and both parties would, no doubt, be better satisfied if their interests were separated. Therefore he had decided to withdraw his capital from the business, and place it in some other enterprise which would give his son a life work along lines laid out in his education and training. He didn't want to sell his stock to the Universal Electric Company as he had a chance to do (Pa started fiercely here, for he was afraid

of the Universal Electric); although the old agreement by which neither party was to sell out to a competitor was probably no longer binding; and so they had come as man to man to talk adjustment.

"But," says Pa, "this takes me by surprise. I don't quite see my way clear to taking on such a load as carrying all the stock would be. Mid-Continent stock is valuable."

They exchanged glances again, as much as to say that Pa was evidently anxious to sell rather than buy, and was crying the stock up accordingly, so as to get as much money as he could for me before he died.

"We may not be so grasping as you think," said Mr. Prunty; and then nothing was said for quite a while.

Pa was looking awfully sick, and Mr. Prunty was just exuding love and kindness and magnanimity from every pore.

"You had some proposition thought out," interrogated Pa, feeling anxiously for his own pulse, "or you wouldn't have come. What is it, Prunty?"

"Well," answered Mr. Prunty, gazing piercingly at Pa, as if to ask if such a cadaverous person *could* possibly take on the sole control of the Mid-Continent even if he had the money – "well, we had thought of it a little, that's a fact. We thought we'd make you an offer to buy or sell –"

"Hurrah for Billy!" my heart shouted. For this was just what he said would happen. But, instead of hurrahing, I came to the front and gave Pa a powder. It was mostly quinine, and was dreadfully bitter.

"To buy or sell," went on Mr. Prunty, "at a price to be named by us. If it's a reasonable figure, take our stock and give us our money. If it's too high, why, sell us yours. That's fair, ain't it?"

Pa lay back and looked green and groaned. He was doing it nobly.

"What is fair in some circumstances," he moaned, "is extortion in others; and I – er – yes, I suppose it would be called fair. What's your give-or-take price, Prunty?"

"We are willing," said Mr. Prunty, "to give or take seventy-five for the stock."

Pa was so still that I had to rouse him, and Mr. Prunty repeated his offer.

"I – I'm getting a little forgetful," said Pa, "and I'd like to have you put it in writing, so I can consider it, and be sure I have it right, you know."

The Pruntys consulted again, and again they came forward. Enos wrote down the proposition, and Mr. Prunty signed it. I didn't understand it very well, and the strain was so frightful that I expected to fly all to pieces every instant, but I didn't.

When Enos handed the paper to Pa, Pa cleared his throat in a kind of scraping way, and in stepped Billy with a great box under his arm.

"Mr. Helmerston," said Pa, as calmly as General Grant at – any place where he was especially placid – "I want you and my daughter to be witnesses to the making of the proposition in this writing, from Mr. Prunty to me."

Billy read the paper, and said he understood that it was a give-or-take offer of seventy-five for all the stock of the Mid-Continent. Mr. Prunty said yes, looking rather dazed, and not so sympathetic.

"I accept the proposition," snapped Pa, his jaw setting too awfully firm for the tertiary stage. "I'll take your stock at seventy-five. Helmerston, pay 'em the money!"

Billy had the cash in ten-thousand-dollar bundles; and I was so fascinated at the sight of so much treasure being passed over like packages of bonbons, that for a while I didn't see how funny Mr. Prunty was acting. When I did look, he was holding his nose in the air and gasping like one of Aunt Maria's little chickens with the pip. He seemed to have a sort of progressive convulsions, beginning low down in wriggings of the legs, and gradually moving upward in jerks and gurgles and gasps, until it went off into space in twitchings of his mouth and eyes and nose and forehead. Enos had the bundles of money counted, and a receipt written, before he noticed that his father was having these fits, and then *he* seemed scared. I suppose these people have a sort of affection for each other, after all.

"Father," said he – "Father, what's the matter?"

"Matter?" roared Mr. Prunty. "Does the fool ask what's the matter? Don't you see we're done brown? Look at the basketful they brought, that we might just as well have had as not, if it hadn't been for – Blast you, Blunt, I'll show you you can't chisel old Enos Prunty out of his good money like this, I will! I'll put the whole kit and boodle of yeh in jail! That stock is worth a hundred and fifty, if it's worth a cent. Ene, if you'll stand by like a stoughton bottle and see your old father hornswoggled out of his eye-teeth by a college dude and this old confidence-man, you'll never see a cent of my money, never! Do you hear, you ass? He's no more sick than I am! That's false pretenses, ain't it? He's got some darned greenery-yallery business on that face of his! Ain't that false? Blunt, if you don't give me the rest in the basket there I'll law you to the Supreme Court!"

"Hush, father," said Enos; "Aurelia's here."

"When you get everything set," said Pa, with a most exasperating smile, "just crack ahead with your lawsuit. We'll trot you a few heats, anyhow. You'd better take your pa away, Enos, and buy him a drink of something cool."

"I want to compliment you, Mr. Helmerston," said Enos, quite like a gentleman, "on the success of your little stage-business, and especially on your careful forecast of the play of human motives. I can see that a man with only ordinary business dishonesty, like myself, need not be surprised at defeat by such a master of finesse as you."

He bowed toward me. Billy flushed.

"If you mean, sir – " he began.

"Oh, I mean nothing offensive," answered Enos. "I will be in the office in the morning, and shall be ready, as secretary, to transfer this stock on the books, previous to resigning. Come, father, we've got our beating; but we can still have the satisfaction of being good losers. Good-by, Miss Blunt; I wish you joy!"

Pa came out of the green light as they disappeared, limping on his wrapped-up foot, and shouted that he had always said that Enos was a brick, and now he knew it. I ran up to him and kissed him. Then I threw myself into Billy's arms.

"Aurelia!" said Pa, looking as cross as a man *could* look in such circumstances, "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!"

I dropped into a chair and covered up my face, while Pa went on addressing Billy, trying to be severe on him for letting me kiss him, and to beam on him at the same time for helping him with the Pruntys.

"Young man," said he, "I owe you a great deal. This tomfoolery happened to work. Please to consider yourself a part of the Mid-Continent Electric Company in any capacity you choose."

"Yes, sir," said Billy, gathering up the money. "Is that all, sir?"

"I should like to have you take Enos' place as secretary," added Pa.

"Thank you," said Billy. "I shall be pleased and honored. Is that all? Do I still go to Mexico?"

Pa pondered and fidgeted, and acted awfully ill at ease.

"Yes," said he at last. "You're the only competent engineer we've got who understands the plans. You'll have to go for a few months – if you don't mind – anyhow."

"Pa," said I, "I'm tired of metal work, and I need a vacation in new and pleasant surroundings, and – and associations. Billy is awfully pleasant to associate with, and – and be surrounded by; and I've never, never been in Guadalanawhat-you-may-call-it; and – and – may we Pa?"

"Young woman!" glared Pa, "who have you the effrontery to call 'Billy'?" – Pa could never acquire what he calls "the 'whom' habit."

Billy stepped manfully forward.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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