THE HEART LINE

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Cover art

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He took her hand, testing its quality and texture Page 52

THE HEART LINE

A DRAMA OF SAN FRANCISCO

By
GELETT BURGESS
Author of
The White Cat, Vivette
A Little Sister of Destiny, etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LESTER RALPH

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TO MAYSIE
WHO KNEW THE PEOPLE
AND
LOVED THE PLACE
IN MEMORY OF
THE CITY THAT WAS

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THE HEART LINE

PROLOGUE

In the year 1877 the Siskiyou House, originally a third-class hotel patronized chiefly by mining men, had fallen into such disrepute that it was scarcely more

than a cheap tenement. Its office was now frankly a bar-room; beside it, a narrow hallway plunged into the shabby, shadowy interior; here a steep stairway rose. Above were disconsolate rooms known to the police of San Francisco as the occasional resort of counterfeiters, confidence workers and lesser knaves; to the neighborhood the Siskiyou Hotel had a local reputation as being the home of Madam Grant, who occupied two rooms on the second floor.

Her rooms were slovenly and squalid—almost barbarous in the extremity of their neglect. Upon the floor was a matted carpet of dirt and rubbish inches deep, piled higher at the corners, uneven with lumps of refuse, bizarre with scraps of paper, cloth and tangled strings.

In the rear room an unclean length of burlap was stretched across a string, half concealing a disordered, ramshackle cot, whose coverings were ragged, soiled and moth-eaten. A broken chair or two leaned crazily against the wall. The dusty windows looked point-blank upon the damp wall of an abutting wooden house. There had once been paper upon the walls; it was now torn, scratched and rubbed by grimy shoulders into a harlequin pattern of dun and greasy tones.

The front room, through the open rolling doors, was, if possible, in a still worse state of decay, and here wooden and paper boxes, tin cans, sacks of rags (doing service for cushions), a three-legged table and a smoked, rusty oil-stove, with its complement of unclean pots and dishes, showed the place, abominable as was its aspect, to be a human abode. A print or two, torn from some newspaper or magazine, was pinned to the wall in protest against the sordidness of the interior. The place gave forth a fetid and moldy smell. The air was damp, though the sun struggled in through cracked panes, half lighting the apartment.

There was, however, one piece of furniture, glossily, splendidly new, incongruously set amidst the disorder—an oak bookcase, its shelves well filled with volumes. Seated upon a cracker box in front of its open doors, this afternoon, a boy of eight years sat reading with rapt excitement the story of *Gulliver's Travels*.

He, too, seemed strangely set in that environment, for he was clean and sweet in person and dress. His hair was black and waving, his eyes deep blue, clear and shrewd. His cheeks were pink and gently dimpled, his mouth ample, firm and well-cut, over a square, deeply cleft chin. He was patently a handsome child, virile, graceful, determined in his pose. His natural charm was made more picturesque by a blue flannel suit, with white collar, cuffs and stockings. Oblivious to his extraordinary surroundings, he read on until he had finished the book.

He rose then, yawned and walked to the window in the front room to look out upon the street. Opposite was a row of low buildings—a stable, a Chinese laundry, two dreary rooming-houses and a saloon. The roof-line of the block, where the false wooden fronts, met the sky, held his gaze for a few moments. A horse-car lumbered lazily past, and his eyes fell to the cobble-paved thorough-

fare and its passers-by. To the left, Market Street roared bustling a block away and the throngs swept up and down. To the right, a little passage starting from two saloons, one on each corner of the street, penetrated the slums. The warm, mellow California sunlight bathed the whole scene, picking out, here and there, high lights on window-glass that shot forth blinding sparks and flashes.

The boy yawned again, his hands in his pockets, then turned to the sooty oil stove and peered rather disgustedly amongst the frying-pans, tins and pasteboard boxes. There was nothing in the way of food to be found. He sniffed fastidiously at the corrupt odor of cooking, then knelt upon the floor and began a search, crawling gingerly on hands and knees. The ends of three matches projected slightly above the surface of the matted layers of rubbish. Here he scraped the dirt away with a case-knife and came upon a little paper-wrapped parcel which, opened, disclosed three bright twenty-five-cent pieces. He wrapped them up again, tucked them into the hole in the dirt and went on with his quest.

His next find, a foot or so from the base-board of the double doors, was a *cache* containing a pearl-handled pen-knife. He put it back. Here and there in the subsoil he came upon other treasure trove, each article carefully wrapped in paper or bits of rag—a jet ear-ring, a folded calendar, a silver chain, two watches, a dozen screw-eyes, several five-dollar gold pieces, a roll of corset laces. He returned them one by one as he found them, and smoothed the dirt over the place.

He had nearly exhausted the field in the front room, when he came upon a small paper bag containing a few macaroons. These he sat down to eat, first brushing off feathery bits of green mold. He discovered another bag containing peanuts. He chewed them slowly, throwing the shells upon the floor, his eyes wandering, his air abstracted.

Leading off the front room was a smaller one whose door was shut. He opened it now, and went in somewhat fearfully. Here was another cot drawn up in front of the window, and, upon nails driven in the wall, women's hats and dresses. Upon the inside of the door was pinned a stained, yellowing newspaper cut—the portrait of a man perhaps thirty years old, with mustache and side-whiskers and a wide flowing collar. Beneath it was printed the name, "Oliver Payson." The boy gazed at it curiously for some moments.

From this, he turned to a corner where stood an old trunk covered with cowhide whose hair was rubbed off in mangy spots. Corroded brass-headed nails held a rotting, pinked flap of red leather about the edge of the cover. On the top of the trunk, also in brass-headed nails, were the letters "F.G."

He stooped over and tried the lid. The trunk was locked. He lifted it, testing its weight, and found it too heavy to be budged. He rubbed the hair with his hand, played with the handles and fingered the lock longingly; then, after a last look, he left the room and closed the door.

He had gone back to the bookcase and taken down a volume of Montaigne's *Essays*, when he heard a knock on the door of the back room leading into the hallway. He unlocked the door, opened it a few inches and stood guarding the entrance.

A woman of middle age in a black bonnet, shawl and gown attempted to pass him. He stood stiffly in her way, regarding her harsh, sour visage, thin, cruel lips and pale, humid, bluish eyes. At his resolute defense her attitude weakened.

"Ain't Madam Grant to home?" she said.

"No, she is not. What do you want?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see her; you let me come in and wait a while—she'll be back soon, I s'pose?"

"She doesn't allow me to let anybody in when she's away," the boy protested.

"Oh, that's all right, Frankie; I'm a particular friend of hers. I'll just come in and make myself to home till she comes in. I'm all winded comin' up them steep stairs, and I've got to set down."

"I'm sorry," the boy said more politely, "but I mustn't let you in. I did let a lady in once, and Mamsy scolded me for it. The next day we missed a watch, too."

"My sakes! Does she keep her watches in the dirt on the floor, too?" the woman said, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. "You needn't worry about me, my dear; everybody knows me, and trusts me, too. Besides, my business is important and I've just *got* to see the Madam, sure."

"You may wait on the stairs, if you like, but you can't come in here. She says that the neighbors are altogether too curious." The remark was made deliberately, as if to aid his defense by its rudeness. But the woman's skin was tough.

"You're a pert one, you be!" she sniffed. "I'd like to know what you do here all day, anyway. You ought to be to school! We'll have to look after you, young man; they's societies that makes a business of seeing to children that's neglected like you, and takes 'em away where they can be taught an education and live decent."

The boy's face changed to dismay. The tears came into his eyes. "I don't *want* to go away, I want to live here, and I'm going to, too! Besides, I can read and write already, and I learn more things than you can learn at school. I'd just like to see them take me away!"

"What do you learn, now?" said the woman insinuatingly. "Do you learn how to tell fortunes? Can you tell mine, now? I'll give you a nickel if you will!"

"I don't want a nickel. I've got all the money I want!"

"Oh, you have, have you? How much have you got? Say, I hear the Madam's pretty well fixed. How much do you s'pose she's worth, now?"

”You can’t work me that way.”

She put forth a shaky hand to stroke his dark hair, and he warded her off. ”Nor that way either!” he said, beginning to grow angry.

”Say, sonny, do you ever see the spirits here?” she began again.

”No, but I can smell ’em now,” he replied.

She burst out into a cackle of laughter. ”Say, that’s pretty good! You’re a likely little feller, you be. I didn’t mean no harm, noways.”

”You mean that you didn’t mean any harm, don’t you?” he asked soberly.

”No, I don’t mean no harm, sure I don’t! What d’you mean?”

”She says one shouldn’t use double negatives.”

”What’s them, then?”

”I mean you don’t use good English,” said the boy.

”I don’t talk English? What do I talk then—Dutch? What’s the matter with you?”

”Oh, I’m just studying grammar, that’s all. Now you see I don’t need to go to school, the way you said. Mamsy teaches me every night.”

”Oh, she does, does she? Well, well! I hear she has a fine education; some say she’s went to college, even.”

”Yes, she has. She went to a woman’s college in the East, once.”

”Then what’s she living in this pigsty for, I’d like to know! It beats all, this room does. Let me come in for a moment and just look round a bit, will you? I won’t touch nothing at all, sure.”

The boy protested, and it might have come to a physical struggle had not footsteps been heard coming up the narrow stairway. The visitor peered over the railing of the balusters.

”That’s her!” she whispered hoarsely.

A head, rising, looked between the balusters, like a wild animal gazing through the bars of its cage. It was the head of a woman of twenty-seven or eight, and though her face had a strange, wild expression, with staring eyes, she was, or had undoubtedly been, a lady. Her hair, prematurely gray, was parted in the center and brought down in waves over her ears. Her eyebrows, in vivid contrast, were black; and between them a single vertical line cleft her forehead. What might have been a rare beauty was now distorted into something fantastic and mysterious, though when at rare intervals she smiled, a veil seemed to be drawn aside and she became an engaging, familiar, warm-hearted woman. She was dressed in a brilliant red gown and dolman of mosaic cloth with a Tyrolean hat of the period. Such striking color was, thirty years ago, uncommon upon the streets, but, even had it been more usual, the severity of her costume with neither a bustle nor the elaborate ruffles and trimmings then in vogue, would have made her conspicuous.

She came up, with a white face, gasping for breath after her climb, one hand to her heart. For a moment she seemed unable to speak. Then suddenly and sharply she said:

"Francis, shut the door!"

The boy obeyed, coming out into the hall, with a hand still holding the knob.

"The lady wanted me to let her in, but I wouldn't do it, Mamsy," he said.

Madam Grant turned her eyes upon the apologetic, cringing figure, whose thin, skinny fingers plucked at her shawl.

"I just called neighborly like, thinkin' maybe you'd give me a settin', Madam Grant," she said.

Madam Grant had come nearer, now, and stood gazing at her visitor. The expression of scorn had faded from her face, her eyes glazed. She spoke slowly in a deliberate monotone.

"Your name is Margaret Riley."

The woman nodded. Her lips had fallen open, and her eyes were fixed in awe.

"Who are the three men I see beside you?" demanded Madam Grant.

"They was only two! I swear to God they was only two!"

"There is a little child, too."

"For the love of Heaven!" Mrs. Riley moaned. "Send 'em away, send 'em away, tell 'em to leave me be!"

Madam Grant's eyes brightened a little, and her color returned.

"Come in the room and I will see what I can do for you."

The three entered, Mrs. Riley, half terrified but curious, darting her eyes about the apartment, sniffing at the foul odor, her furtive glances returning ever to the mad woman. Francis went to the bookcase and resumed his reading without manifesting further interest in the visitor. Madam Grant seated herself upon a wooden box covered with sacking and untied the strings of her hat.

"What do you want to know?" she asked sharply.

"I got three tickets in the lottery, and I want to know which one to keep," Mrs. Riley ventured, somewhat shamefaced.

Madam Grant gave a fierce gesture, and the line between her brows grew deeper. "I'll answer such questions for nobody! That's the devil's work, not mine. How did your three husbands die, Margaret Riley?"

The woman held up her hands in protest. "Two, only two!" she cried; "and they died in their beds regular enough. God knows I wore my fingers out for 'em, too!"

"They died suddenly," Madam Grant replied impassively. "Who's the other one with the smooth face—the one who limps?"

Mrs. Riley coughed into her hands nervously. ”It might be my brother.”

”It is not your brother. You know who it is, Mrs. Riley; and he tells me that you must give back the papers.”

”Oh, I’ll give ’em back; I was always meanin’ to give ’em back, God knows I was! I’ll do it this week.”

”In a week it will be too late.”

”I’ll do it to-morrow.”

”You’ll do it to-day, Mrs. Riley.”

”I will, oh, I will!”

”Now, if you want a sitting, I’ll give you one,” Madam Grant continued. ”That is, if I can get Weenie. I can’t promise anything. She comes and she goes like the sun in spring.”

”Never mind,” said Mrs. Riley, rising abruptly. ”I think I’ll be going, after all.” She started toward the door.

The clairvoyant’s face had set again in a vacant, far-away expression and her voice fell to the same dead tone she had used before. She clutched her throat suddenly.

”He’s in the water—he’s drowning—he’s passing out now—he’s gone! You are responsible, you! you! You drove him to it with your false tongue and your crafty hands. But you’ll regret it. You’ll pay for it in misery and pain, Margaret Riley. Your old age will be miserable. You’ll escape shame to suffer torment!”

Mrs. Riley’s face, haggard and terrified, was working convulsively. Without taking her eyes from the medium, she ran into the front room and shook the boy’s shoulder.

”Wake her up, Frankie, I don’t want no more of this! Wake her up, dear, and let me go!”

Francis arose lazily and walked over to Madam Grant. He put his arm tenderly about her and whispered in her ear.

”Come back, Mamsy dear! Come back, Mamsy, I want you!” He began stroking her hands firmly.

Mrs. Riley, still gazing, fascinated, at the group, backed out of the room and closed the door. Her steps were heard stumbling down the stairs. Madam Grant’s eyes quivered and opened slowly. She shuddered, then shook the blood back into her thin, white hands. Finally she looked up at Francis and smiled. ”All right, dear!”

Her smile, however, lasted but for the few moments during which he caressed her; then the veil fell upon her countenance, and her eyes grew strange and hard. She gazed wildly here and there about the room.

”What’s that in Boston?” she asked suddenly, the pitch of her voice sharply raised, as she pointed to the shells upon the rubbish of the floor.

”Only some peanuts I was eating, Mamsy,” said the boy, guiltily watching her.

”Somebody has been in Toledo, somebody has been in New York! I can see the smoke of the trains!” Her eyes traveled around an invisible path, from mound to mound of dirt and scraps, noticing the slight displacements the boy had made in his quest for food. He watched her sharply, but without fear.

”Oh, the train didn’t stop, Mamsy; they were express trains, you know.”

”Don’t tell me, don’t tell me!”

She pointed with her slender forefinger here and there. ”New Orleans is safe; New Orleans is always a safe, strait-laced old town; but the place isn’t what it was! They’ve left the French quarter now to the Creoles, but I know a place on Royal Street where the gallery whispers—O God! that gallery with the magnolia trees—and the leper girl across the street in the end room!” Her voice had sunk to a harsh whisper; now it rose again. ”Chicago—all right. I wouldn’t care if it weren’t. Baltimore—*he* never was in Baltimore. But what’s the matter with Denver? Somebody’s been to Denver!” She turned her gaze point-blank upon Francis.

He met it fairly.

”Oh, no, Mamsy, nobody ever goes to Denver, Mamsy dear!”

She knelt down and groped tentatively, sensitively, across the layer of dust that sloped toward the corner, by the bay-window. She turned, still on all-fours, to shake her finger at him, and say solemnly: ”Don’t ever go to Denver, Francis! Denver’s a bad place, a very wicked place. They gamble in Denver, they gamble yellow money away.” She arose, apparently either satisfied or diverted in her quest, to turn her back to the boy and look inside the bag she had been holding.

”Go outside, Francis!” she commanded, after fumbling with its contents.

He walked to the door and passed into the hall. Here he waited, listening listlessly, drumming softly upon the railing. The room was silent for a while; then he heard a muffled pounding, as of one stamping down the surface of the matted dirt. At last she called him and he went in again. Madam Grant’s face was placid and kind.

She proceeded to occupy herself busily at the little oil stove, putting into the greasy frying-pan some chops which she had brought home with her. The spluttering and the pungent odor of the frying fat soon filled the two rooms. She cut a few slices from a loaf of stale bread, and set the meager repast forth upon the top of a wooden box.

”Come and have dinner, Francis!” she said, with a sweet look at him.

That the boy was far older than his years was evident by the way he watched her and took his cue from her, humoring her in her madder moments, restraining her in her moods of mystic exaltation, pathetically affectionate dur-

ing her lucid intervals. She was in this last phase now, and from time to time, in the course of their meal, his hand stole to hers. Its pressure was softly returned.

"What have you read to-day?"

"I finished *Gulliver*."

"What did you think of it?"

"Why, somehow, it seemed just like it might be true."

"*As if* it might be true, Francis—what did I tell you?" Her tone grew severe, almost pedagogic. "You must be careful of your talk, my boy! Never forget; it is important. You'll never get on if you're careless and common. You will often be judged by your speech. What else did you read?"

"I tried Montaigne's *Essays*, but I couldn't understand much. It seemed so dull to me. But there's one, *Whether the Governor of a Place Besieged Ought Himself to go out to Parley*. I like that!"

Madam Grant laughed. "I'd like to have known Montaigne; he was a kind of old maid, but he was a modern, after all; common sense will do if you can't get humor."

"Where did you get all these books, Mamsy?"

Her face grew blank again; her eyes wandered. She recited in a sort of croon:

"Heard, have you? what? they have told you he never
repented his sin.
How do they know it? are they his mother? are you of
his kin?"

A frightened look came on the boy's face and his hand went to hers again.

"Mamsy, Mamsy!" he cried. "Come back, Mamsy! I want you!"

She turned to him as if she had never seen him before. "Oh!" she said, and drew aside. Then: "You mustn't ask questions, my boy."

"I won't, Mamsy."

"You're a good little boy and you came out of the dark," she pursued.

"Out of the dark?" he repeated, tempting her on. His curiosity was manifest.

"Don't you remember?"

"I'm not sure. They was a place—"

"There was a place," she corrected.

"There was a place where they beat me, and I ran away, and I found you, and you were good to me."

"No, it is you who have been good—I'm not good; I'm bad, Francis."

”I know you’re good, Mamsy, because you teach me to do everything right, and I love you!”

With a quick impulse she clasped him to her, but even as she did so, her face changed again, this time with an expression of pain. She put her hand to her heart suddenly and moaned. He watched her in terror.

”Get the bottle!” she commanded huskily, dropping to the floor, to support herself on her elbow.

He ran to a little bath-room beside the closet, brought a bottle and spoon, poured out a dose of the medicine and put it to her lips. Finally she sat up, listening.

”Somebody’s coming. *She* is coming! Come here, Francis! Quickly!”

Taking him by the hand, she led him to the closet in the back room, pushed him inside, closed the door and locked it.

It was dark in the closet, but he knew its contents as well as if he could see them. Upon a row of shelves were account-books and papers covered with dust. On nails in the wall his own small stock of clothes hung, and in a wooden box on the floor were his playthings—blocks, a wooden horse, several precious bits of twine and leather, a collection of spools and a toy globe. He sat down on this box patiently and waited.

Presently there came a knock at the hall door. Madam Grant opened it and some one entered. He heard his guardian’s voice saying:

”Come in, Grace, here I am, such as I am, and here you are, such as you are.” Then her voice changed, becoming tremulous and excited. ”Ah, but she’s beautiful! May I kiss her, Grace? Oh, what eyes! Her father’s eyes, aren’t they? Don’t be afraid, Grace, let her come to me.”

There was a reply in a soft voice which Francis could not make out, as they passed into the front room. He tried to peep through the keyhole, but as the key had been left in, he could see nothing. He sat down upon the box again to wait, playing with his toy globe. After a while he noticed a thin streak of light admitted by a crack in the panel of the door, and rose to see if he could see through it. At the height of his eye it was too narrow to show him anything in the room, but farther up it widened. He pulled down several account-books from the shelves and piled them upon the box. Standing tiptoe upon these, he found that he could get a clear though limited view of the bay-window.

Here a little girl sat quietly, vividly illuminated in the sunshine. She was scarcely more than four years of age and was dressed in a navy blue silk frock whose collar and pockets were elaborately trimmed with ruffles of white satin and bows of ribbon. She wore a white muslin cap decorated with ribbon, lace and rosebuds; white stockings showed above her high buttoned boots; her hair was a truant mass of fine-spun threads, curling, tawny yellow. Her face was

round, her eyes extraordinarily wide apart under level, straight brows. What caught and held his attention, however, as he watched, was a velvety mole upon her left cheek, so placed as to be a piquant ornament rather than a disfigurement to her countenance. She sat listening, tightly holding a woolly lamb in her plump little arms. The two women were out of his range of vision.

The steady low sound of voices came to him, but he made no attempt to listen—his attention was riveted upon the figure of the little girl who was sharply focused, as in an opera-glass, directly in his field of view. Occasionally, as she was spoken to, she smiled, and her cheek dimpled; but she seemed to be looking at him, through the door. She scarcely moved her eyes, but kept them fixed in his direction, as if conscious of an invisible presence.

The women talked on. Occasionally Madam Grant's voice rose to a more excited note, and a few words came to him, betraying to his knowledge of her that her mood had been interrupted by her customary vagaries. At such times the little girl would withdraw her glance to gaze solemnly in Madam Grant's direction; she showed, however, no signs of alarm. It seemed, indeed, as if the little girl understood, even as he understood, the temporary aberration. Then her eyes would return to his, as if drawn back by his gaze.

So the scene lasted for a half-hour, during which time he caught no glimpse of the other visitor. At last a hand was outstretched and the little girl rose. Francis stepped down for a moment to rest himself from his strained position; when he had put his eye again to the crack she had passed out of his line of sight.

He was to catch a few words more, however, before the callers left.

"I'm glad you came to-day," Madam Grant said. "You were just in time."

"Why, are you going to leave here?"

"Yes, I'm going away."

"Felicia," the visitor said earnestly, "why won't you let us take care of you? This is no place for you—it is dreadful to think of you here! Now, while you are able to talk to me, do let me do something for you!"

"No; it's too late. Besides, there is Francis," said Madam Grant.

"Let Francis come, too. This is a terrible place for a child. Look at this room—look at the filth and disorder!"

Madam Grant's voice rose again. "Take her away, take her away!" she cried raucously. "She'll go to New York, she'll go to Toledo—I don't want her in Toledo meddling! She'll be in New Orleans the first thing you know; there she goes now! Take her away, take her away!"

The door closed. Francis heard the key turn in the lock. Then there was the jarring sound of a fall and finally all was still. He waited for some moments, then he called out:

"Mamsy, let me out! let me out!"

There was no reply.

”Mamsy!” he called out again. ”Where are you? Come and let me out, *please* let me out!”

There was still no answer to his pleadings. In terror now, he pounded the panels, shook the handle of the door, and then began to cry. Climbing upon the box again, he caught sight of Madam Grant’s skirt. She was lying prone upon the floor. As he wept on, she moved and began to crawl slowly toward him. At last her hand groped to the door and the key was turned in the lock. He burst out into her arms.

The blood was gone from her tense, anguished face; one hand clutched at her heart. She did not speak, but gasped horribly for breath. There was no need now for her to direct him. He poured out a dose of medicine and forced it between her lips. He gave her another spoonful; the drops trickled from her mouth and stained the front of her crimson gown. Then, with his assistance, she crept to his couch, pulled herself upon it and lay down, groaning. He sat on the floor beside her, stroking her hand.

For some time she was too weak to speak. Her black eyebrows were drawn down, the cleft between them was deep, like the gash of a knife. Her white hair fell about her head in disorder. She drew a ragged coverlid over her chest, as if suffering from the cold, though the sun shone in upon her as she lay and mercilessly illumined her desperate face. The spasm of agony abated, and after some minutes she breathed more freely. Then, with a sigh, her muscles relaxed and her voice came clear and calm.

”You must be a good boy, Francis,” she began, ”for I am going away. It’s all over now with the worry and the puzzle and the pain. What will you do, I wonder? Oliver might help, perhaps. Oliver isn’t so bad, down in his heart. He was fair enough. There’s money enough. Francis, when I fall asleep, look in the trunk and hide the money, if you can—don’t let them get it away from you! Wait till I’m asleep, though—the key is in my bag. What a fool I was! I might have known. There was my grandmother, she was mad, too. It may stop with me—oh, she was a dear little thing, though!”

”Who was the little girl, Mamsy?” Francis inquired, his curiosity overcoming his fear for her.

”Born with a veil, born with a veil! I was a seventh daughter, too—much good it did me! I could tell others—who could tell me? Bosh! it’s all rubbish—we’ll never know! fol-de-rol, Francis, it’s all gammon—all but Weenie. Weenie knows. Yellow hair, too; it will grow gray soon enough!” Then, as if she had just heard his question she broke our querulously, ”Where did *you* see her?”

”I looked through a crack in the door, Mamsy.”

She pulled herself up in a frenzy of anger and shook her finger at him.

”Oh, you did, did you? You snooping, sniping monkey! I’ll tell you what you were looking at, you were watching the train to New York! You’ll go to Toledo, will you? You won’t find anything there. Go to New Orleans; there’s plenty to find out in New Orleans! In Denver, too, and way stations, but be careful, be careful! I was born in Toledo.” She sank back exhausted.

”Don’t be worried, Mamsy,” said Francis, attempting to calm her. ”I won’t never go to Toledo, Mamsy!”

”’Won’t never’!” She glared at him. ”What did I say about double negatives, boy? Two negatives make a positive, two pints make a quart, two fools make a quarrel, two quarrels make a fool. What language! I was at Vassar, too—I was secretary of my class! Oh, I want to see Victoria! She would understand, I’m sure! Oh, Francis!” Her voice dwindled away and her eyes closed.

For a moment she seemed to be asleep. Then a sudden convulsion frightened him. She spoke again without raising her lids.

”Why, there’s mother! Come and kiss me, mother! Did Weenie send for you, mother? Oh, Weenie! Who’s the old man? Father? I never saw father on this side, did I, Weenie? He passed out when I was very little, didn’t he? So many people! Why, the room is full of them! Yes, I’m coming—”

The boy was tugging frantically at her hand, calling to her without ceasing, sobbing in his fright. He succeeded at last in bringing her out of her trance and she opened her eyes to stare at him. Her breath was coming harder. With a great effort she reached for the boy’s head and pulled it nearer, gazing into his frightened eyes.

”Poor Francis!” she gasped. ”You’ve been so good, dear—you’ve been my hope! Felicia Grant’s hope! You have no name, dear; take that one, instead of mine—Francis Granthope—oh, this pain!”

”Shan’t I get you the medicine?” he asked, sobbing.

”No, it’s no use.” She pushed him gently away. ”I’m going—to sleep—now—Don’t call me back, Francis; I want rest. Remember the trunk—good-by!”

She closed her eyes and rolled over on her side, turning her face away from him.

He waited half an hour in silence. Then he put his hands to her arms softly.

”Mamsy!” he said quietly but insistently. ”Are you asleep, Mamsy?” There was no answer.

He arose and looked for her leather bag. He found it on the floor where she had fallen. Opening it, he found inside a heterogeneous collection—strings, hairpins, peppermints, papers, a lock of hair in an envelope, a photograph, several gold pieces, and the key—he took it and tiptoed into the little side room with excited interest. He had never looked inside the trunk before and his eagerness made his hands tremble as he unlocked it.

On top was a tray filled with account-books and papers, letters, folded newspapers and a mahogany box. It was all he could do to lift it to get at what was beneath. He struggled with it until he had tilted it up and slid it down to the floor.

Below was a mass of white satin and lace. He lifted this piece by piece, disclosing a heavy wedding gown, silk-lined, wrapped in tissue paper, and many accessories of an elaborate trousseau—a half-dozen pairs of silk stockings, a pair of exquisite white satin slippers, a box of long white gloves, another of lace handkerchiefs, dozens of mysterious articles of lingerie, embroidered and lace-trimmed. In a lower corner was a little, white vellum, gold-clasped prayer-book.

Lastly he found a package securely wrapped in brown paper; opening this, he discovered six crisp, green packages of bank-notes. These he rewrapped and slid them inside his full blue blouse. Then he put everything back in order, replaced the tray and locked the trunk.

Finally he stole back to the form upon the couch. ”Mamsy, are you awake?” he whispered.

There was no answer, and he shook her shoulder slightly. Then, as she made no reply, he leaned over and looked at her face. Her eyes were open, fearfully open, but they did not turn to his. They were set and glazed with film.

A horror came over him now, and he shook her with all his strength.

”Mamsy, Mamsy!” he cried. ”Look at me, Mamsy! What’s the matter?”

Still she did not look at him, or speak, or move. He noticed that she was not breathing, and his fear overcame him. He dropped her cold hand and ran screaming out into the hall.

CHAPTER I

THE PALMIST AND FANCY GRAY

Fancy Gray was the lady’s name and the lady’s hair was red. Both were characteristic of her daringly original character, for, as Fancy’s name had once been Fanny, Fanny’s hair had once been brown. Further indication of Miss Gray’s disposition was to be found in her eyebrows, which were whimsically arched, and her mouth, which was scarlet-lipped and tightly held. Another detail of significance was her green silk stockings, rather artfully displayed to lend a harmony to her dark green cloth tailor-made suit, which fitted like a kid glove over Miss

Gray's cunningly rounded little body. Her eyes were brown and bright; they were as quick as heliograph flashes, but could, when she willed, burn as softly as glowing coals of fire. Her face seemed freshly washed, her complexion was translucently clear, modified only by the violet shadows under her eyes and an imperceptible tint of fine down on her upper lip. Her hands, well beringed and well kept, were fully worth the admiration which, by her willingness to display them to advantage, she seemed to expect on their account.

In New York, a good guesser would have put her age at twenty-three; but, taking into account the precocious effect of the California climate, nineteen might be nearer the mark. She was, at all events, a finished product; there was no evidence of diffidence or *gaucherie* about Fancy Gray. She appeared to be very well satisfied with herself. If, as she evidently did, she considered herself beautiful, her claim would undoubtedly be acknowledged by most men who met her for the first time. On those more fastidious, she had but to smile and her mouth grew still more generous, showing a double line of white teeth, those in the lower jaw being set slightly zigzag, as if they were so pretty that it had been wished to put in as many as possible—her cheeks dimpled, her eyes half closed—and she triumphed over her critic. For there was something more dangerous than beauty in that smile; there was an elfin humor that captured and bewildered—there was warmth and welcome in it. It made one feel happy.

As she sat at her desk in the waiting-room she could look across the corner of Geary and Powell Streets to catch the errant eye of passing cable-car conductors, or gaze, in abstraction, at pedestrians crossing Union Square, or at the oriental towers of the Synagogue beyond. With the bait of a promising smile, she caught many an upward glance. Fancy Gray was not in the habit of hiding her charms, and she levied tribute to her beauty on all mankind. She gazed upon women, however, far less indulgently than upon men; never was there a more captious observer of her sex. A glance up and a glance down she gave; and the specimen was classified, appraised, appreciated, condemned, condoned or complimented. Not a pin missed her scrutiny, not a variation of the mode escaped her quest for revealing evidence. A woman could hardly pass from contact with Fancy's swift glance without being robbed, mentally, of everything worth while that she possessed in the matter of novelty in fashion or deportment. Fancy appropriated the ideas thus gained, and made use of them at the earliest opportunity. The waiting-room bore, upon the outside, the legend:

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|  FRANCIS GRANTHOPE, PALMIST  |
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Inside, where Fancy sat daily from ten to four, the apartment was walled and carpeted in red. Upon the walls, painted wooden Chinese grotesque masks, grinning or scowling against the fire-cracker paper, hung, at intervals, from black stained woodwork. Between the two windows was a plaster column bearing the winged head of Hypnos; at the other end of the room was a row of casts of hands hanging on hooks against a black panel. The desk in the corner was Fancy's station, and here she murmured into the telephone, scribbled appointments in a blank-book, read *The Second Wife*, gazed out into the green square, or manicured her nails—according as the waiting-room chairs were empty, or occupied with men or with women. Whatever company she had, she was never careless of the light upon her or the condition of her tinted hair.

It was a cool, blustering afternoon in August. San Francisco was at its worst phase. The wind was high and harsh, harassing the city with its burden of dust. Over the mountains, on the Marin shore, a high fog hung, its advance guard scudding in through the Golden Gate, piling over the hills by the Twin Peaks and preparing its line of battle for a general assault upon the peninsula at nightfall. In the streets men and women clung to their hats savagely as they passed gusty corners, and coat collars were turned up against the raw air. Summer had, so far, spent its effort in four violently hot days, when the humid atmosphere made the temperature unbearable. Now the weather had flung back to an extreme as unpleasant; open fires were in order. There was one now burning in Granthope's reception-room, to which Fancy Gray made frequent excursions. She was there, making a picture of herself beside the hearth, having resolutely held her pose for some time in anticipation of his coming, when Francis Granthope arrived.

Tall, erect and able-bodied, with the physique of an athlete, and a strong, leonine head covered with crisp, waving, black hair, Francis Granthope had the complement of the actor's type of looks; but his alertness of carriage and his swift, searching glance distinguished him from the professional male beauty. Fine eyes of deep, rich blue, fine teeth often exposed in compelling smiles, a resolute mouth and a firm, deeply cleft chin he had; and all these attractions were set off by his precise dress—gloves, bell-tailed overcoat, sharply creased trousers, varnished boots and silk hat. A short mustache, curling upward slightly at the ends, and a small, triangular tuft of hair on his lower lip gave him a somewhat foreign as-

pect. He had an air, a manner, that kept up the illusion. Men would perhaps have distrusted him as too obviously handsome; women would talk about him as soon as he had left the room. Stage managers would have complimented his ”presence”; children would have watched him, fascinated, reserving their judgment. He seemed to fill the room with electricity.

He sent a smile to Fancy, half of welcome, half of amusement at her picturesque posture, and, with cordial ”Good morning!” in a mellow barytone, removed his overcoat and hat, putting them into a closet near the hall door. He reappeared in morning coat, white waistcoat and pin-checked trousers, with a red carnation in his buttonhole. He held his hands for a moment before the fire, then looked indulgently at his blithe assistant.

Now, one of Fancy’s charms was a slender, pointed tongue. This she was wont to exhibit, on occasion, by sticking it out of her mouth coquettishly, and shaking it saucily in the direction of her nostrils—a joyous exploit which was vouchsafed only upon rare and intimate occasions. This, now, she did, tilting her head backward to give piquancy to the performance.

Granthope laughed, and went over to where she sat.

”You’re a saucy bird, Fancy,” he commented, leaning over her, both hands upon the desk. ”Do you know I rather like you!”

Her face grew drolly sober; her whimsical eyebrows lifted.

”I don’t know as I blame you,” she replied. ”You always did have good taste, though.”

”I believe that I might go so far as to imprint a salute upon your chaste brow!”

”I accept!” said Fancy Gray.

He stooped over and kissed her. She was graciously resigned.

”Thank you, Frank,” she said demurely. ”Small contributions gratefully received.” She tucked her head into the corner of his arm, and he looked down upon her kindly.

”Poor little Fancy!” he said softly.

”Have you missed me, Frank?”

”Horribly!”

”Don’t laugh at me!”

”How can I help it, O toy queen?”

”Am I so awfully young?”

”You’re pretty juvenile, Fancy, but you’ll grow up, I think.”

She was quite sober now. ”Oh, there’s an awful lot of time wasted in growing up,” she said. Then she squirmed her head so that she could look upward at him. ”You’ve been awfully good to me, Frank!” Her tone was wistful.

”You deserve more than you will ever get, I’m afraid,” was his answer as he

patted her hair.

”I think you do like me a little.”

He shook his finger at her. ”No fair falling in love!”

She laughed. ”I believe you’re afraid, Frank!”

”I don’t know what I’d do without you, Fancy. We’ve been through a good deal together, first and last, haven’t we?”

”Yes, we’ve had a good time. I’d like to do it all over again.”

”Heavens, no!” he exclaimed. ”I wouldn’t! There’s enough ahead. From what I’ve seen of life, things don’t really begin to happen till you’re thirty, at least. All this will seem like a dream.”

”Sometimes I hope it will.” Fancy was looking away, now. Her gaze returned to him after a moment of silence. ”Don’t you ever think of getting out of this, Frank? You’re too good for these fakirs, really you are! Why, you could mix with millionaires, easy! And you’ve got a good start, now. They like you. You’ve got the style and the education and the ’know’ for it.”

He went back to the fireplace, standing there with his hands behind his back.

”Oh, this is amusing enough. What does it matter, anyway? There are as big fools and shams in society as there are in my business. Look at the women that come down here, and the things they tell me! Why, I know them a good deal better now than I should if I were on their calling-lists and took tea with them! But you are right, in a way. I suppose some day I must quit this and take to honest theft.”

”Don’t say that, Frank! I hate you when you’re cynical.”

”What else can I be, in my profession?”

”Oh, I do want you to quit, Frank, really I do, and yet, I hate to think of it. What should I do? I’d lose you sure! I could never make good with the swells. I’m only a drifter.”

”Oh, you can’t lose me, Fan; we’ve pulled together too long. You could make good all right. You’ve got a pose and a poise that some ladies would give their teeth for. I don’t believe you’ve ever really been surprised in your life, have you?”

”I guess not.” Fancy shook her head thoughtfully. ”When I *am* surprised, it’ll be a woman who’ll do it. No man can, that’s sure.”

”No. I fancy you know all there is to know about men. I wish I did. You’ll do, Fancy Gray!” He approached her and playfully chucked her under the chin. Then he looked at her gravely. ”I wonder why you’re willing to drudge along here with me, anyway. You could get a much better position easily—with your face—and brains.”

”*And* figure. Don’t forget that!” Fancy shook her finger at him.

”Yes.” He looked her over approvingly.

”No woman ought to be blue with a figure like mine, ought she?”

He laughed. ”I can’t imagine your ever being blue, Fancy!”

Fancy opened her eyes very wide.

”There’s a whole lot you don’t know about women yet,” she said sagely.

”That’s likely.”

”Am I to understand that I’m fired, then?” She tried to appear demure.

”Not yet. I’m only too afraid you’ll resign. It’s queer you don’t get married. You must have had lots of chances. Why don’t you, Fancy?”

”I never explain,” said Fancy. ”It only wastes time.”

He went over to her again and very affectionately boxed her ears.

She freed herself, and turned her face up to him. ”Frank,” she said, ”do you think I’m pretty?”

”You’re too pretty—that’s the trouble!” he answered, smiling, as at a familiar trait.

”No, but really—do you honestly think so?” Her face had again grown plaintive.

”Yes, Fancy. Far be it from me to flatter or cajole with the compliments of a five-dollar reading, but as between friends, and with my hand on my heart, I assert that you are beautiful.”

”I don’t mean that at all,” said Fancy. ”I want to be *pretty*. That’s what men like—pretty girls. Beautiful women never get anywhere except into the divorce courts. Do say I’m pretty!”

”Fancy, you know I’m a connoisseur of women. You are actually and absolutely pretty.”

”Well, that’s a great relief, if I can only believe you. I have to hear it once a day, at least, to keep up my courage. Now that’s settled, let’s go to work.”

He went back to the fireplace and yawned. ”All right. What’s doing today?”

”Full up, except from eleven to twelve.”

”Who are they?”

Fancy jauntily flipped open the appointment book and ran her forefinger down the page.

”Ten o’clock, stranger, Fleurette Heller. Telephone appointment. Girl with a nice voice.”

”Be sure and look at her,” Granthope remarked; ”I may want a tip.”

”Ten-thirty, Mrs. Page.”

Granthope smiled and Fancy smiled.

”Do you remember what I told her?”

Fancy looked puzzled. ”What do you mean? About her husband?”

”No, not that. The last time she came I tried a psychological experiment with her. I told her that normally she was a quiet, restrained, modest, discreet woman, but that at times her emotional nature would get the better of her; that she couldn’t help breaking out and would suddenly let go. I thought she was about due this week. There’s been something doing and she wants to tell me about it to appease her conscience. Give them what they want, and anything goes!”

Fancy listened, frowning, the point of her pencil between her lips. ”You don’t need any of my tips on Mrs. Page,” she said with sarcasm. ”At eleven, Mr. Summer, whoever *he* is.”

”I don’t care, if he’s got the price.”

”It bores you to read for men, doesn’t it, Frank? I wish you’d let me do it.”

As she spoke, the telephone bell on the desk rang, and she took up the receiver, drooping her head coquettishly.

”Yes?” she said dreamily, her eyes on Granthope, who had lighted a cigarette.

”Yes, half-past eleven o’clock, if that would be convenient. What name, please? ... No, any name will do..... Miss Smith? All right—good-by.”

She entered the appointment in her book, and then remarked decidedly, ”*She’s* pretty!”

”No objections; they’re my specialty,” Granthope replied; ”only I doubt it.”

”Never failed yet,” said Fancy.

Granthope looked at his watch, then passed through a red anteroom to his studio beyond. Fancy began to draw little squares and circles and fuzzy heads of men with mustaches upon a sheet of paper. In a few moments the palmist returned, his morning coat replaced by a black velvet jacket tight-fitting and buttoned close.

”Oh, Fancy, take a few notes, please; you didn’t get that last one yesterday, I believe.”

She reached for a lacquered tin box, containing a card catalogue, withdrew a blank slip and dipped her pen in the ink. Then, as he stopped to think, she remarked:

”I don’t see why you go to all this trouble, Frank. Nobody else does. You’ve a good enough memory, and I think it’s silly. I feel as if I were a bookkeeper in a business house.”

”One might as well be systematic,” he returned. ”There’s no knowing when all this will come in handy. I don’t intend to give five-dollar readings all my life. I’m going to develop this thing till it’s a fine art. I’ve got to do something to dignify the trade. This doesn’t use nearly all that’s in me. I wish I had something to do that would take all my intellect—it’s all too easy! I don’t half try. But it’s a

living. God knows I don't care for the money—nor for fame either, for that matter. Fame's a gold brick; you always pay more for it than it's worth. I suppose it's the sheer love of the game. I have a scientific delight in doing my stunt better than it has ever been done before. Some play on fiddles, I play on women—and make 'em dance, too! Some love machinery, some study electricity—but the wireless, wheel-less mechanics of psychology for mine. Practical psychology with a human laboratory. Pour the acid of flattery, and human litmus turns red with delight. Try the alkali of disapproval, and it grows blue with disappointment. I give 'em a run for their money, too. I make life wonderful for poor fools who haven't the wit to do it for themselves. I peddle imagination, Fancy."

"You get good prices," Fancy said, smiling a bit sadly. "There are perquisites. There aren't many men who have the chances you do, Frank. Women are certainly crazy about you, and now that you're taken up by the smart set, I expect you will be spoiled pretty quick." She shook her head coquettishly and dropped her eyes.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I should think you would be almost ashamed of being a woman, Fan, sometimes," he said. "They are all alike, I believe."

Fancy bridled. Then she bit her lip. "You'll meet your match some day!"

"God, I hope so! It'll make things interesting. Nothing matters now. I haven't really wanted anything for years; and when you don't want anything, Fancy, the garlands are hung for you in every house."

"Did you ever have a conscience, Frank?"

"Not I. I shouldn't know what to do with it, if I had one. I don't see much difference between right and wrong. We give them what they want, as clergymen do. It may be true and it may be false. So may religion. There are a hundred different kinds—some of them teach that you ought to kill your grandmother when she gets to be fifty years old. Some teach clothing and some teach nakedness. Some preach chastity—and some the other thing. Who's going to tell what's right? My readings are scientific; my predictions may be true, for all I know. Some I help and some I harm, no doubt. But from all I can see, God Himself does that. Take that Bennett affair! He lost his money, but didn't he have a good taste of life? We'll never know the truth, anyway. Why not fool fools who think there's an answer to everything, and make 'em happy? Do you remember that first time we played for Harry Wing? I was new at it then. When I crawled through the panel and put on the robe, the tears were streaming down my face to think I was going to fool an old man into believing I was his dead son. What was the result? He was so happy that he gave me his gold watch to be dematerialized for identification. He got more solid satisfaction and comfort out of that trick than he had out of a year of sermons. I only wish I could fool myself as easily as I can fool others—then I could be happy myself."

”Why, aren’t you happy, Frank?” Fancy asked, her eyes full of him. ”I wish I could do something to make you happy—I’d do anything!”

”Oh, I’m not unhappy,” he said lightly, neglecting her appeal. ”I can’t seem to suffer any more than I can really enjoy. I suppose I haven’t any soul. I need ambition—inspiration. But we must get to work. Are you ready?”

Fancy nodded.

”August 5th,” he dictated. ”Mrs. Riley. Age sixty-five. Spatulate, extreme type. Wrist, B. Fingers, B, X, 5. Life 27. Head 18. Heart 4. Fate 12. 3 girdles. Venus B. Mars A. Thumb phalange over-developed. Right, ditto. Now:—married three times, arm broken in ’94, one daughter, takes cocaine, interested in mines. Last husband knew General Custer and Lew Wallace. Accidentally drowned, 1877. Accused of murder and acquitted in 1878. Very poor.

”Don’t forget to look up Lew Wallace, Fancy! Go down to the library tonight, will you?” he said, laying down his note-book.

”Where did you ever get that old dame?”

”Madam Spoll sent her here. She’s easy, but no money in her. Still, I like to be thorough, even with charity cases; you never know what may come of them.”

The telephone bell prevented Fancy’s reply. She took up the receiver and said ”Yes” in a languishing drawl.

”Yes. Number 15? .... Payson? Spell it .... Hold the line a minute.” She turned to Granthope, her ear still to the receiver, her hand muffling the mouthpiece.

”Funny. Speak of angels—here’s Madam Spoll now! She wants to know if you’ve got anything about Oliver Payson?”

”Payson?” he repeated. ”Oliver Payson? No, I don’t think so, have we?”

”I don’t remember the name, but I’ll run over the cards. Talk about method! I wish Madam Spoll had some! P., Packard, Page—no; no Payson here.” She returned to the telephone. ”No, we have nothing at all. Good-by.” Then she hung up the receiver.

Granthope, meanwhile, had been walking up and down the room, frowning.

”It’s queer—that name is somehow familiar; I’ve heard of it somewhere. Oliver Payson—Oliver Payson.”

”Funny how you never can think of a thing when you want to,” said Fancy, sharpening her pencil.

”I know something about Oliver Payson,” Granthope insisted. ”But it’s no use, I can’t get it. Perhaps it will come to me.”

”You never know what you can do till you stop trying,” Fancy offered sagely.

Granthope spoke abstractedly, gazing at the ceiling. ”It’s something about a picture, it seems to me.”

He walked into his studio, still puzzling with blurred memories. Fancy took up *The Second Wife*.

At ten o'clock the door opened, and Fancy's hand flew to her back hair. A girl of perhaps twenty years with intense eyes entered timidly. Her hair was distracted by the wind and her color was high, increasing the charm of her pretty, earnest, finely freckled face. She wore a jacket a little too small for her, with frayed cuffs. Her shoes were badly worn; her hat was cheap, but effective.

"I called to see Mr. Granthope; I think I have an appointment at ten," she said.

"Miss Heller?" Fancy asked. The girl nodded. Fancy took inventory of the girl's points, looking her up and down before she replied, "All right; just be seated for a moment, please."

She walked to the studio and met Granthope coming out. They spoke in whispers.

"Let her down easy," Fancy suggested. "It's a love affair. She has a letter in her coat pocket, all folded up; you can see the wrinkles where it bulges out. Hat pin made of an army button, and she doesn't know enough to paint. Make her take off her coat and see if her right sleeve isn't soiled above where she usually wears a paper cuff to protect it. She is half frightened to death and she has been crying."

"All right," said Granthope. "I'll give her five dollars' worth of optimism."

Fancy put her hand in his softly. "Say, Frank, just charge this to me and be good to her, will you?"

"All right. If you like her, I'll do my best. She'll be smiling when she comes out, you see if she isn't."

As the girl went in for her reading, Mrs. Page walked into the reception-room, and nodded condescendingly. She was a dashing woman of thirty-five, full of the exuberance and flamboyant color of California. Her hair was jet black and glossy, massively coiled upon her head; her features were large, but regular and well formed; her figure somewhat voluptuous in its tightly fitting tailor suit of black. She was a vivid creature, with impellent animal life and temperament linked, apparently, to a rather silly, feminine brain. Her mouth was large, and in it white teeth shone. She was all shadows and flashes, high lights and depths of velvety black. From her ears, two spots of diamond radiance twinkled as she shook her head. When she drew off her gloves, with a manner, more twinkles illuminated her hands. Still others shone from the cut steel buckles of her shoes. She was somewhat overgrown, flavorless and gaudy, like California fruit, and her ways were kittenish. Her movements were all intense. When she looked at anything, she opened her eyes very wide; when she spoke she pursed her lips a bit too much. Altogether she seemed to have a superfluous ounce of blood in her

veins that infused her with useless energy.

Fancy eyed her pragmatically, added her up, extracted her square root and greatest common divisor. The result she reached was evident only by the imperious way in which she invited her to be seated and the nonchalant manner in which, after that, she gazed out upon Geary Street.

Mrs. Page, however, would be loquacious.

"Shall I have to wait long?" she asked. "I have an engagement at eleven and I simply *must* see Mr. Granthope first! It's very important."

"I don't know," said Fancy coolly. "It depends upon whether he has an interesting sitter or not. Sometimes he's an hour, and sometimes he's only fifteen minutes." She spoke with a slightly stinging emphasis, examining, meanwhile, the spots on her own finger-nails.

"Oh," said Mrs. Page, and it was evident that the remark gave her an idea as to her own personal powers of attraction. "I thought Mr. Granthope treated all his patrons alike."

"Sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't," was Fancy's cryptic retort. She watched the effect under drooped lashes.

The effect was to make Mrs. Page squirm uneasily, as if she didn't know whether she had been hit or not. She took refuge in the remark: "Well, I hope he will give me a good reading this time."

"It all depends on what's in your hand," Fancy followed her up, smiling amiably.

Mrs. Page minced and simpered: "Do you know, somehow I *hate* to have him look at my hand, after what he said before. He told me such *dreadful* things, I'm afraid he'll discover more."

"Why do you give him a chance, then?" said Fancy coldly.

"Oh, I hope he'll find something better, this time!"

"Weren't you satisfied with what he gave you?" Fancy asked. "I have found Mr. Granthope usually strikes it about right."

"Oh, of course, I'm satisfied," Mrs. Page admitted. "In fact, I trust him so implicitly that I have acted on his advice. But it's rather dreadful to know the truth, don't you think?"

Fancy nodded her head soberly. "*Sometimes* it is." She accented the adverb mischievously.

"Oh, I don't mean what you mean at all!"

"I know. You mean it's dreadful to have other people know the truth?"

"No; but I can't help my character, can I? It's not *my* fault if I *have* faults. It's all written in my palm and I can't alter it. Only, I mean it's awful to know exactly what's going to happen and not be able to prevent it."

"It's worse not to want to." Fancy waved her hand to some one in the street.

Mrs. Page withdrew from the conversation, routed, and devoted herself to a study of the Chinese masks, casting an occasional impatient glance into the anteroom. Fancy polished her rings with her handkerchief.

Granthope's voice was now heard, talking pleasantly with Fleurette, who was smiling, as he had promised. As she left, flushed and happy, Granthope greeted Mrs. Page, and escorted her, bubbling with talk, into the studio. The door closed upon a pervading odor of sandalwood, Mrs. Page's legacy to Fancy, who sniffed at it scornfully.

Many cable-cars had passed without Fancy's having recognized any one worth bowing to, before the next client appeared; but, at that visitor's entry, she became a different creature. Her eyes never really left him, although she seemed, as he waited, to be busy about many things.

He was a smart young man, a sort of a bank-clerk person, dressed neatly, with evidence of considerable premeditation. His hair was parted in the middle, his face was cleanly shaven. His sparkling, laughing eyes, devilishly audacious, his pink cheeks and his cool self-assured manner gave him an appearance of juvenile, immaculate freshness, which rendered an acquaintance with such a San Francisco girl as Fancy Gray, easy and agreeable. He laid his hat and stick against his hip jauntily, and asked:

"Could I get a reading from Mr. Granthope without waiting all day for it?" As he spoke he loosed a frivolous, engaging glance at her.

"He'll be out in just a moment," Fancy replied with more interest than she had heretofore shown. "Won't you sit down and wait, please?"

He withdrew his eyes long enough to gallop round the room with them, but they returned to her like horses making for a stable. He took a seat, pulled up his trousers over his knees, drew down his cuffs, felt the knot in his tie and smoothed his hair, all with the quick, accurate motion due to long habit. "Horrible weather," he volunteered debonairly.

"It's something fierce, isn't it?" said Fancy, opening and shutting drawers, searching for nothing. "It gets on my nerves. I wish we'd have one good warm day for a change."

"Been out to the beach lately?" he asked, eying her with undisguised approval. He breathed on the crown of his derby hat and then smelt of it.

"No," she replied. "I don't have much time to myself. I hate to go alone, anyway." Fancy looked aimlessly into the top drawer of her desk.

"That's too bad! But I shouldn't think you'd ever have to go alone. You don't look it."

"Really?" Fancy's tone was arch.

"That's right! I know some one who'd be willing to chase out there with you at the drop of the hat."

Fancy, appearing to feel that the acquaintance was making too rapid progress, said, ”I don’t care much for the beach; it’s too crowded.”

”That depends upon when you go. I’ve got a car out there where we could get lost easy enough. Then you can have a quiet little dinner at the Cliff House almost any night.”

”Can you? I never tried it.”

”It’s time you did. Suppose you try it with me?”

Fancy opened her eyes very wide at him and let him have the full benefit of her stare. ”Isn’t this rather sudden? You’re rushing it a little too fast, seems to me.”

”Not for me. I’m sorry you can’t keep up. You don’t look slow.”

Fancy turned to her engagement book.

”You must have known some pretty easy ones,” she said sarcastically.

The snub did not silence him for long. He recrossed his legs, drummed on the brim of his hat, and began:

”Say, did you ever go to Carminetti’s?”

”No, where is it?”

”Down on Davis Street. They have a pretty lively time there on Sunday nights. Everybody goes, you know—gay old crowd. They sing and everything. It’s the only really Bohemian place in town now.”

”I’m never hungry on Sundays,” Fancy said coolly.

”Nor thirsty, either?”

”Sir?” she said in mock reproof, and then burst into a laugh.

”Say, you scared me all right, *that* time!”

”You don’t look like you would be scared easy. I guess it’s kind of hard to call *you* down.”

He folded his arms and squared his shoulders. ”I don’t know,” he said. ”I don’t seem to make much of a hit with *you*!”

”Oh, you may improve!”

”Upon acquaintance?”

”Perhaps. You’re not in a hurry, are you?”

”That’s what I am!” He went at her now with more vigor. ”I say, would you mind telling me your name? Here’s my card.”

He rose, and, walking over to the desk, laid down a card upon which was printed, ”Mr. Gay P. Summer.” Fancy examined it deliberately. Then she looked up and said:

”My name is Miss Gray, if you *must* know. What are you going to do about it?”

”I’ll show you!” he laughed, drawing nearer. What might possibly have happened (for things do happen in San Francisco) was interrupted by sounds

predicting Mrs. Page's return.

"Say, Miss Gray, I'll ring you up later and make a date," he said under his breath. Then he turned to Mrs. Page and stared her out of the room with undisguised curiosity.

"You can see Mr. Granthope now," said Fancy, unruffled by the competition.

He made an airy gesture and followed the palmist into the anteroom.

Fancy grew listless and abstracted. After a while she went to the closet, examined herself in the glass on the door, adjusted the back of her belt, fluffed her hair over her ears and reseated herself. Then she took her book languidly and began to read.

There came a knock on the door.

"Come in," Fancy called out, arousing herself again. The new-comer was one who, though at least twenty-seven, was still graciously modeled with the lines of youth. Her head was poised with spirit on her neck, but, like a flower on its stem, ready to move with her varying moods, from languor to vivacity. Her hair was a light, tawny grayish-brown, almost yellow, undulant and fine as gossamer. In the pure oval of her face, under level, golden brows, her eyes were now questioning, now peremptory, but usually smoldering with dreams, hiding their color. Their customary quiescence, however, was contradicted by the responsiveness of her perfectly drawn mouth—a springing bow, like those of Du Maurier's most beautiful women. The upper lip, narrow, scarlet, so short that it seldom touched the lower, showed, beneath its lively curve, a row of well-cut teeth. With such charm and delicacy of person her small, flat ears and her proud, sensitive nostrils fell into lovely accord. She wore a veil, and was dressed in a concord of cool grays, modishly accented with black. Her movements were slow and graceful, as if she had never to hurry.

"I believe I have an appointment with Mr. Granthope for half-past eleven," she said in a smooth, low, rather monotonous voice.

"Miss Smith?" Fancy asked briskly, but with a more respectful manner than she had shown Mrs. Page.

The lady blushed an unnecessary pink, and blushed again to find herself blushing. She admitted the pseudonym with a nod.

"Take a seat, please," Fancy said. "Mr. Granthope will be ready for you in a few minutes." Then her eyes fluttered over the visitor's costume, rested for a second upon her long black gloves, darted to her little, patent-leather shoes, mounted to her black, picturesque hat, and sought here and there, but without success, for jewelry.

The lady took a seat in silence. She repaired the mischief the wind had done to her hair, raising her hand abstractedly, as she looked about the room. The Chinese masks did not entertain her long, but the head of Hypnos she appeared

to recognize with interest. From that to Fancy, and from Fancy to the row of casts, her glance went, slowly, deliberately. Then she took a large bunch of violets from her corsage, and smelled them thoughtfully.

Fancy began to play with one of her bracelets, clasping and unclasping it. The lock caught in a bangle-chain, and, frowning, she bent to unfasten it. In an instant the lady noticed her dilemma, smiled frankly, and walked over to the desk, drawing off her long glove as she did so.

"Let me do it for you!" she said, and, taking Fancy's hand, she busied herself with the clasp.

Fancy watched her amusedly. The lady was so close that she could enjoy the odor of the violets and a fainter, more exquisite perfume that came from the diaphanous embroidered linen blouse, whose cost Fancy might have reckoned in terms of her week's salary. With careful, skilful movements the chain was unfastened, but the lady still held Fancy's hand in her own.

"Oh, what beautiful hands you have!" she exclaimed. "I never saw anything so lovely in my life! Let me see them both! I wonder if you know how pretty they are!"

She looked questioningly into Fancy's face and the twinkle in Fancy's eyes answered her.

"Oh, of course you do! Mr. Granthope must have told you! He has never seen a prettier pair, I'm sure!" She laid them carefully down, palms to the table, and smiled at Fancy.

"I see you've got the right idea about hands," said Fancy Gray archly. "That second finger's pretty good; did you notice it?"

Both laughed.

"I hope you don't think I'm rude," said the lady.

"You don't worry me a bit, so long as you can keep it up. I'm only afraid you're going to stop! But it seems to me you've got a pretty small pair of hands yourself! No wonder you noticed mine!" Fancy gazed at them, as if she were surprised to find any one who could compete with her own specialty.

For answer, Miss Smith, as she had called herself, drew her violets from her coat, kissed them and handed them to Fancy. Fancy played up; kissed them too, nodded, as if drinking a health, and tucked them safely away on her own breast. Then she treated Miss Smith to the by-play of her delicious dimples, as she said, "Come in as often as you like, especially when you have flowers!"

"Miss Smith's" face had become wonderfully alive, and she gazed at Fancy so frankly admiring that now Fancy had to drop her own eyes in embarrassment. At this moment Granthope's voice was heard as he came out of his studio with Gay P. Summer. A kind of shyness seemed to envelop the visitor and she drew back, her color mounting, her lids drooping.

”I’m all ready for you, Miss Smith,” said Granthope, coming into the room and bowing suavely. ”Come in, please.”

Leaving Mr. Summer in conversational dalliance with Fancy Gray, the lady followed the palmist into his studio. As she walked, her graceful, long-limbed tread, with its easy swing, seemed almost leopard-like in its unconscious freedom, her head was carried somewhat forward, questing, her arms were slightly extended tentatively from her side, as if she almost expected to touch something she could not see.

CHAPTER II
TUITION AND INTUITION

It was a large room, unfurnished except for a couch in a recess of the wall and a table with two chairs drawn up under an electric-light bulb which hung from the ceiling. The walls were covered from floor to cornice by an arras of black velvet, falling in full, vertical folds, sequestering the apartment in soft gloom. Over the couch, this drapery was embroidered with the signs of the zodiac in a circle—all else was shadowy and mysterious.

The young woman walked into the place with her leisurely stride—her chin a little up-tilted, her eyes curious. In the center of the room she stopped and looked slowly and deliberately about her. The corners of her mouth lifted slightly with amusement, evidently at the obvious picturesqueness of the studio.

Granthope watched her keenly. With his eyes and ears full of Fancy Gray’s ardent, dramatic youth, sparkling with the sophistication of the city, slangy, audacious, gay, this girl seemed almost unreal in her delicacy and exquisite virginity, a creature of dreams and faery, the personification of an ideal too fine and fragile for every-day. Her face showed caste in every line. He was a little afraid of her. Her bearing compelled not only respect, but, in a way, reverence—a tribute he seldom had felt inclined to pay to the *mondaines* who visited him.

His confidence, however, soon asserted itself. He had found that all women were alike—there were, as in chess, several openings to his game, but, once started, the strategy was simple.

”Well, how do you like my studio?”

”It’s like dreams I’ve had,” she said. ”I like it. It’s so simple.”

”Most people think it too somber.”

”It is somber; but that purple-black is wonderful in the way it takes the light. And it’s all so different!”

”Yes, I flatter myself it is that. But I’m ’different’ myself.”

”Are you?” She turned her eyes steadfastly upon him for the first time, as if mentally appraising him, as he stood, six feet of virility, handsome, vivid and nonchalant. The color which had risen to her cheeks still remained.

”You are, too,” he went on, examining her as deliberately.

She smiled faintly and took a seat by the table and removed her veil. Her face was now clearly illuminated, and Granthope’s eyes, traveling from feature to feature in quest of significant details, fell upon her left cheek. His look was arrested at the sight of a brown velvety mole, a veritable beauty-spot, heightening the color of her skin. It was charming, making her face piquant and human. His hand went to his forehead thoughtfully.

At the sight of this mark upon her cheek, something troubled him. His mind, always alert to suggestive influences, registered the faintest impression of a thought at first too elusive to be called an idea. It was like the ultimate, dying ripple from some far-off shock to his consciousness. The impact died almost as it reached him—a flash, vaguely stimulating to his imagination, and then it was gone, its mysterious message uncomprehended.

She watched him a little impatiently, seeming to resent his scrutiny. Noticing this, he summoned his distracted attention and seated himself at the table. But, from time to time, now, his glance darted to her cheek surreptitiously, searching for the lost clue. He had learned the value of such subtle intuitions and would not give up his efforts to take advantage of this one.

She laid her bare hand upon the black velvet cushion beneath the light, saying, ”I’m sorry that something has disturbed you.” She looked at him, and then away.

”Why, nothing has disturbed me,” he said. ”Why should you think so?” Even as he pulled himself together for this denial her quick perception gave him another cause for wonder.

”I’m rather sensitive to other people’s moods sometimes. That’s one reason why I came. I didn’t know but you might tell me something about it—how far to trust it, perhaps—though I came, I confess, more from curiosity.”

Her air was still so detached that her conversational approaches seemed almost experimental. She spoke with pauses between her phrases, while her eyes, now showing full and clear gray, lit upon him only to rove off, returned and departed again, but never rapidly, as if she sought for her words here and there in the room, and brought them calmly back to him. She did not shun a direct gaze, but her look wandered as her thought wandered in its logical course,

for the time seeming to forget his presence.

He took her hand and felt of it, testing its quality and texture, preparing himself for his speech. Her hand was long and slim, with scarcely a fiber more flesh upon the bones than was necessary to cover them admirably. He had no thought at first except to give his ordinary routine of reading, but his study of her showed her to be an exceptional character. She was beautiful, with the loveliness of an aristocratic and slightly bewildering spiritual type. Her hand in his was magnetic, delicious of contact, subtly alive even though not consciously responsive. Other women with more obvious charm had left him cold. She, aided by no suggestion of coquetry or complaisance, allured him. She awakened in him a desire not wholly physical, although he could not fail to regard her primarily in the sex relation that, so far, had been his chief interest in women. She, as a woman, answered, in some secret way, him, as a man. This was his first wave of feeling. Her hint amused him, true as her intuition had been; she had stumbled upon his embarrassment, no doubt, and had claimed prescience, a common enough form of feminine conceit. There he had a valuable suggestion as to the direction of her line of least resistance to his wiles.

Following upon this, as the first feeling of her unreality faded, upon contact, came the thought of her as a wealthy and credulous girl, who might minister to his ambitions. He was without real social aspirations, except in so far as his success in the fashionable world favored the game he was playing. Years of contact with credulity and hypocrisy had carried him, mentally, too far to value the lionizing and the hero-worship he had tasted from his smarter clients. But the patronage of such a fair and finished creature as this girl, especially if he could establish a more intimate relation, might secure the permanence of his position and his opportunities. He saw vistas of delight and satisfaction in such an acquaintance. He had had his fill of silly women whose favors were paid for in ministrations to their vanity. Such tribute, easy as it was for him with his facility, irked him. Here, perhaps, was one who might hold his interest by her fineness and her mentality, and by the very difficulty he might find in impressing her. There would be zest to the pursuit.

Beneath these waves of feeling, however, and beneath his active intelligence, there was an inchoate disturbance in some subconscious stratum of his mind. He felt it only as the slight mental perplexity the mole upon her cheek had caused; he had no time, now, to pursue that incipient idea. His impression of her as a desirable, pleasurable quarry incited him to devise the psychological method necessary for her capture. He knew to a hair, usually, what he could do with women; but now he was forced to gain time by a preamble in the conventional patter of the palmist's cult.

Her hand, it appeared, was of a mixed type, neither square nor conic, with

long fingers, inclined to be psychic. He remarked the extraordinary sensitiveness denoted by their cushioned tips. Nails, healthy and oval; knuckles indicating a good sense of order in mental and physical life. She was, in short, of strong, vigorous mentality, well-balanced, artistic, generous, liberal; but (he referred to the Mount of Jupiter) with a tendency to be a looker-on rather than a sharer in the ordinary social pleasures of life. Saturn, developed more toward the finger, gave her a slightly melancholy temperament; Apollo showed a great appreciation of the beautiful in nature, with no little critical knowledge of art; Mercury was less developed, and implied a lack of humor; Venus betrayed a well-controlled but warm feeling; it was soft—she was, consequently, easily moved. Her thumb was wilful rather than logical, her fingers suggested respectively, pride, perception, self-respect, morbidity, love of the beautiful as distinguished from the ornamental, tact.

He had thrown himself into a pose so habitual as to become almost unconscious, though it was keyed to the theatrical pitch of his picturesque appearance and surroundings. The girl's expression showed, to his alert eye, a slight disappointment at the conventionality of his remarks. This spurred him to more originality and definiteness. He tossed his hair back with one hand in a quick gesture and turned to the lines in her palm, examining them first with a magnifying glass and then tracing them with an ivory stylus. Her eyes were fixed upon his, as if she were more interested in the manner than the matter of his task.

"You are the sort of person," he said, "who is, in a certain sense, egoistic. That is, after a criticism of any one, you would immediately ask yourself, 'Would I not have done the same thing, under the same circumstances?' You're stupendously frank—you'd own up to anything, any faults you thought you possessed; you'd even exaggerate a jestingly ignoble confession of motives because you hate hypocrisy so much in others. You are eminently fair and just, as you are generous. You have none of the ordinary feminine arts of coquetry. If you liked a man you would say so frankly."

It was typical of Granthope's enthusiasm for his game that he dared thus play it so boldly with his cards face up upon the table. His visitor began to show more interest; it was evident that she appreciated the ingeniousness of his phrasing. Her lip curved into a dainty smile. Her eyes gleamed slyly, then withdrew their fire.

He continued: "You are slow in action, but when the time comes, you can act swiftly without regard of the consequences. You are not prudish. You are willing to look upon anything that can be regarded as evidence as to the facts of life, even though you may not care to go into things purely for the sake of experience. You are faithful and loyal, but you are not of the type that believes 'the king can do no wrong'—you see your friends' faults and love them in spite of those faults,

yet you are absolutely indifferent to most persons who make no special appeal. You are lazy, but physically, not mentally—there is no effort you will spare yourself to think things out and get to the final solution of a psychological or moral problem. You love modernness, complexity of living, the wonderful adjustments that money and culture effect, but not enough to endure the conventionality that sort of life demands. You are not particularly economical—you'd never go all over your town for a bargain or to 'pick up' antiques—you would prefer to go to a good shop and pay a fair price. You are fond of children—not of all children, however, only bright and interesting ones. You are fond of dress in a sensuous sort of way; that is, you like silk stockings, because they feel cool and smooth; silk skirts, because they fall gracefully and make a pleasant swish against your heels; furs, on account of the color and softness, but none of these merely because of their richness or splendor."

His face was intent, almost scowling, two vertical lines persisting between his brows; his mouth was fixed. His concentration seemed to hold no personal element; there was nothing to resent in the contact of his fingers or the absorption of his gaze. Suddenly, however, he looked up and smiled—he knew how to smile, did Granthope—and the relation between them became so personal and intimate that she involuntarily drew away her hand. He was instantly sensitive to this and by his attitude reassured her. Not, however, before she had blushed furiously, in spite of evident efforts to control herself.

His eyes glanced again at the mole on her cheek. Then, as if electrified by the sudden kindling and intensification of her personality, his subconscious mind finished its work without the aid of reason. As a bubble might separate itself from the bottom of the sea and ascend, quivering, to the surface, his memory unloosed its secret, and it rose, to break in his mind. The mole—*he had seen it before*—where? Like a tiny explosion the answer came—*upon the cheek of the little girl who visited them that day*, twenty-three years ago, at Madam Grant's—the day she died. It reached him with the certainty of truth. It did not even occur to him to doubt its verity. In a flash, he saw what sensational use he could make of the intelligence. Another idea followed it—an old trick—perhaps it would work again.

"Would you mind taking off that ring?" he asked.

She drew off a simple gold band set with three turquoises. He laid it upon the cushion, turning it between his fingers as he did so. In a single glance he had read the inscription engraved inside. His ruse was undetected; her eyes had roved about the room. He turned to her again.

"You are twenty-seven years old. You have a lover, or, rather, a man is making love to you. I do not advise you to marry him. You have traveled a good deal and will take another journey within a year. Something is happening in

connection with a male relative that worries you. It will not be settled for some time. Are there any questions you would like to ask?"

"I think you have answered them already," she replied.

He leaned back, to shake his hands and pass them across his forehead, theatrically. Another bubble had broken in his consciousness. "Oliver Payson!"—the name came sharply to his inner ear like a voice in a telephone. Oliver Payson—he recalled now where he had seen the name—*upon the newspaper cut pinned to the door of Madam Grant's bedroom.* Like two drops of quicksilver combining, this thought fused with that suggested by the mole on the girl's cheek. "Clytie Payson"—this name came to him, springing unconjured to his mind. He determined to hazard a test of the inspiration. He simulated the typical symptoms of obsession, trembled, shuddered and writhed in the professional manner. Then he said:

"Would you like a clairvoyant reading? I think I might get something interesting, for I feel your magnetism very strongly."

She assented with an alacrity she had not shown before. Her eyes opened wider, she threw off her lassitude, awakening to a mild excitement.

"Let me take your hands again—both of them. This is something I don't often do, but I'll see what I can get."

He shut his eyes and spoke monotonously:

"I see a name—C, l, y—"

The girl's hands gave an involuntary convulsion.

"—t, i, e. Is that it? Clytie! Wait—I get the name—"

Beneath slightly trembling lids, a fine, sharp glance shot out at her and was withdrawn again. It was as if he had stolen something from her.

"Payson!"

The girl withdrew her hands suddenly; she drew in her breath swiftly, paling a little.

"That's my name, Clytie Payson! It's wonderful! Go on, please!"

She gave him her gracilent, dewy hands again, and he thrilled to their provocative spell. He took advantage of her distraction to enjoy them lightly. When he spoke there was no hesitation in his voice.

"I don't understand this! I don't know who these people are, or where they are, and it seems ridiculous to tell it. But there is a fearfully disordered room with the sun coming in through dirty, broken windows. The floor is covered with rubbish, there's no furniture but a few old boxes. I see two women and a little girl. They are in old-fashioned costumes."

Clytie's face was pale, now, and she watched him breathlessly.

"One of the women has white hair and vivid black eyebrows. She talks wildly sometimes; sometimes she's quite calm. The other woman is middle-aged

and has a soft voice. The little girl is dressed in blue; she is sitting on a box listening. The crazy woman is kissing her."

He shook himself, shuddered and opened his eyes, to find Miss Payson gazing upon him, her hand to her heart.

"It's strange!" she said.

"It sounds nonsensical, I suppose," he said, "but that's just what I get. Can you make anything of it?"'

"It's all true!" said Clytie. "That very thing happened to me when I was a little girl—so long ago, that I had almost forgotten it."

"You remember it, then?"

"Yes, it all comes back to me—though I have wondered vaguely about it often enough. It was when I was four years old and I went with my mother to call on this strange, crazy woman—if she were crazy! I never knew. I never dared speak to father about it. He never knew that we went, I think. I had an idea that he wouldn't have liked it, had he known."

"And your mother?"

"She died—the same year, I think. We left San Francisco, father and I, soon after, and we lived abroad for several years. I didn't even remember the scene until long afterward, when something brought it up. Then it was like a dream or a vision."

"Do you know, Miss Payson, I feel that you have very strong mediumistic powers; I can feel your magnetism. I think that you might develop yourself so as to be able to use your psychic force."

She took it seriously.

"Yes, I think I do have a certain amount of capacity that way. I can never depend upon it, though, but my intuitions are very strong and occasionally rather strange things have happened to me."

It amused him to see how quickly she had fallen into the trap he had set for her. Experience had taught him it was a common enough assertion for women to make, and he was cynically incredulous. He was a little disappointed, too; as, in his opinion, it discounted her intelligence. Nevertheless, he found in it a way to manipulate her.

"Perhaps I might help you to develop it," he suggested, "although I'm not much of a clairvoyant myself; I claim only to be a scientific palmist."

"I think you are wonderful," Clytie asserted, giving him a glance of frank admiration. "This test alone would prove it. You see, having some slight power myself, I'm more ready to believe that others have it."

He waived her compliment with apparent modesty.

"Women are more apt to be gifted that way—it isn't often I attempt a psychic reading. What is written in the palm I can read; as a physician diagnoses a case

from symptoms in the pulse and tongue and temperature, so I read a person's character from what I see in the hand. I have been particularly interested in yours, Miss Payson, and perhaps I have been able to give you more than usual. I hope I may have the opportunity of seeing you again; I'm quite sure I can help you, or put you in the way of assistance."

She arose and slowly drew on her gloves, her mind full of the revelation. He watched every motion with delight. Her brief mood of irradiation had given place to her customary languor, and her fragile loveliness, emphasizing the opposite to every one of his virile, ardent traits, allured him with the appeal of one extreme to another. Most of all, her mouth, wayward with its ravishing smile, enchanted him. It was controlled by no coquetry, he knew, and it moved him the more for that reason. Yet she seemed loath to go and moved slowly about the room. She stopped to point with a sweeping gesture at one side of the velvet-hung wall.

"It's rather too bad to hide the windows, isn't it?"

He smiled at her divination, doubtful of its origin.

"You have a very good sense of direction, haven't you?"

She appeared to notice his incredulity, but not to resent it.

"Indeed, I have very little," she said; then, giving him her hand with a quick impulse of cordiality, she smiled, nodded and turned to the anteroom.

He glanced at the table, saw her ring, and made a motion toward it. Then it occurred to him that it might be used as an excuse for seeing her again and he followed her out.

In the reception-room, Fancy was yawning; seeing them, she brought her hand quickly to her mouth and raised her eyebrows at Granthope. He made no sign in reply. Clytie walked up to her impulsively and held out her hand.

"I do hope I'll see you again, sometime," she said.

Fancy laughed. "I do, too. You're the only one who's ever really appreciated me. You make me almost wish I was a lady." By her tone, there was some old wound that bled.

"You're that, and better, I'm sure," Clytie answered softly; "you're yourself!"

She turned to leave. Granthope, who had watched the two women, amused, opened the door for her, received her long, steady glance, her quiet, low "Good morning," and bowed her out.

As soon as she had fairly left, he turned quickly to Fancy. "Where's Philip?"

"In the back room, I suppose." Fancy looked surprised.

"Go and get him, please; tell him to find out where this girl lives, and all he can about her."

"Say, Frank—" Fancy began, rising.

"Hurry, please! I don't want him to miss her. She's a good thing!"

"She's *too* good, Frank, that's just it!"

”That’s why I want her. I don’t catch one like that every day. Why, she’s worth all the rest put together.” He looked impatiently at her.

Fancy shrugged her shoulders and sailed airily out of the room.

Granthope stood for some time, his hands thrust into the pockets of his velvet coat, gazing abstractedly at the red wall of his reception-room. Then he took up the telephone and called for Madam Spoll’s number.

He made himself known and then said, ”I’ll be round to-night before your séance. I want to talk something over.”

CHAPTER III
THE SPIDER’S NEST

The architecture of San Francisco was, in early days, simple and unpretentious, befitting the modest aspirations of a trading and mining town. Builders accepted their constructive limitations and did their honest best. False fronts, indeed, there were, making one-story houses appear to be two stories high, but redwood made no attempts in those days to masquerade as marble or granite.

During the sixties, a few French architects imported a taste for classic art, and for a time, within demure limits, their exotic taste prevailed. The simple, flat, front wall of houses, now grown to three honest stories high, they embellished with dentil cornice, egg-and-dart moldings and chaste consoles; they added to the second story a little Greek portico with Corinthian columns accurately designed, led up to by a flight of wooden steps; the façade was broken by a single bay-window, ornamented with conventional severity. Block after block of such dwelling-houses were built. They had a sort of restful regularity, they broke no artistic hearts.

In later days, when San Francisco had begun to take its place in the world, a greater degree of sophistication ensued. Capitals of columns became more fanciful, ornament more grotesquely original, till ambitious turners and wood-carvers gave full play to their morbific imagination. Then was the day of scrolls and finials, bosses, rosettes, brackets, grille-work and comic balusters. Conical towers became the rage, wild windows, odd porches and decorations nailed on, regardless of design, made San Francisco’s nightmare architecture the jest of tourists. Lastly, after an interregnum of Queen Anne vagaries, came the Renaissance and the Age of Stone, heralded by concrete imitations and plaster walls of bogus gran-

ite.

Madam Spoll's house was of that commonplace, anemically classic style which, after all, was then the least offensive type of residence. It was painted appropriately in lead color—for the house, with the rest of the block, seemed to have been cast in a mold—a tone which did its best to make Eddy Street prosaic. It had been long abandoned by fashion and was now hardly on speaking terms with respectability. It occupied a place in a row of boarding-houses, cheap millinery establishments and unpretentious domiciles. There was a dreary little unkempt yard in front, with a passage leading to an entrance under the front steps; above, the sign "Madam Spoll, Clairvoyant and Medium," was displayed on ground glass, and below, hanging on a nail against the wall, was a transparency. When the lamp was lighted inside this, one read the words: "Circle To-night. Admittance ten cents."

This Thursday the lamp was lighted. It was half-past seven o'clock.

Devotees had begun to arrive, and, entering by the lower door, they paid their dimes to Mr. Spoll, who stood beside the little table at the entrance, left their "tests"—envelopes, flowers, jewelry or what not—and passed into the audience-room.

This had once been a dining-room and its walls were covered with a figured paper, above which was a bright red border decorated with Japanese fans and parasols. A few gaudy paper lanterns hung from the ceiling, and here and there were hung framed mottoes: "There Is No Death"—"We Shall Meet Again"—"There Is a Land that is Fairer than Day." This room was filled with chairs set in rows, and would hold some forty or fifty persons. It was separated by an arch from a smaller room beyond, where, upon a platform, stood a table with an open Bible, an organ, two chairs and a folding screen.

Only the front seats were at present occupied, these by habitués of the place, all firm believers, a picturesque group showing at a glance the stigmata of eccentricity or mental aberration. For the most part they were women in black; they bowed to one another as they sat down, then waited in stolid patience for the séance to open. The others were pale, blue-eyed men with drooping mustaches and carefully parted hair, and a whiskered, bald-headed old gentleman or two who sat in silence. The room was dimly illuminated by side lights.

Farther down the hallway, opposite the foot of a flight of stairs leading upward to her living-rooms, was Madam Spoll's "study," and here she was, this evening, preparing for business.

This room was small and crowded with furniture. The marble mantel held an assortment of bisque bric-à-brac, sea-shells, paper knives and cheap curiosities. The walls were covered with photographs, a placque or two, fans and picture cards. A huge folding bed, foolishly imitating a mirrored sideboard, occupied one

corner of the room. A couch covered with fancy cushions and tidies ran beside it. A table, heavily draped, a three-legged tea-stand, an easel with a satin sash bearing the portrait, photographically enlarged in crayon, of a bold, smirking, overdressed little girl, a ragged trunk and several plush-covered chairs were huddled, higgledy-piggledy, along the other side of the room.

Upon the couch Madam Spoll sat, spraying envelopes with alcohol from an atomizer on a small bamboo stand before her.

She was an enormous woman of masculine type, with short, briskly curling, iron-gray hair and a triple chin. Heavy eyebrows, heavy lips, heavy ears and cheeks had Madam Spoll, but her forehead was unlined with wrinkles; her expression was serene, and, when she smiled, engaging and conciliating. She was dressed in black satin with wing-like sleeves, the front of her waist being covered with a triangular decoration of bead-work.

Watching her with roving, black eyes was Professor Vixley, smoking a vile cigar. His face was sallow, of a predatory mold with a pointed, mangy beard, and sharp, yellow teeth. He wore a soft, striped flannel shirt with a flowing pink tie. From the sleeves of his shiny, cutaway coat, faded to a purplish hue, his thin, tanned, muscular hands showed like the claws of a vulture.

"You seem to be doin' a pretty good business," he remarked, dropping his ashes carelessly upon the floor.

"So-so," Madam Spoll answered. "If things go well we hope to get a new hall up on Post Street, but there ain't nothing in tests. Straight clairvoyance is the future of *this* business. Of course, we have to give cheap circles to draw the crowd, but it's a lot of bother and expense and it does tire me all out. Then there's always the trouble from the newspapers likely to come up."

"Pshaw! I wouldn't mind gettin' into the newspapers occasionally, it's good advertisin'. The more you're exposed the better you get along, I believe."

"'Lay low and set on your eggs' is my motto," said the Madam. "I don't like too much talk. I prefer to work in the dark—there's more money in it in the long run. I don't care if I only have a few customers; if they're good and easy I can make all I want."

"What do you bother with sealed messages for, Gert?" Professor Vixley asked.

"Oh, I got to fix a lot of skeptics to-night. I can usually open the ballots right on the table easy enough behind the flowers, but I want to read a few sealed messages besides. It may help along with Payson, too." She took up an envelope numbered "275." It was saturated with alcohol. She held it to the light, and squinting at the transparent paper, she read: "'When is Susie coming home?' Now, ain't that a fool question? I'll take a rise out of *her*, see if I don't! That's that woman who got into trouble in that poisoning case."

”Say, the alcohol trick’s a pretty good stunt when you get a chance to use it! But I don’t have time for it in my business.”

”Yes, it’s easy enough if you use good, grain alcohol, but I wish I had an egg-tester. They save a lot of time, and you can read through four or five thicknesses of paper with ’em. Spoll, he has plenty of chance to hold out the ballots and bring ’em in to me; his coming and going ain’t noticed, because he has to fetch ’em up to the table, anyway. By the time I go on, all the smell’s faded out. If it ain’t, my handkerchief is so full of perfumery that you can’t notice anything else. I’m going to fit up my table with one o’ them glass plates with an electric flash-light underneath that I can turn on with a switch. You can read right through the envelope then. But I don’t often consent to tests like that. It deteriorates your powers. And my regular customers are usually contented to send their ballots up open and glad of the chance to get an answer. *They* don’t want to give the spirits no trouble! Lord, I wish I had the power I had when I begun.” She smiled pleasantly at her companion.

”I see old Mrs. Purinton on the front row as I come in,” Vixley observed, shifting his cigar labially from one corner of his mouth to the other.

”Say, there’s a grafter for fair!” she exclaimed. ”She’s been coming here to the publics for two years and never once has she gave me a private setting. That’s what I call close. She’s as near as matches! And always the same old song—little Willie’s croup or when’s Henry going to write, and woozly rubbish like that. I got a good mind to hand her a dig. I could make a laughing-stock out of her, and scare her away easy. Folks do like a laugh at a public séance; you know that, Professor.”

”Sure! It don’t do no harm as long as you hit the right one.”

”Oh, I ain’t out for nothing but paper-sports and grafters. I know a good thing when I see it. I hope there’ll be something doing worth while in this Payson business. He may show up to-night. Lulu claims she conned him good.”

”I hope I’ll have a slice off him,” said Professor Vixley, his beady, black eyes shining. ”We got to get up a new game for him before we pass him down the line.”

”Oh, if anybody can I guess we can; there’s more’n one way to kill a cat, besides a-kissing of it to death.”

”Yes, smotherin’ it in hot air, for instance!” Vixley grinned.

”They’s one thing I wish,” said Madam Spoll, ”and that is that we had a regular blue-book like they have in the East. Why, they tell me there’s six thousand names printed for Boston alone. If we had some way of getting a lead with this Payson it would be lots easier. But I expect the San Francisco mediums will get better organized some day and coöperate more shipshape.”

Here Mr. Spoll entered, a tall, thin, bony, wild-eyed individual with a rolling

pompadour of red hair, his face spattered with freckles. He walked on tiptoe, as if at a funeral, bowed to the Professor, coughed into his hand, and took up the letters Madam Spoll had been investigating, putting down some new ones.

"Oh, here's that 'S.F.B.' that Ringa told me about," she said, glancing at an envelope. "Is Ringa come in yet?"

"I ain't seen him; but it's early," said Spoll. "He'll show up all right. I'll send him right in."

"Is Mr. Perry in front?"

"You bet!" Spoll was still tiptoeing about the room on some mysterious errand. "Perry ain't likely to lose a chance to make a dollar, not him!"

"He's a good one!" Madam Spoll smiled at the Professor. "I don't hardly know what I'd do without him. I can always depend upon him to make good. He ain't too willing, and sometimes, I declare, he almost fools me, even. I've known him to stand up and denounce me something fierce, especially when there was newspaper men in the audience, and then just gradually calm down and admit everything I wanted him to. He looks the part, too. Why, I sent him round to Mrs. Stepson's circle one night, when she first come to town, and she was fooled good. I've seen him cry at a materializing séance so hard it would almost break your heart."

"Does he play spook?"

"No, he's best in the audience. He's a good capper, but I don't believe he could play spook—besides, he's getting too fleshy."

"Who else have you got regular?" asked Professor Vixley.

"Only two or three. I don't need so many touts as most. I pride myself on doing my own work without much help. Of course, you got to give a name sometimes when a fishing test won't work, and a friend in the audience helps. Miss French, she's pretty good, but she's tricky. I'm afraid of her. I was gave away once to the *Chronicle* and I lost a whole lot of business. Men are safer. Harry Debert is straight enough, but he's stupid. He's the too-willing kind, and you don't have a chance to get any effect.

"Say, Spoll," she added to her husband, "be sure and don't take no combs nor gloves! I ain't going to do no diagnosing in public—not for ten cents. Them that want it can pay for it and take a private setting."

"They're mostly flowers to-night," said Spoll as he crept out of the room.

"Lord, I do hate a flower test!" she groaned. "It's too hard work. Of course, they're apt to bring roses if their name's Rose, or lilies and daisies the same way, but you can't never be sure, and you have to fish. Lockets is what I like, lockets and ballots."

At this moment Mr. Ringa entered. He was a bleached, tow-headed youth, long and lanky, with mild gray eyes and a stubbly, straw-colored mustache. Two

front teeth were missing from his upper jaw. His clothes seemed to have shrunk and tightened upon his frame. He bowed respectfully to Madam Spoll and Professor Vixley, who represented to him the top of the profession.

"Did you get that 'S.F.B.' letter, all right?" he asked.

"Yes, what about it?"

"She's easy!"

Vixley grinned. "If she's easy for you she must be a cinch for us!"

Ringa persevered. "Well, I got the dope, anyway. She's a Mrs. Brindon and she's worried about her husband—he's gone dotty on some fluzie up North. I read her hand last week. I told her they was trouble coming to her along of a dark woman—she's one of these beer-haired blondes—what I call a Würzburger blonde—then I showed it to her in the heart-streak. 'Go ahead and tell me how it will come out,' she says. I says: 'There's a peculiar condition in your hand that I ain't quite on to,' I says. She says: 'Why, can't you read it?' Says I: 'Madam, if I could read that well, I wouldn't be doing palms for no two bits a shot; I'd be where Granthope is, with a fly-away studio and crowding it at five plunks, per.' Then I says: 'Say, I hear Madam Spoll has great gifts in predicting at all affairs of the heart. I ain't never been to any of her circles, but why don't you shoot around next Thursday night and try her out?' 'What'll I do?' she says. Then I told her to write on a paper, 'Does he care more for Mae Phillips than he does for me, and how will it come out?' She done it and sealed it up into an envelope I give her."

[image]

"I told her they was trouble coming to her"

"Good work!" said Madam Spoll. "I'll give you a rake-off if I land her. I've got her ballot right here. I won't need to open it."

"Ain't that job worth a dollar to you as it stands?" Ringa asked nervously. "I'll call it square and take my chances on the percentage."

"All right. It's a good sporting chance! Only I wish it was a man. Women are too close." Madam Spoll opened her purse and paid him.

As Ringa left, Vixley asked: "By the way, how about this fellow Payson? Do you think Lulu roped him?"

"I guess so. Lulu's done pretty well lately, and she's brought me considerable business. She ought to be here by this time."

"I should think she'd be able to handle him alone."

"Don't you go and tell her so! The thing for her to do is to get a manager,

but I don't intend to queer my own game."

"What line is she workin' now? She's failed at about everything ever since she begun with cards."

"Oh, she's doing the 'Egyptian egg' reading. Wouldn't that freeze you? Lord, that was out of date twenty years go; but everything goes in San Francisco."

"Say, ain't this town the penultimate limit!" Vixley ejaculated, grinning. "Why, the dopes will stand in line all night for a chance to be trimmed, and send their money by express, prepaid, if you let 'em. Gert, sometimes I'm ashamed of myself for keepin' 'em waitin' so long! Talk about takin' a gumdrop away from a sick baby; that's hard labor to what we did for Bennett. What I want to know is, how do these damn fools ever get all the money we take away from 'em? It don't look like they had sense enough to cash a check."

"If I had one or two more decoys as good as Ringa and Lulu Ellis, I'd be fixed all right. I could stake out all the dopes in town. Say, Granthope could cut up a lot of easy cash if he'd agree to stand in. I tried to tap him about this here Payson, and he wouldn't give me a tip."

"Perhaps he didn't know anything. You can't loosen up when you're wide open, can you?"

"He generally knows all there is to know. The trouble is he's getting too high-toned. Since he fitted up his new studio and butted into society you can't get near him with nothing like a business proposition. I believe he thinks he's too good for this place and will go East. He's a nice boy, though. I ain't got nothing against him, only I wish he'd help us out. Hello, here's Lulu. Good evening, Lulu, how's Egyptian eggs to-day?"

Lulu Ellis was a dumpy, roly-poly, soft-eyed, soft-haired, pink-cheeked young woman, as innocent appearing a person as ever lived on her wits. Not that she had many of them, but a limited sagacity is enough to dupe victims as willing to be cajoled as those who appeal to the Egyptian egg for a sign of the future. Lulu's large, brown eyes were enough to distract one's attention from her rule-of-thumb methods. Her fat little hand was soft and white, her plump little body full of extravagant curves.

"Say, Mr. Payson has come!" she exclaimed immediately, with considerable excitement. "He's on the third row at the far end."

Madam Spoll became alert. "Did you see his test?"

"No, he was here when I come," Lulu replied.

"Go out and get Spoll." Madam Spoll spoke sharply. "We've got to fix this thing up right now."

Lulu returned to say: "There's such a crowd coming in he can't leave, but he says it was a gold watch with a seal fob."

"All right, so far," said the Madam. "Now, Lulu, are you sure of what you

told me?"

Lulu's reply was interrupted by the entrance of Francis Granthope, in opera hat and Inverness cape, making a vivid contrast to the disreputable aspect of Professor Vixley. He greeted the three conspirators with his customary elegance.

"I'm sorry I had nothing about Payson when you rang me up, Madam Spoll, but just afterward his daughter came in for a reading. Queer, wasn't it?"

"God, that's a stroke of luck!" said Vixley eagerly. "I say, Frank, you can work her while we handle the old man, and we'll clean up a fortune. They say he's a millionaire." Vixley's little eyes gleamed.

"Let's hear what Lulu has to say, first," said Madam Spoll.

"Why, I didn't get much," Lulu confessed. "He said he dropped in by accident as he was passing by, to see what Egyptian egg astrology was. I got his name off of some letters he had in his overcoat pocket. I made him hang it on the hall hat-rack. I did all I could for him——"

"Did he get gay with you?" Professor Vixley interrupted. He had been overtly enjoying Lulu's plump charms with his rapacious eyes.

Granthope smiled; Lulu Ellis colored slightly.

"No, he didn't! I don't do none of that kind of work!"

"The more fool you!" Madam Spoll retorted. "He's an old man, ain't he?"

"Sixty," said Vixley, "I looked him up."

"Then he ought to be easy as chewing gum," said Madam Spoll.

Granthope lighted a cigarette and listened with a mildly cynical expression.

"He ain't that kind, though," Lulu insisted. "I ain't altogether a fool, after all. Why, he don't even go to church!"

Her three auditors laughed aloud, the Professor raucously, Madam Spoll with a bubbling chuckle, Granthope with scarcely more than an audible smile.

"That settles it, then. You're coming on, Lulu! What else do you know?" said Madam Spoll.

"Well, he has a daughter——"

"Yes, Granthope knows all about that," from the Madam.

"Her name is Clytie," said Granthope. "Twenty-seven."

"Is she a looker?" asked Vixley.

Granthope turned to him and gave him a patronizing glance. "*You* wouldn't think so, Professor. She's hardly your style. But she's good enough for me!" He languidly flipped the ash from his cigarette and took his pose again.

Lulu went on: "I think he had a love affair before he was married, but I couldn't quite get it. I didn't dare to fish very much. And that's about all I got."

"That's plenty, Lulu. You can go now. Here's a dollar for you and much obliged for passing him up."

"Oh, thank you," said Lulu. "I'm afraid it ain't worth that much. He gave

me a dollar himself, though I don't charge but four bits, usually."

"Lord, what a fool!" said Vixley, watching her go out. "That girl won't ever get nowhere, she's too innocent. She knows no more about real life than a boiled egg."

"She's all right for me, though," Madam Spoll replied. "That's just the kind I need in my business. She fools 'em every time. They ain't nothing like a good blusher for a stool-pigeon, you take my word for it. Lulu's all right in her place." She turned to wash her hands at a bowl in the corner.

"Well," said Vixley, crossing his legs, "are you coming in with us, Frank?"

"It looks pretty good to me, so far. But it depends. What have you got about Payson, anyway?" Granthope's tone was languid.

Madam Spoll winked at Vixley, as she wiped her hands behind the palmist's back.

"Why," Vixley replied, "Payson's in wool and is director of a bank, besides. He's a square-head with a high forehead, and them are easy. Gertie, here, can get him into a private sittin', and when she does, you leave him to her—she'll find a way all right. She don't do no lumpy work, Gertie don't, you know that, all right! When she passes him along to me, I'll manage him like the way we worked Bennett with the real estate. I'd like another chance as good as him."

"You just wait," said Madam Spoll. "I got a hunch that this Payson is going to be pretty good pie; and we got a good strong combination, Frank, if you want to do your share."

"It's a pity Spoll ain't got some of Gertie's gumption," said Vixley, smiling with approval at his partner.

"Don't you make no mistake about Spoll—he's done some good work on Payson already." The Madam was adjusting her waist before the glass and coquetting with her hair. "The trouble with you, Vixley, is that you ain't got no executive ability—I'm going to organize this game myself. I can see a way to use Spoll and Ringa, and Flora, too. We want to go into this thing big. Payson's a keener bird than Bennett was, but they's more in him."

"So Spoll has begun, has he?" Granthope asked.

"Yes. He located the Paysons over on North Beach."

"I know that much already. The mother's dead. Mr. and Miss Payson have traveled abroad. What else do you know about her?"

"Why, it seems she's the sole heir. Good news for you, eh? High society, too—Flower Mission, Kitchen Garden, Friday Cotillions, Burlingame, everything. She could help you, Frank, if you got on the right side of her."

Here Mr. Spoll tiptoed in, bowed to Granthope, and said:

"Eight o'clock, Gertie."

Madam Spoll arose cumbrously, took a last peep in the mirror of the folding

bed and turned into the hall, saying, ”You take my advice, Frank. We depend upon you. See what you can do with the girl.” She paused to bend a keen glance upon him. ”What did you do with her, anyway?”

”Why, I did happen on something,” he answered. ”Do you remember Madam Grant, who used to live down on Fifth Street, twenty-odd years ago?”

Madam Spoll came back into the room eagerly.

”The crazy woman who lived so queer and yet had lots of money? Yes! She did clairvoyance, didn’t she? I remember. She had a kid with her, too. Let’s see—he ran away with the money, didn’t he? And nobody ever knew what become of him. What about her?”

There was a duel of astute glances between them. Granthope had his own reasons for not wanting to say too much. He guarded his secret carefully, as he had guarded it from her for years.

”Miss Payson used to go down to see Madam Grant with her mother, when she was a little girl.”

”No! *did* she, though? With her mother? That’s queer! Hold on, Vixley. What did Lulu say about a love affair before Payson was married? Do you get that? Here’s his wife visiting Madam Grant; you remember her, don’t you? There’s something in that I believe we got a good starter already.”

Spoll appeared again, anxiously beckoning, and she went with him down the hall.

Vixley took up the scent. ”Say, Frank,” he asked, ”how did you happen to get on to that, anyway? That was slick work.”

Granthope turned to him and replied patronizingly, ”Oh, I ought to know something about women by this time. I got her to talking.”

Vixley frowned, intent in thought, stroking his scant, pointed beard and biting his mustache; then he slapped his knee with his claw-like hand. ”Say, you got a grand chance there,” he exclaimed. ”See here, you can get in with the swells and be in a position to help out lots. It’s the chance of a lifetime, and we’ll make it worth your while.”

”How?” Granthope inquired contemptuously.

”By a fair exchange of information. You put us wise, and we’ll put you wise. I’ll trust you to find ways of using what help we give you.” He cackled.

”Yes—you can trust me. I think I might have some fun out of it. I don’t mind helping you out, but all I need myself is a little imagination, some common-sense and a frock coat.”

Vixley looked at him admiringly. ”I wish’t I had your chance, Frank; that’s what I do. Say, you just light ’em and throw ’em away, don’t you! I s’pose if I had your looks I could do it myself.”

Granthope looked him over calmly. ”There’s no knowing what a bath and

a manicure and a suit of clothes would do for you, Professor."

"You can't make brains out o' soap," retorted the medium.

"And you can't make money out of dirt.

"We'll see who has the money six months from now."

"It's a fair enough bargain. I take the girl, you take the money. I'm satisfied." Granthope arose and yawned. "Oh," he added, "did you know Payson had a partner named Riley? He was drowned in seventy-seven."

"That's funny. Queer how things come our way! Mrs. Riley is here in the front room with a test. She was tried for the murder of one of her husbands. Gert's goin' to shoot her up with it to-night. You better go in and see the fun. She'll give it to her good."

"I think I will," said the palmist.

He left Vixley plunged in thought, and walked out.

Turning into the audience-room he sat down on a chair in the rear. The place was almost filled. His eyes scanned the assembly carefully, roving from one spectator to another. On a side seat near him, a party of four, young girls and men, sat giggling and chewing gum. The rest of the company showed a placid vacancy of expression or lukewarm expectancy.

Madam Spoll at the organ and her husband with his violin, had, meanwhile, been playing a dreary piece of music, "to induce the proper conditions," as she had announced from the platform. They stopped, retarding a minor chord, and the medium went to the table and began to handle the tests, rearranging them, putting some aside, bringing others forward, in an abstracted manner. Then, looking up with a self-satisfied smile, she spoke:

"I want to say something to the new-comers and skeptics here to-night in explanation of these tests. Them who have thoroughly investigated the subject and are familiar with every phase of mediumship, understand, of course, that these objects are placed here merely to attract magnetism to the sitter and induce the proper conditions, so that your spirit friends will be able to communicate with you. This phase of mediumship is called psychometry, but if I'd stop to explain just what that means, I wouldn't have time to give any readings. Now, it won't be possible to get any messages unless you come here in the proper mood to receive them. You must send out your best thought and do all you can to assist, or else my guides won't be able to establish communication on the spirit plane. If you merely come here only to laugh and to make a scoff of the proceedings, I'll have to ask you to leave before I begin, for they's many here to-night who are honestly in search of the truth, seeking to communicate with the dear, loved ones beyond on the other side."

She passed her hand across her eyes, sighed, and fingered her chin nervously. She poked the articles on the table again.

”As I come on to this platform, I see an old man over there, in that direction, what you might call a middle-aged man, perhaps, of a medium height, and whiskers, like. I feel a condition of going on a journey, you might say, somewhere east of here, though maybe not very far, and I get the name John. The light goes over in your direction, lady, that one with the red hat. Yes, you. Would that be your father, possibly?”

The lady, straightening herself upon being thus addressed, said timidly, ”I think perhaps you mean my uncle. His name was John.”

”Maybe it is an uncle, though I get the influence of a father very strong, too. Has your father passed out?”

The lady in the red hat nodded.

”Then it *is* your father, do you see? Yes, I get an uncle, too, who wishes to communicate, only his influence ain’t strong enough. That shows it ain’t mind reading, as the newspaper folks say, don’t it?” She smiled, as if she had made a point, and the audience appeared to be impressed.

”About this journey, now: maybe you ain’t had no idea of traveling, but John says you will. I don’t think it’s liable to be very far, though. It’ll be before the last of September or the first of October and John says it’ll be successful. Do you understand what I mean?”

The lady, frightened at the terrible import of this question, did not speak.

”Did you send up an article?”

”It’s that purse with the chain.”

Madam Spoll fingered it and weighed it reflectively.

”I get a condition of what you might call inharmony. Seems to me like in your home something is worrying you and you ain’t satisfied, you understand, with the way things are going and sometimes you feel as if, well, you just couldn’t stand it!” Her smile, now, bathed her dupe with sympathy.

The lady nodded vigorously, with tightly shut lips.

”You kind of wonder if it does any good for you to go to all the trouble you do to sacrifice yourself and try to do your duty, when it ain’t what you might call appreciated. And you’re worried about money, too. Ain’t that so?”

She received a ready assent. The woman’s eyes were fixed upon her. Every one in the room watched the stripping naked of a soul.

”Well, John says that your father and him are helping you all they can on the spirit plane, and he thinks conditions will be more favorable and will take a turn for the better by the first of the year.”

A question fluttered on the woman’s lips, but before it had time to escape, Madam Spoll suddenly turned in the other direction.

”While I was talking to that lady,” she said, ”I felt an influence leading me to that corner over there by the clock, and I get the initials ’S.F.B.’ Is there anybody

of that name over there?"

A flashily dressed woman, with tinted yellow hair and rhinestone ear-rings, raised her hand.

"Those are my initials," she announced.

Madam Spoll grew impressive. "Your name is Brindon, ain't it?"

The woman gasped out a "Yes."

"Did I ever see you before?"

"No," said the blonde, "not to my knowledge, you didn't."

Madam Spoll made a comprehensive gesture with both hands, calling attention to the miracle. "You sent up a sealed ballot, didn't you?"

The woman nodded. She was obviously excited, looking as if she feared her skeleton was to be dragged forth from its closet; as indeed it was.

Madam Spoll took up the envelope with her delicate thumb and forefinger and displayed it to the audience.

"You see, it's still sealed," she announced, then, shutting her eyes, she continued: "My guides tell me that he's what you might call infatuated, but he'll come back to you and say he's sorry. Do you understand that?"

The woman was now painfully embarrassed and shrank into her seat. The medium, however, did not spare her. It was too good a chance for a dramatic sensation. She tore the envelope open and read its contents boldly: "Does he care more for Mae Phillips than he does for me?" It was a psychological moment. The old women stared at Mrs. Brindon with morbid delight. There was a little buzzing of whispers through the room. Then the audience prepared itself for the next sensation.

The medium picked up another envelope. "This is marked '275,'" she said, then she clutched her throat. "Oh," she cried, "I'm strangling! They's somebody here who passed out very sudden, like they was poisoned. It's terrible. I can't answer the question the party has written because there's an evil influence here, a wicked woman. She had three husbands and two of 'em died suspicious. Her name is Riley. Would that be you?" She pointed forcefully at a dried-up, old woman in a shawl, with bleared eyes and a veined nose.

There was no response.

"Was this question something about your daughter?" Madam Spoll asked.

The woman coughed and bowed, shrinking into herself.

"I guess you better go somewhere else for your readings," Madam Spoll declared cruelly. "Your aura don't seem to me to be very harmonious. I don't know what's the matter to-night," she went on, passing her hand across her forehead in apparent distress. "The conditions around me are something horrid." Her voice rose. "There's somebody in this very room here who has committed murder. I can't do a thing until I get that off my mind. My guides tell me who it is, and

that they'll be satisfied if he'll acknowledge it and say he's sorry. Otherwise, this séance can't go on."

She stopped and glared about the hall. By this time she had worked her audience up to an intense excitement. Every one looked at his neighbor, wondering what was to come, but no one offered to confess to a crime. Madam Spoll raged up and down the platform in a frenzy. Then she stopped like an elephant at bay.

"I know who this person is. It's a man, and if he don't rise and acknowledge it, I shall point him out!"

No one stirred. On the fourth seat, a clean-shaven man of thirty-five, with sharp, aquiline features and wide-spread ears, sat, transfixed with horror, his two hands clenched. It was Mr. Perry, the cleverest actor in the medium's support.

She advanced toward him as if drawn by a secret power, stared into his eyes, and putting her hand upon his shoulder, said:

"Thou art the man!"

Mr. Perry wriggled out of her grasp. "See here," he cried, "you mind your own business, will you. You're a fake! You got no right to make a fool of me." His voice trembled, his face was a convincing mask of guilt arraigned.

The medium shook a warning finger at him. "You either acknowledge what I say is true, or you leave the hall! I can't go on with you here."

Mr. Spoll came in to stand beside her valiantly; spectators stood up to watch the drama. Mr. Perry's eyes were wild, his face distorted; suddenly he arose and rushed out of the room. Madam Spoll snapped her fingers two or three times, shook herself and went back to the platform. The murmurs died down and the séance was resumed.

Madam Spoll waited a while in silence, then she picked up a gold watch with a seal fob from the table. "I'm glad to feel a more peaceful influence," she said. "I'm directed toward this watch. I don't know who brought it up, for I was out of the room at the time, but I get the name 'Oliver.'" She looked up expectantly.

A gentleman arose from an end seat in the third row. He had a high domed head, partly bald, and a gray chin-beard with a shaven upper lip; under shaggy overhanging eyebrows, cold gray eyes looked through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. His air was benevolently judicial and bespoke culture and ease. He had, moreover, a well-marked presence, as of one used to being considered influential and prominent. A row of false teeth glittered when he opened his mouth.

"That's my name," he acknowledged in a deep, fluent voice that was heard all over the room, "and that is my watch."

Madam Spoll fixed him in the eye. "I'd like to know if I can't get your other name. My guides are very strong to-night." After a few moments of self-absorption, she smiled sweetly upon him. "I think I can get it clairaudiently.

Would it be Pearson?"

"No, but that's pretty near it, though."

"It sounds like Pearson to me, Pearson. Payson, oh, yes, it's Payson, isn't it?"

"That's right," he said, and sat down.

"Did I ever see you before?"

"Not to my knowledge, Madam."

She looked triumphantly at her audience and smiled.

"If they's any skeptics here to-night, I hope they'll go away satisfied." A number of old ladies nodded emphatically. "Of course, newspaper men never come on a night like this, when my guides are strong. Funny what you see when you ain't got a gun, ain't it? The next time I'm half sick and tired out, they'll be plenty of them here to say I'm a fake, like our friend here who left so sudden, white as a sheet. Now, when I was directed to that watch, I was conscious of a spirit standing beside this gentleman," she pointed at him benevolently, "influencing me to take it up. It's a woman, and she must have been about thirty when she passed out, and remarkably handsome, too. She was sort of fair-complected, between dark and light. I get a feeling here in my throat and down here," she touched her breast, lightly, curving her arm gracefully inward, "as if she went out sudden, like, with heart disease. Do you know what I mean?"

Mr. Payson had bent forward now. "Yes," he said, "I think I do. Has she any message for me?"

"Yes, she has; but—well, you see, it ain't one I'd exactly care to give in public, and I don't think you'd want me to, either. If you come up after the séance is over, I'll see if I can get it for you. Or you might do still better to have a private setting and then I'll have time to tell you more. She brings me a condition of what you might call worry or anxiety, as if you had something on your mind."

She turned to a bunch of flowers, and, taking them up, smelled them thoughtfully, for a while. Mr. Payson settled back in his seat.

As the medium commenced again, Granthope arose with his faint, cynical smile and walked quietly out. He found Mr. Spoll at the table by the door.

"Well, I guess he's on the hook." The palmist buttoned his cape and lighted a cigarette.

"Trust Gertie for that," said Spoll; "she'll land him all right, see if she don't. Good night!"

Granthope turned up his collar and walked out into the street.

CHAPTER IV
THE PAYSONS

Mr. Oliver Payson lived on a half-deserted street on the northerly slope of Russian Hill, in a quarter of the town which, at one time, promised to become a favored, if not an aristocratic residential district. But the whim of fashion had fancied in succession Stockton Street, Rincon Hill, Van Ness Avenue, Nob Hill, and had now settled upon the Western Addition and the Presidio Heights. The old North Beach, with its wonderful water and mountain view, nearer the harbor and nearer the business part of the city, had long been neglected. The few old families, who in early days settled on this site, still remained; and, with the opening of new cable-car lines, found themselves, not only within a short distance of down-town, but at the same time almost as isolated as if they had dwelt in the country, for this part of the city is upon none of the main routes—few frequent the locality except upon some special errand.

One side of the street was still unbuilt upon; on the southern side stood three houses, each upon its fifty-vara lot, comfortably filling the short block. That occupied by the Paysons was an old frame structure of two stories, without attempt at ornamentation, except for its quaint, Tudoresque pointed windows and a machicolated wooden battlement round the flat roof. It stood on a gentle slope, surrounded by an old-fashioned garden, which was hedged in, on either side, by rows of cypress and eucalyptus trees, protecting it from the trade winds, which here blow unhampered across the water.

In front, a scene ever-changing in color as the atmospheric conditions changed, was ranged in a semi-circular pageant, the wild panorama of San Francisco Bay, from Point Bonita and Golden Gate in the west, past the Marin County shore with Sausalito twinkling under the long, beautiful profile of Mount Tamalpais, past Belvedere with its white villas, Alcatraz and Goat Island floating in the harbor, to the foot-hills behind Oakland and Berkeley, where, in the east, Mount Diablo's pointed peak shimmered in the blue distance.

In the second story of this house Clytie had a bookbinding room, where she spent most of her spare time. It was large, bare, sunny, impregnated with the odor of leather skins, clean and orderly. A sewing frame and a heavy press

stood behind her bench and upon a table were neatly arranged the pages of a book upon which she was working. Carefully placed in workmanlike precision were her knives, shears, glue pot and gas heater and a case of stamping irons in pigeonholes.

She was, this afternoon, in a brown gingham pinafore, with her sleeves rolled up, seated before the table, her sensitive hands moving deftly at the most delicate operation connected with her craft. Upon a square of heavy plate glass, she laid a torn, ragged page, and, from several old fly leaves, selected one that matched it in color. She cut a piece of paper slightly larger than the missing portion, skived the edges, and pasted it over the hole or along the frayed margin. The work was absorbing and exacting to her eyes; to rest them, she went, from time to time, to the window and looked out upon the bay.

The water was gray-green streaked with a deeper blue. In the "north harbor" two barks lay at anchor in the stream and ferry-boats plied the fairway. In and out of the Gate there passed, at intervals, tugs with sailing ships bound out with lumber or in with nitrates, steamers to coast ports, or liners from overseas, rusty, weather-beaten tramps, strings of heavy-going barges, lusty little tugs, lumber schooners wallowing through the tide rip, Italian fishing smacks, lateen-rigged with russet sails, saucy launches, and, at last, the magnificent bulk of a white battleship sliding imperiously into the roadstead along the waterfront.

At four o'clock Clytie's mind seemed to wander from her occupation, and now, when she ceased and looked out of the window, her abstracted gaze was evidently not directed at what she saw. Her mental vision, rather, seemed alert. Her slender golden eyebrows drew closer together, her narrow, sharp nostrils dilated; her lips, half open, inhaled deep, unconscious breaths. The pupils of her eyes contracted like a cat's in the light. Then she shook herself, passed her hand over her forehead, shrugged her shoulders and resumed her work.

A little later this performance was repeated; this time, after her momentary preoccupation, she rose more briskly, put her tools away, laid her book carefully aside and took off her pinafore. After washing her hands she went into her own room on the same floor. She went down-stairs ten minutes after, in a fresh frock, her hair nicely arranged, radiating a faint perfume of violet water. She opened the front door and walked slowly down the path to the gate where the wall, though but waist-high on the garden side, stood high above the sidewalk. Here she waited, touching the balustrade delicately with her outstretched fingers, as if playing upon a piano. The breeze loosened the severity of her coiffure, which relaxed into slight touches of curling frivolity about her ears and neck. Her pink frock billowed out into flowing, statuesque folds as she stood, like a figurehead, gazing off at the mountains. Her mouth was set into a shape not quite a smile, a queer, tremulously subtle expression of suspense. She kept her eyes in the

direction of Hyde Street.

It was not long before a man turned the corner and walked briskly toward her. He looked up at the first house on the block, searching for the number; then, as his eyes traveled along to the next gate, he caught sight of her. Instantly his soft felt hat swung off with a quick flourish and he sent her a pleased smile.

"Here I am, Mr. Granthope!" Clytie called down to him, and on the instant her face was suffused with pink. She had evidently expected him, but now she appeared as agitated as if his coming had surprised her.

He ran up the flight of wooden steps, his eyes holding hers all the way. His dark, handsome face glowed; he abounded with life and spirit as he stood before her, hand outstretched. In the other, he held a small leather-bound book.

"Good afternoon, Miss Payson!" he said heartily. He shook hands eagerly, his touch, even in that conventional greeting, consciously managed; the grasp was sensitive and he delayed its withdrawal a suggestive second, his dark eyes already at work upon hers. "How lucky I was to catch you out here!" he added, as he dropped her hand.

"Oh, I've been expecting you for some time," Clytie replied, retreating imperceptibly, as from an emotional attack, and turning away her eyes.

He noticed her susceptibility, and modified his manner slightly.

"Why! You couldn't possibly have known I was coming?"

"But I did! Does that surprise you? I told you I had intuitions, you know. You came to bring my ring, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course. You really have second-sight, then?" He looked at her as one might look at a fairy, in amusement mingled with admiration.

"Yes—haven't *you*?" She put it to him soberly.

"Haven't I already proved it?" His eyes, well-schooled, kept to hers boldly, seeking for the first sign of her incredulity. Into his manner he had tried to infuse a temperamental sympathy, establishing a personal relation.

She did not answer for a moment, gazing at him disconcertingly; then her eyes wandered, as she remarked: "You certainly proved something, I don't quite know what."

He laughed it off, saying: "Well, I've proved at least that I wanted to see you again, and made the most of this excuse."

"Yes, I'm glad I forgot the ring. I'm really very glad to see you, too—I half hoped I might. Won't you come up to my summer-house? It's not so windy there, and we can talk better."

He accepted, pleased at the invitation and the implied promise it held, and followed her up the path and off toward the line of trees. The place was now visited by belated sunshine which compensated for the sharp afternoon breeze. In the shelter of the cypress hedge the air was warm and fragrant. Here was

an arbor built of withe crockery crates overgrown with climbing nasturtiums; it contained a seat looking eastward, towards Telegraph Hill. In front stood a sun-dial mounted on a terra cotta column, beneath a clump of small Lombardy poplars.

As she seated herself she pointed to it. ”Did you know that this is a sort of cemetery? That sun-dial is really a gravestone. When I was a little girl I buried my doll underneath it. She had broken open, letting the sawdust all out, and I thought she must be dead. It may be there now, for all I know; I never dug her up.”

He looked over at the shaft, saying, ”A very pretty piece of symbolism. I suppose I have buried illusions, myself, somewhere.”

She thought it over for a moment, and apparently was pleased. ”I’d like to dig some of them up,” she said at last, turning to him, with the slow movement of her head that was characteristic of her.

”Haven’t you enough left?”

She started to reply, but evidently decided not to say what she had intended, and let it drop there, her thought passing in a puzzling smile as she looked away again.

He had laid his book beside him upon the bench, and, when her eyes came back, she took it up and looked at it. A glance inside showed it to be an old edition of Montaigne. She smiled, her eyes drifted to him with a hint of approval for his taste, then she turned her interest to the binding. As she fingered the leather, touching the tooled surfaces sensitively, her curiosity did not escape his sharp eyes, watching for anything that should be revelatory.

She explained: ”I have a technical interest in bindings. I do some of that work myself. It’s curious that I happened to be at work to-day on an old copy of Montaigne. I’m rebinding it for my father’s birthday. You’d never think my hands were of any practical use, would you?”

He laughed. ”Inconsistencies like that are what baffles one most, especially when one knows that most characters are inconsistent. But we professionals have to go by general rules. I should expect you to be an exception to all of them, though.”

He watched her surreptitiously, noting her diminishing color, the evasion of her glance, and the air of self-consciousness with which she spoke, as they talked for a while of obvious things—the weather, the view, and the picturesque, old-fashioned garden. She had taken the ring and had put it upon her finger, keeping her eyes on its turquoises. Her whole demeanor ministered to his vanity, already pleased by her frank welcome. He was used enough to women’s interest and admiration for him to expect it and play upon it, but this was of a shyer and more elusive sort; it seemed to hold something more seriously considered, it

baffled him, even as he enjoyed its unction. Besides all this, too, there was a secret romantic charm in the fact that they had shared together that vivid experience of the past. He came back for another draught of flattery.

"It was odd that you expected me, wasn't it?" he said. "I can't help wondering about it."

She had her eyes upon the Sausalito boat, which was weaving a trailing web of foam past Alcatraz Island. At his words, she turned to him with the same slow seriousness as before and replied:

"I shouldn't think it would seem so remarkable to you, your own power is so much more wonderful."

"Perhaps so in that one case, but you know I don't, ordinarily, claim clairvoyance. It's only occasionally, as the other day with you, that I attempt it."

Her eyes awakened; she said earnestly, "Was I really able to bring that out in you?"

He caught at the hint. "Why, what else could it be but your magnetism? It was the more strange because I had never seen you before."

The glow faded, and she relaxed her nervous energy. "Ah, hadn't you? I wonder!"

"Why, had you ever seen me before that day?"

"I think so. At least you seem, somehow, familiar."

"When was it, and where, then?"

She seemed too puzzled to answer, or fatigued with following an intangible thread of thought. As she spoke, slowly, intensely, her hands made large, vague gestures, often pausing in mid air, as her voice paused, waiting for the proper word to come. "I don't know. It only seems as if I had been with you—or near you, or something—I don't know what. It's like a dream—or a story I can't quite recall, only—" she did not finish the sentence.

He wondered what her game could be. Fundamentally cynical, though he never permitted it to show in his manner, he distrusted her claims to prevision. There was, after all, nothing in Miss Payson's words that might not be accounted for by what he knew of the wiles of feminine psychology. His training had taught him how much a baseless hint, injected at the proper moment, could accomplish in the masquerade of emotions and the crafty warfare of the sexes. That he and she had been actors together in a past uncomprehended scene, he regarded as a mere coincidence of which he had already made good use; he refused to connect it with her suggestive remark, for he was sure that she must have been unaware of his presence in Madam Grant's room that day, so long ago. It seemed to him more likely that, woman-fashion, she had shot into the air and had brought down an unsuspected quarry. And yet, even as a coincidence, he could not quite dismiss the strangeness of it from his mind.

He was preparing to turn it to a sentimental advantage, when Clytie, who had relapsed into silence, suddenly aroused herself with one of those impulsive outbursts which were characteristic of her.

"There is something about it all that is stranger still, I think!"

Her golden brows had drawn together, separated by two vertical lines, as she gazed at him. Then with a little jet of fervor, she added:

"I'm afraid I know too much about you, Mr. Granthope! It's somewhat embarrassing, really. It doesn't seem quite fair, you know."

"I'm not quite sure that I understand."

"Oh, you know! You must know!"

He laughed. "Really, Miss Payson, it's very flattering, of course—"

"Oh, no, it's not in the least flattering."

"I wish you'd explain, then." He leaned back, folded his arms and waited indulgently. So long as he could keep the conversation personal, he was sure of being able to manage her, and further his own ends. It amused him.

She busied herself with a lace handkerchief as she continued, in a low voice, as if she were ridding herself of a disagreeable task, and always with the slow, monotonous turning of her questing eyes toward him, and away. "Of course I've heard many things about you—you're a good deal talked about, you know; but it's not that at all—it's an instinctive knowledge I have about you. I can't explain it. It's a queer special feeling—almost as if, in some way, I had the right to know. That's why I wanted to see you again—I hoped you'd come. I wanted to tell you."

"But all that certainly is flattering," he said. "I wouldn't be human if I weren't pleased to hear that you're interested, even if—"

She could not help breaking into smiles again, as she interrupted him.

"Oh, but I haven't told you yet."

"Please do, then!"

"It sounds so foolish when I say it—so priggish! But it's this: I don't at all approve of you. Why in the world should I care? I don't know. It isn't my business to reform you, if you need it." Now she had brought it out, she could not look at him.

Curiously enough, though he had been amused at her assumption of a circumstantial knowledge of him, this hinted comprehension of his character, of the duplicity of his life, if it were that, impressed him with the existence in her mind of some quality as rare and mysterious as electricity, a real psychic gift, perhaps. It gave him an instant's pause. Instinctively he feared a more definite arraignment. He began a little more seriously, now, to match his cleverness against her intuition; and, for the first defense, he employed a move of masculine coquetry.

"You have been thinking of me, then?"

"Yes," she replied simply, "I have thought about you a good deal since I

was in your studio. But I suppose you're used to hearing things like that from women." She was apologetic, rather than sarcastic.

He shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to be able to make no way against her directness. "I've thought not a little of you, too, Miss Payson. You are wonderfully psychic and sensitive. I think you should develop your power—you might be able to do extraordinary things with it. I wish you'd let me help you. That is," he added humorously, "if I'm not too far gone in your disapproval."

"Oh, the disapproval—I call it that for want of a better word—isn't so important as the fact that I should feel it at all, don't you see? You remember that you told me I was the kind of a woman who, if she liked a man, would tell him so, freely. That is true. I would scorn to stoop to the immemorial feminine tricks. I do like you, and in spite of what I can't quite explain, too. I don't know why, either. It seems as if it's a part of that other feeling I've mentioned—that I've been with you, or near you, before."

He leaned forward to extort more of this delicious confession from her. "Do you mean spiritually, or merely physically near?"

"Oh, I don't mean an 'elective affinity' or anything so occult as that," she laughed. "Indeed, I don't quite know what I do mean—it's all so vague. I can't formulate it. It escapes me when I try. But I did know, for instance, quite definitely, that I'd see you again. I tell you about it only because I think that you, with your power in that way, may be able to understand it and explain it to me."

He thought he saw his chance, now, and instinctively he began to pose, letting his eyes deepen and burn on her. He nodded his head and said impressively:

"Yes. I have felt it, too, Miss Payson. It's wonderful to think that you should have recognized me and understood me so well. No one ever has before. We are related by some tie—I'm sure we've met before, somewhere, somehow—"

She jumped up and stood before him, her hands tightly held, her lips pressed together. For a moment, so, she looked hard at him; then what there had been of anger in her gaze softened to something like sadness or pity.

"*That's* what I meant!"

He misunderstood her remark and her attitude and went still farther astray from her meaning.

"You are not like any other woman I have ever known," he said, in the same soulful way.

"Why can't you be honest with me!" she broke out. She was astonishingly alive now; there was no trace of her former languor. He winced at realizing, suddenly, and too late, that he had made a false step.

"Why do you make me regret having been frank?" she went on, with a despairing throb in her voice. "You have almost succeeded in making me ashamed of myself, already. *That* is just what I disapprove of in you. Don't imagine that

you can ever deceive me with such sentimentality. I shall always know when you're straightforward and simple. That's what I've been trying to make you understand—that I *do* know!"

She turned slowly away from him, almost hopelessly. For a moment she remained immobile, then before he had recovered his wits, she had modified the situation for him. Her eyes drifted back to his as she remarked thoughtfully:

"I am sure, too, that you could help me, if you would."

"How?" He tried to pull himself together.

"Merely by being honest with me."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, I know that's a good deal to ask," she laughed.

"Of me?"

"Of any one."

"I'll try, Miss Payson," he said, not too seriously. "But you've frightened me. I don't dare think too hard about anything, you're such a witch."

She released him graciously and keyed down to an easier tone.

"You must forgive me if I've been too frank, Mr. Granthope, but this interview is almost like a first meeting, and you know how much one is apt to say in such a situation. Let's not continue the discussion—I'm embarrassed enough already. I know I shall regret what I've said. We'll talk of something pleasanter. Tell me about that pretty girl in your office."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and his tone was as if he had said, "Aha!" He wondered if it were possible that, after all, it was only this which had moved her to speak.

Clytie frowned, but if she read his thought, she let it go unchallenged.

"She's an original little thing; I like her," she added.

"You do?" he said mischievously exaggerating his surprise.

"Yes, I do. Don't think I'm trying to patronize her, but she's a dear—and she's very pretty."

"Do you think so? I shall have to tell her that. She's pretty enough, at least, to have been on the stage. She was in vaudeville for a couple of years. I first got acquainted with her at the Orpheum. I've known her a long time. She's a great help and a great comfort to me, and a very clever girl."

"How long has she been your assistant?"

"Two years."

"And you haven't fallen in love with her yet?"

Granthope was relieved. He was sure now that she was, if not jealous, suspicious of his relations with Fancy. It was not the first time he had encountered such insinuations.

"Oh, not in the least," he said. "I can give you my word as to that. I don't think it ever occurred to me—though I'd do anything in the world for her."

”And I suppose you’re as sure of her immunity?”

”Why, of course,” said Granthope, and in his tone there was the ring of masculine assurance.

Clytie smiled and shook her head. ”There are some things men never can know, no matter how clairvoyant they are,” she said, looking away.

He did not follow this up, but arose to leave. ”I’m afraid you have a very poor opinion of me, Miss Payson,” he said, ”but I do feel complimented by your frankness. Perhaps I shall merit it—who knows?” It was his turn to address the distance, and, in spite of his consciousness of an histrionic effect, his own words sounded curiously in his ears; they seemed premonitory. He shook himself free from her influence again. She had controlled the situation from the first word; he had only made a series of mistakes. It all confirmed his first estimate of her: that she was very well worth his while, but that her capture would be difficult.

Clytie, too, had arisen. Her mood had lightened, and her sense of humor had returned. ”I hope I haven’t been either tragic or absurd,” she said, smiling. ”I’m not always so serious, Mr. Granthope. The next time I meet you I’ll probably be more conventional.”

”Then I may see you again?”

”I doubt if you can help it.”

”I shall certainly not try to!” Then he paused. ”You mean—?”

”Yes!”

There was something delightful to him in this rapid transfer of wordless thought. It again established an intimacy between them. That she acknowledged such a relation by anticipating another meeting, an inevitable one, charmed him the more. He might win, after all, with such assistance from her. Her power of intuition aroused his curiosity—he longed to experiment with it. She was a new plaything which he had yet to learn to handle. Before, he had dominated her easily enough; he might do so again.

”Miss Payson,” he said, ”won’t you come down to my studio again sometime? I’d like to make a more careful examination of your hand, and perhaps I can help you in developing your psychic sense.”

”Oh, no, thank you. Really, I can’t come again—I shall be pretty busy for a while—I have to go to the Mercantile Library every afternoon, looking up material for my father’s book—and, after all, I got what I wanted.”

”What did you want?”

”Partly to see you.”

He bowed. ”Curiosity?”

”Let’s call it interest.”

”You had no faith, then, in my palmistry?”

”Very little.”

”Yet you acknowledge that I told you some things that were true?”

”Haven’t I told you several things about yourself, too?”

”I’d like to hear more.”

”Oh, I’ve said too much, already.”

”Let’s see. That I am more or less of a villain—”

”But a most interesting one!”

”That I have met you before—”

”Not perhaps ’met’—”

”That Fancy Gray is in love with me—”

”Oh, I didn’t say that!”

”But you suspect it?”

”If I did, it was impertinent of me. It’s none of my business.”

”Well, you won’t come again—you’ve quite satisfied your curiosity by seeing me?”

”Quite. I’ve confirmed all my suspicions.”

”What were they?”

Clytie laughed. ”Really, you’re pushing me a little too hard, Mr. Granthope. I’d be glad to have you call here, sometime, if you care to. But my psychic powers are quite keen enough already. They rather frighten me. I want them only explained. As I say, it’s embarrassing, sometimes. I hate to speak of what I feel—it’s all so groundless and it sounds silly.”

”You know more, then, than you mention?”

”Oh, much!”

”About me, for instance?”

”Yes. But it’s vague and indefinite. It needn’t worry you.”

”Even though you disapprove?”

She laughed again. ”You may take that as a compliment, if you like.”

He nodded. ”It is something that you care.”

”I’m mainly curious to see what you’ll do—”

”Oh, you’re expecting something, then?”

”I’m watching to see. I confess I shall watch you. I said that you interested me—that’s what I mean. You’re going to—well, change.”

As she stood between him and the light her soft hair showed as fine and crisp as spun glass. Her lips were sensitively curved with a flitting smile, her eyes were dreamy again. Everything about her bespoke a high spiritual caste, but, to Granthope, this only accented the desirability of her bodily self—it would make her the greater prize, unlike anything he had, so far, been able to win. He had an epicure’s delight in feminine beauty, and he knew how its flavor should be finely tinctured by mind and soul; even beauty was not exciting without that, and of mere beauty he had his fill. Besides, she had unexpected reserves of emotion that

he was continually tempted to arouse. But so far he had hopelessly misplayed his part, and he longed to prove his customary skill with women.

"Well," he said finally, offering his hand, "I hope I'll be able to satisfy you, sooner or later. I'll come, soon, for a report!"

"Oh, my mood may have changed, by that time."

He gave her the farewell amenities and went down the path to the gate. There he turned and saw her still watching him. He waved his hat and went down the steps, his mind restless with thoughts of her.

Clytie remained a while in the arbor. The fog had begun to come in now with a vanguard of light fleecy clouds riding high in the air, closing the bay in from all sides. The massive bank behind followed slowly, tinted with opal and rose from the setting sun. It settled down, shutting out her sight of the water, and its cohorts were soon scurrying past her on their charge overland from ocean to harbor. The siren at Point Bonita sighed dismally across the channel. It soon grew too cold to remain longer in the garden, and she went into the house shivering, lighted an open fire in the library and sat down.

For half an hour she sat there in silence, inert, listless, lost in thought, her eyes on the blurred landscape mystic with driving fog. The room grew darker, illuminated only by the fitful flashes of the fire. Her still, relaxed figure, fragile and delicate as an ivory carving, was alternately captured and hidden by the shadow and rescued and restored by the sudden gleam from the hearth. She had not moved when her father's step was heard in the hall. He came in, benignly sedate. His deep voice vibrated through the room.

"Well, Cly, dreaming again?"

She started at the sound and came out of her reverie to rise and greet him affectionately. He put down some books and a package of papers and lighted the chandelier, exchanging commonplaces with her—of her bookbinding work, which she confessed to have shirked; of the weather, with a little of old age's querulous complaint of rheumatic touches; of the black cat, which was their domestic fetish and (an immortally interesting topic to him) of the vileness and poisonous quality of San Francisco illuminating gas. His voice flowed on mellifluously with unctuous authority, as he seated himself in his arm-chair beneath the lamp, shook out his evening paper and rattled its flapping sheets.

Clytie evinced a mild interest in his remarks, smiled gently at his familiar vagaries, answering when replies should be forthcoming, in her low, even, monotonously pitched tones. She questioned him perfunctorily about the book he was writing, an absorbing avocation with him, warding off his usual disappointment at her lack of sympathy by involving herself in a conversational web of explanation regarding Foreign Trade Expansion, Reciprocal Profits and The Open Door in the Orient.

”There’s not much use working on it at the office,” he concluded. ”I’m too liable to interruptions.”

”Who interrupted you to-day?” she asked.

”Oh, there was a queer chap in this afternoon, an insurance solicitor; Wooley, his name was. I told him I didn’t want an accident policy, but I happened to tell him about that time on the Oakland Mole, when I got caught between two trains in the Fourth of July crush—you remember? and he told me about all the narrow escapes he ever heard of, trying to get me to go into his company. Funny dog he was. He kept me laughing and talking with him for an hour. Then Blanchard came in. He says he’s coming around to-night.” He hesitated and scanned her intently through his gold-bowed glasses, under his bushy brows. ”I hope you will treat him well, Cly.”

Her face grew serious and her sensitive lips quivered, as she said:

”Why do you like Mr. Cayley so much, father?”

”Why, he’s a very intelligent fellow, Cly; I don’t know of another young man of his age who is really worth talking to. He knows things. He has a broad outlook and a serious mind. He’s the kind of young man we need to take hold of political and commercial reform. I tell you, the country is going to the dogs for lack of men who are interested in anything outside of their own petty concerns. Why, he’s the only one I know who really seems interested in oriental trade and all its development means to the Pacific slope. That’s remarkable, considering he isn’t himself connected with any commercial enterprise. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have him to discuss my subject with. He seems to be genuinely interested in it. I wish you were as much so, Cly!”

Clytie turned away, smiling somewhat ironically, an uncommon expression for her engaging features.

”You know,” she said slowly, ”that I don’t quite trust him.”

”Why, you two have been friends long enough, you should know him better by this time. You’re intimate enough with him.”

”Oh, it’s only a feeling I have. You know I have my intuitions—but what friendship there is has been of his seeking.”

”He’s all right, Cly,” her father said dictatorially. ”I haven’t lived in the West for fifty years without knowing something of men. I do want you to learn to appreciate him. He’s got a future before him and he is certainly fond of you. You know, if anything did come of it, I would—”

Clytie arose abruptly. ”I think dinner’s almost ready, father, and I’m hungry. Are you ready?”

She was imperious, holding her tawny head erect, her chin high, her hands clasped behind her back, the willowy suppleness of her body now grown rigid. Mr. Payson sighed resignedly, and allowed a moment’s silence to speak for him;

then, finding that his daughter's attitude continued to dominate the situation, he, too, arose, patted her cheek and shook his head. This pantomime coaxed forth a gracious smile from her. He took his manuscripts and left to go up to his room. Clytie remained at the window till he returned.

They had nearly finished their dinner, when, after a casual dialogue, she remarked, without looking at him:

"Father, do you remember anything about an old crazy woman who lived down south of Market Street somewhere, years ago—in a cheap hotel, I think it was?"

He started at her question and his voice, ordinarily so calm and so mellow, quavered slightly.

"What do you mean? Who was she?" he asked earnestly.

"That's what I want to know," Clytie said, stirring her coffee.

"What do you know about her?"

"Why—I went to see her once."

"*You* went to see her? When?"

"Then you *did* know her!"

Mr. Payson spoke cautiously, watching his daughter. "I have heard about her, yes, but I never knew you had been there. How in the world did that happen? It must have been a long time ago." He stared as if he could scarcely believe her assertion.

"Mother took me there once or twice. It's almost the first thing I remember."

"She did? She never told me! It's strange you have never mentioned it before."

"Perhaps I oughtn't to mention it now. I thought, somehow, that she wouldn't want me to tell you about it."

His tone now was disturbed, anxious, pitched in a higher key.

"Why shouldn't you speak of it? What difference could it possibly make? I remember that woman, yes. She was not old, though. Do you recall her well? You were very young then."

"I can almost see her now. She had white hair and black eyebrows, with a vertical line between them; she was pale, but with bright red lips. She wore a strange red gown. I think she must have been very beautiful at one time. Who was she, father?" Clytie sent a calm, level glance at him.

"Oh, she was a friend of your mother's. Your mother and I used to keep track of her and help her, that's all."

"Was she poor, then?"

"No, she wasn't. That was the queer part of it. She had considerable ability and actually carried on a real estate business, though she was pretty mad. She had lucid intervals, though, when she was as reasonable as any one."

”What became of her?”

”She died, I think, of heart disease. It must have been the same year your mother died, if I remember rightly.”

”What was her name?”

Mr. Payson grew more nervous at this questioning, but he replied, ”They called her Madam Grant, I believe. How did you happen to bring up the subject after all these years, Cly?”

It was her turn to be embarrassed. ”Well—I've recalled that scene occasionally, and wondered about it—it has always been a mystery I couldn't explain, and I never dared talk about it. Of course, it's only one of those vivid early pictures of childhood, but it has always seemed very romantic.”

”It was a strange situation,” Mr. Payson replied. ”She was a very unfortunate woman and I was sorry for her. I never would have permitted you to go, if I had known, of course, but perhaps your mother knew best.” He dropped his chin upon his hand. ”Yes, I'm glad you went, now. What impression did she make on you?”

”I only remember thinking how beautiful she must have been.”

”Yes,” Mr. Payson's voice was almost inaudible. He pushed his chair back, rose and went into the library. Clytie followed him.

”Are you going out to-night, father?”

”Yes, I've got some business to attend to.”

”In the evening?” she raised her brows.

”Oh, I'm only looking up something—for my book.” He turned away to avoid her gaze.

”Oh!” She sat down and took up a book without questioning him further. Soon after, the front doorbell rang and Mr. Cayley was shown in by the Chinese servant.

Blanchard Cayley was well known about town, for he had a place in many different coteries. By his birth he inherited a position in a select Southern set that had long monopolized social standing and looked scornfully down upon the upstart railroad aristocracy and that *nouveau riche* element which was prominent chiefly through the notoriety conferred by the newspapers. Blanchard Cayley's parts gained him the entrée, besides, to less conventional circles, where his wit and affability made him a favorite. He belonged to two of the best clubs, but his inclinations led him to dine usually at French or Italian restaurants, where good-fellowship and ability distinguished the company. He wrote a little and knew the best newspaper men and all the minor poets in town. He drew a little, and was familiar with all the artists. He accounted himself a musical critic and cultivated composers. He knew San Francisco like a rat, knew it as he knew the intricacies of French forms of verse, as well as he knew the architecture of mu-

sic and the history of painting. He had long ceased his nocturnal meanderings "down the line" from the Hoffman Bar to Dunn's saloon, but he occasionally took a post-graduate course, of sorts, to see whether, for the nonce, the city was wide open or shut. He had discovered the Latin Quarter, now well established as a show-place for jaded pleasure-seekers, and had played *bocce* with the Italians in the cellars of saloons, before the game was heard of by Americans. He had found the marionette theater in its first week, traced every one of Stevenson's haunts before the Tusitala had died in Samoa, knew the writings of "Phoenix" almost by heart, and had devoured half the Mercantile Library. Tar Flat and the Barbary Coast he knew as well as the Mission and North Beach, and as for Chinatown, he had ransacked it for queer jars, jade and hand-made jewelry, exhausting its possibilities long before San Franciscans had realized the presence, in that quarter, of anything but an ill-smelling purlieu of tourists' bazaars.

He had "discovered" women as well—women, for the most part, whose attractions few other persons seemed to appreciate. His last find was Clytie Payson—a much more valuable tribute to his taste than any heretofore. He had devoted himself assiduously to her, and it was his boast that he could remember the hat she wore when he first saw her, ten years before. His pursuit of her had been eccentric. Cayley was mathematical and his methods were built upon a system. During the first years of their acquaintance he alternated months of neglect with picturesque arrivals on nights so tempestuous and foul that his presence would be sure to be counted as a flattering tribute, and would outweigh, with his obvious devotion, the previous languor of his pursuit. This was a fair sample of the subtlety of his psychological amours, for Blanchard Cayley was not of the temperament to run across the room and kiss a girl with verve and ardor. He led, however, an intense mental life; there he was a creature of enthusiasms and contempts, capable of no intermediate emotion.

What else was true of his character it would be necessary to determine from the several ladies of his choice whom he kept carefully apart, recipients of his subdivided confidence. Blanchard Cayley did not introduce female contemporaries.

He wore a carefully trimmed, reddish, Vandyke beard, with a drooping mustache; his hair curled a bit effeminately. Large blue eyes, the well-developed nose of the hobbyist, hands of a sixteenth-century gentleman, aristocratic, well-kept, soft. To-night he was in half-dress—dinner jacket and gold studs, an inch wide stripe upon his trousers—this under a yellow mackintosh and cricket cap, in strict accordance with his own ideas of form.

Mr. Payson was in the library still busy with his manuscript when he entered. The two shook hands. Blanchard's manner had in it something of a survival of the old school. He was never awkward, yet never bombastic.

Suave, rather, with a semi-humorous touch that relieved his courtesy of anything solemn. He smiled, showing his teeth, saying, with an appearance of great interest,

"Well, Mr. Payson, I see you're still at it. How's *The Open Door in the Orient*?"

"Oh, getting on," said Mr. Payson. "I want to read you my last chapter when I get a chance. I think you'll like it."

Cayley had been successful in appearing to listen, and at the same time pay his respects to Clytie, whose hand he did not let go without a personal pressure in addition to the visible greeting. He kept it an unpleasant half-second longer than had Granthope. She freed herself with a slight gesture of discomfort. "Perhaps I'd better go up-stairs and leave you men alone to talk it over," she suggested.

"Certainly not," said her father. "I'll wait until some other time, only I thought Blanchard would be interested."

"Indeed, I am," Cayley protested. "I'm very anxious to hear your opinion about gold, too. I have something to suggest, myself. Oh!" He delved into his breast pocket. "Here are some notes on the history of the trade dollar, Mr. Payson. You know I was speaking of it. I've been looking up the subject at the mint and at the library for you; I think it might give you some ideas."

Mr. Payson took the paper eagerly and pushed up his spectacles to examine it. "Thank you; thank you very much. I'll be glad to look it over. It's a pleasure to find any one nowadays who's so interested in what is going to be a very vital question. You'll find my cigars here, somewhere. Cly, you go and find the box, won't you?"

As Clytie disappeared in the direction of the dining-room, he added, "You must humor her, Blanchard, she's a bit skittish. Don't force her hand and I think you'll bring her around."

"Thanks for the tip, but I have my idea," was the reply. "It's only a question of time when I shall be able to produce the psychological condition I want."

Mr. Payson shook his head dubiously. "I don't know. That isn't the way we went about it when I was young. We didn't bother much with psychology then. We had emotions to attend to."

"Oh, love-making is just as much a science as anything else, and there is no reason why it shouldn't progress. There are modern methods, you know; it's only a form of hypnotism." He smiled blandly.

When he and Clytie were alone—a situation she seemed to delay as much as possible—Cayley sat down opposite her with an ingratiating, disarming smile. He was neither eager nor impressive. He was sure of himself. It did not, as he had said, seem to matter a great deal about her emotions; he scarcely considered her otherwise than as a mind whose defenses he was to overthrow in an intellectual

contest. He began with elaborate circumlocution.

”Well, I’ve discovered something.”

Her delicate eyebrows rose.

”It is a curious botanical fact that there are four thousand lamp-posts in the city of San Francisco.”

”Why botanical?”

”That is just what I expected you to ask.”

”Then I’ll not ask it.” She was already on the defense.

”But you did!”

”Well?” She appeared to resent his tone.

”Now, see here!” He laid his right forefinger to his left palm. ”Suppose a Martian were visiting the earth. He wouldn’t at first be able to distinguish the properties of things. So, seeing these four thousand lamp-posts, he might consider them as a part of the Terrene flora—queer trees.”

It was like a game of chess, and it was evident that she could not foresee his next move. The detour was too complicated. She seemed, by her attitude, to be on her guard, but allowed him, with a nod of assent, to proceed.

”Now, suppose you have the Martian, or let us call it the uncorrelative point of view. Suppose you use brain-cells that have hitherto been quiescent or undeveloped.”

”I don’t exactly follow.” Her attention wandered.

He probed it. ”Suppose I should get up and kiss you.”

She awoke suddenly.

”You see what I mean now?” he continued. ”You exploded a new cell then. You gained a new point of view with regard to me. Don’t be afraid. I’m not going to kiss you.”

”Indeed, you’re not!” Her alarm subsided; her resentment, rising to an equal level, was drawn off in a smile at the absurdity of the discussion.

He went on: ”But you must acknowledge that I have, at least, produced a psychological condition. I’m going to use that new cell again.” He waited for her answer.

”Dear me!” she exclaimed at last. ”We’re getting very far away from the lamp-posts. I’m quite in the dark.”

He proceeded: ”My character is lighted by four thousand lamp-posts also.”

”Ah, I see! You want me to regard them as botanical facts. I, as a supposititious Martian, with this wonderful new cell, am to perceive in you something that is not true?”

”No, for in Mars, the lamp-posts, we will suppose, *are* vegetables—not mechanical objects.”

”A little more light from the lamp-posts, please.”

”They are emotions, alive and growing. They have heat as well as light, in spite of their subtleties. I want you to perceive the fact that my methodical nature shows that I have a determined, potent stimulus—that I have energy—that I am in earnest.”

She seemed to sniff the danger now and stood at gaze. He went on:

”I shall keep at the attempt until you do look at me in this way—till I’ve educated these dormant cells.”

”If you are leading up to another proposal,” Clytie said, ”I must say I admire your devotion to method, but it is time thrown away.”

He took this calmly enough. He took everything calmly; but he did not abate his persistence. ”I’m not leading up to a proposal so much as I am to an acceptance.”

Clytie shrugged her shoulders. ”You’ll be telling me you’re in love with me next.”

”Do you doubt it?”

”A half-dozen proposals have not convinced me.”

”Seven,” he corrected. ”This is the eighth.”

”How long do you intend to keep it up?”

”Until I produce in your mind a psychological condition which will convince you that I’m in earnest, that I am sincere, that I am the man for you. Then I shall produce an emotional reflex—it’s sure to follow. It may come to-night and it may come next year. Sooner or later circumstances will bring about this crystallization. Some shock may help; it may be a simple growth. I am sure to win you in the long run. I’m bound to have you, and I will, if I have to make a hundred attempts. You can’t dismiss me, for I’m an old friend and you need me. I have educated you, I have broadened your horizon. You see, I am playing with my cards on the table.”

”But without trumps.” Clytie stifled a yawn.

”Meaning, I suppose, that I have no heart? Clubs may do. I rely upon your atavism.”

”I suppose you have as much heart as can be made out of brain.”

”What if I say that I’m jealous? Will that prove that I have a heart?”

”Oh, you’re too conceited ever to be jealous.”

”But I am! I’ll prove it. I happen to know that that palmist person, Granthope, was here this afternoon and you spent half an hour with him. How’s that?”

”How do you know?” She awoke to a greater interest.

”You don’t seem to realize that I make it my business to know all about you. This came by accident, though. I was on the Hyde Street car and I saw him get off and come in here. I waited at the end of the road till he went back. Now, what

if I should tell your father that you have been entertaining a faking palmist here, on the sly?" He leaned back and folded his hands.

Clytie rose swiftly and walked to the door without a look at him.

"Father," she called, "Mr. Cayley has something to say to you."

"Never mind," Cayley protested. "That was merely an experiment."

Mr. Payson, in overcoat and silk hat, thrust a mildly expectant head in the room.

"It was only about the trade dollar business," said Cayley. "I'll tell you some other time."

Mr. Payson withdrew, scenting no mischief, and Clytie sat down without a word.

"Thought you'd call my bluff, did you?" said Cayley, unruffled. "I like spirit!"

"If you don't look out you'll succeed in boring me." Clytie's manner had shown an amused scorn rather than resentment. She was evidently not afraid of him.

"You're fighting too hard to be bored," he remarked coolly. He added, "Then you are interested in him, are you?"

"I am." Clytie looked him frankly in the face.

"Why?" he asked.

"I've heard a lot about him and he appeals to my imagination. I scarcely think I need to apologize for it. Have you any objection to my knowing him?"

"I'd rather you wouldn't get mixed up with him; since he's been taken up the women are simply crazy about him, as they always are about any charlatan. They're all running after him and calling on him and ringing him up at all hours. Why, Cly, they actually lie in wait for him at his place; trying to get a chance to talk to him alone. I don't exactly see you in that class, that's all. You can scarcely blame me."

"Oh, I haven't rung him up yet," said Clytie, "but there's no knowing what I may do, of course, with all my unexploded brain-cells."

"How did he happen to come here, then?"

"He came to see me, I suppose."

Cayley accepted the rebuff gracefully. "Well, in another month, when some one else comes along, people will drop him with a thud. He's a nine days' wonder now, but he's too spectacular to last. This is a great old town! We need another new fakir now that the old gentleman in the Miller house has stopped his Occult Brotherhood in the drawing-room and his antique furniture repository in the cellar. I haven't heard of anything so picturesque since that Orpheum chap caught the turnips on a fork in his teeth, that were tossed from the roof of the Palace Hotel. I suppose I'll have a good scandal about Granthope, pretty soon, to add to

my collection."

Clytie accepted the diversion, evidently only too glad to change the subject. "What collection?" she asked.

"My San Francisco Improbabilities. I've got a note-book full of them—things no sane Easterner would believe possible, and no novelist dare to use in fiction."

"Oh, yes, I remember your telling me. What are they? One was that house made entirely of doors, wasn't it?"

"Yes, the 'house of one hundred and eighty doors' at the foot of Ninth Street. Then, there is the hulk of the *Orizaba* over by the Union Iron Works, where 'Frank the Frenchman' lives like a hermit, eats swill and bathes in the sewage of the harbor. Then there's 'Munson's Mystery' on the North beach—nobody has ever found out who Munson is. And Dailey, the star eater of the Palace Hotel—he used to have four canvas-back ducks cooked, selected one and used only the juice from the others; he ordered soup at a dollar a plate; and he had a happy way of buying a case of champagne with each meal, drinking only the top glass from each bottle."

Clytie laughed now, for Cayley was in one of his most amusing and enthusiastic moods. "Do you remember that tramp who lived all summer in the Hensler vault in Calvary Cemetery?"

"Yes, but that isn't so impossible as Kruger's castle out in the sand-hills by Tenth Avenue. It's a perfect jumble of job-lot buildings from the Mid-winter Fair, like a nightmare palace. I went out there once and saw old Mother Kruger, so tortured with rheumatism that she had to crawl round on her hands and knees. She had only one tooth left. The old man is one of the last of the wood-engravers and calls himself the Emperor of the Nations. He has resurrected Hannibal and an army of two hundred thousand men; also he revived Pompeii for three days. He wanted to bring Mayor Sutro back to life for me, but I wouldn't stand for it."

Cayley swept on with his anecdotes. "Who would believe the story of 'Big Bertha,' who buncoed all the swellest Hebrews in town, and ended by playing Mazeppa in tights at the Bella Union Theater? Who has written the true story of Dennis Kearney, the hack-driver, who had his speeches written for him by reporters, and went East with a big head, unconsciously to plagiarize Wendell Phillips in Fanueil Hall? Or of 'Mammy' Pleasant, the old negress who had such mysterious influence over so many millionaires—who couldn't be bribed—who died at last, with all her secrets untold? There's Romance in purple letters!

"What do you think of a first folio Shakespeare, the rent-roll of Stratford parish, and a collection of Incunabula worth thirty thousand dollars, kept in the deserted library on Montgomery Street in a case, by Jove, without a lock! What's the matter with Little Pete, the Chinaman, jobbing all the race-tracks in Califor-

nia? Who'd believe that there are streets here, within a mile of Lotta's fountain, so steep that they pasture cows on the grass?"

"Then there's Emperor Norton, and the Vigilance Committee, and all the secrets of the Chinatown slave trade," Clytie contributed, with aroused interest.

"Oh, I'm not speaking of that sort of thing. That's been done, and the East and England think that Romance departed from here with the red-shirted miner. Everybody knows about the Bret Harte type of adventure. It's the things that are going on now or have happened within a few years—like finding that Chinese woman's skeleton upside down, built into the wall of the house on the corner of Powell and Sutter; like Bill Dockery, the food inspector, who terrorized the San Bruno road, like a new Claude Duval, holding up the milkmen with a revolver and a lactometer, and went here, there and everywhere, into restaurants and hotels all over the peninsula, dumping watered milk into the streets till San Francisco ran white with it."

"Then there's Carminetti's," Clytie recalled, now. "That's modern enough, and typical of San Francisco, isn't it? I mean not so much what's done there, as the way they do it. I've always wanted to go down there some Saturday night and see just what it's like."

"I wouldn't want you to be seen there, Cly, it wouldn't do." Cayley shook his head decidedly.

"Why wouldn't it do?"

"It's a little too lively a crowd. You'd be disgusted, if they happened to hit things up a bit, as they often do."

"I don't see why I shouldn't be privileged to see what is going on. It's a part of my education, isn't it? It's all innocent enough, from what you say; it's at worst nothing but vulgar. I think I am proof against that."

"People would get an altogether wrong opinion of you. They'd think you were fast."

"I fast?" Clytie smiled. "I think I can risk that. I shouldn't probably want to go more than once, it's true. You don't know me, that's all. You don't believe that I can go from one world of convention to another and accept the new rules of life when it's necessary. It's just for that reason that I *do* wish to go—as, when I went to London, I wanted to see if I could accept all their slow, poky methods of business and transportation and everything and find out the reason of it all for myself, before I thought of criticizing it. I want to understand Carminetti's, if I can, and if you won't take me, I'll find some one who will."

"Granthope, perhaps?" Cayley suggested with irony.

"I have no doubt he'd understand my motives better than you do!"

"Well, it might be an interesting experiment. Miss Payson at Carminetti's—there's a San Francisco contrast for you!"

”You may add it to your list of Improbabilities. Study me, if you like, and put me in your list. You may find that I have a surprise or two left for you.” She smiled to herself and threw back her head proudly.

”You do tempt me to try it,” he said, coolly watching her. ”You’d look as inconsistent there as those old French family portraits in that saloon out on the Beach—Lords of Les Baux, they were, I believe, administrators of the high justice, the middle and the low!

”And, oh!” he added, ”that reminds me of another thing I found to-day while I was looking over a file of the *Chronicle*, digging up this trade dollar business. It was way back in 1877; a queer story, but I suppose it’s true.”

”What was it?” Clytie asked. The rays of the lamp shot her hair with gold sparks as she sat in a low chair, listening.

”Why, there was an old woman who was half crazy; she lived down south of Market Street somewhere in the most fearful squalor.”

Clytie suddenly moved back into the shadow.

”Yes, yes,—what else?” She followed his words with absorbed attention.

”There was no furniture except a lot of boxes and a bookcase. And here’s the remarkable thing: there was about two inches of rubbish and dirt matted down all over the floor, where she used to hide money and food and any old thing, wrapped in little packages. When she died, her stuff was auctioned off, and they found a trunk with a whole new wedding outfit in it. How’s that?”

”What was her name?” Clytie asked breathlessly.

”I don’t remember it. She was a sort of clairvoyant, I believe. There was a little boy lived with her, too. It seems he disappeared after she died. Ran away.”

Clytie leaned forward again, her eyes wide open and staring. Her hands were tightly clasped together.

”A little boy?” she repeated.

”Why, that’s what it said in the paper. Great story, isn’t it?”

Clytie’s breath came and went rapidly, as if she were trying to breathe in a storm, amidst the dashing of waves. The color went from her cheeks, her thin nostrils dilated. Then, retreating into the shade again, she managed to say:

”It certainly is romantic.”

”No one would believe a thing like that could be true,” he followed.

”No, I can scarcely believe it’s possible, myself,” she replied, controlling her agitation.

Blanchard Cayley ran on and on with his talk. Clytie gave him scant atten-

tion, answering in monosyllables.

CHAPTER V
THE RISE AND FALL OF GAY P. SUMMER

Two hours after leaving Granthope's studio, Mr. Gay P. Summer had "dated" Fancy Gray. Mr. Summer was a "Native Son of the Golden West"; he had, indeed, risen to the honorable station of Vice President of the Fort Point Parlor of that ecstatic organization. He was, in his modest way, a leader of men, and aspired to a corresponding mastery over women. In all matters pertaining to the pursuit and conquest of the fair sex, Mr. Summer was prompt, ingenious and determined. Before two weeks were over he was able to boast, to his room-mate, of Fancy's subjection. Fancy herself might equally well have boasted of his. At the end of this time he was, at least, in possession of her photograph, six notes written in a backward, slanting penmanship, twelve words to the damask page, with the date spelled out, a lock of hair (though this was arrant rape), and one gray suede, left-hand glove. These he displayed, as trophies of the chase, upon the bureau of his bedroom and defended them, forbye, from the asteistic comments of his room-mate, an unwilling and unconfessed admirer of Gay P. Summer's power to charm and subdue.

In those two weeks much had been done that it is not possible to do elsewhere than in the favored city by the Golden Gate. A Sunday excursion to the beach was the fruit of his first telephonic conversation. There are beaches in other places, indeed, but there is no other Carville-by-the-Sea. This capricious suburb, founded upon the shifting sands of "The Great Highway," as San Francisco's ocean boulevard is named, is a little, freakish hamlet, whose dwellings—one could not seriously call them houses—are built, for the most part, of old street-cars. The architecture is of a new order, frivolously inconsequent. According to the owner's fancy, the cars are placed side by side or one atop the other, arranged every way, in fact, except actually standing on end. From single cars, more or less adapted for temporary occupancy, to whimsical residences, in which the car appears only in rudimentary fragments, a suppressed motif suggested by rows of windows or by sliding doors, the owners' taste and originality have had wanton range. Balconies jut from roofs, piazzas inclose sides and fronts, cars are welded together, dovetailed, mortised, added as ells at right angles or used

terminally as kitchens to otherwise normal habitations.

Gay P. Summer was, with his room-mate, the proprietor of a car of the more modest breed. It was a weather-worn, blistered, orange-colored affair that had once done service on Mission Street. The cash-box was still affixed to the interior, the platform, shaky as it was, still held; the gong above, though cracked, still rang. There was a partition dividing what they called their living-room, where the seats did service for bunks, from the kitchen, where they were bridged for a table and perforated for cupboards. There was a shaky canvas arrangement over a plank platform; and beneath, in the sand, was buried a treasure of beer bottles, iron knives, forks and spoons and wooden plates.

Here, unchaperoned and unmolested, save by the wind and sun, Gay P. Summer and Fancy Gray proceeded to get acquainted. They made short work of it.

Fancy's velvet cheeks were painted with a fine rose color that day. Her hair looked well in disorder; how much better it would have looked, had it kept its natural tone, she did not realize. Her firm, white line of zigzag teeth made her smile irresistible, even though she chewed gum. Her eyes were lambent, flickering from brown to green; her lower lids, shaded with violet, made them seem just wearied enough to give them softness. None of this was lost on Gay.

He, too, was well-developed, masculine, agile, with a juvenile glow and freshness of complexion that rivaled hers. His dress was jimp and artful, with tie and socks of the latest and most vivid mode. Upon his short, pearl, covert coat, he wore a mourning band, probably for decoration rather than as a badge of affliction. His eyes were still bright and clear without symptoms of dissipation. His laughter was good to hear, but, as to his talk, little would bear repetition—slangy badinage, the braggadocio of youth, a gay running fire of obvious retort and innuendo, frolic and flirtations. That Fancy appeared to enjoy it should go without saying. She was not for criticism of her host and entertainer that fine day. She let herself go in the way of gaiety he led and slanged him jest for jest, for Fancy herself had a pert and lively tongue.

Upon one point only did she fail to meet him. Not a word in regard to her employer could he get from her. Again and again, Gay came back to the subject of the palmist and his business secrets; Fancy parried his queries every time. He tried her with flattery—she laughed in his face. He attempted to lead her on by disclosing vivacious secrets of his own life; his ammunition was only wasted upon her. He coaxed; he threatened jocosely (she defended herself ably from his punitive kiss), but her discretion was impregnable. She made merry at his expense when he sulked. She tantalized him when he pleaded. Her wit was too nimble for him and he gave up the attempt.

The stimulation of this first meeting went to Fancy's head. She laughed like

a child. She sang snatches from her vaudeville days and mimicked celebrities. Gay dropped his pose of worldly wisdom and made shrieking puns. They played like Babes in the Wood.

At seven o'clock, hungry and sun-burned, they walked along the beach to the Cliff House and dined upon the glazed veranda, watching the surf break on Seal Rocks. As they sat there in the dusk, haunted by an elusive waiter, Gay waxed eloquent about himself, told of his high office in the Native Sons, revealed the amount of his salary at the bank, touched lightly upon his previous amours, bragged loftily of his indiscretions at exuberant inebriated festivals, puffing magnificently the while at a "two-bit" cigar.

Fancy paid for her meal by listening to him conscientiously, ejaculating "No!" and "Yes?" or "Say, Gay, that's a josh, isn't it?" If her mind wandered (Fancy was nobody's fool), he did not perceive it.

To their cocktails and California claret they now added a Benedictine, and Gay grew still more confidential. The night fell, and the crowd began to leave. They walked entirely round the hotel corridor, bought an abalone shell split into layers of opalescent hues, then with a last look at the sea-lions, barking in the surge, they walked for the train, found a place in an open car and sat down, wedged into a hilarious crowd, reveling in song and peanuts.

Disregarded was the superb view they passed. The train, skirting the precipitous cliffs along the Golden Gate, commanded a splendor of darkling water and tumultuous mountain distances, theatrical in beauty. The sea splashed at the foot of the precipice beneath them. The hills rose above their heads, the intermittent twinkle of lighthouses punctuated the purple gloom. It was all lost upon them. Fancy's head drooped to Gay's shoulder. He put his arm about her, cocking his hat to one side that it might not strike hers as he leaned nearer. No one observed them, no one cared, for every Jack had his Jill, and a simple, primitive comradeship had settled upon the wearied throng. A baby whined occasionally as the train lurched round the sharp curves of the track. A riotous yell or two came from the misogynists of the smoking compartment. Fancy did not talk. Gay's loquacity oozed away. He was content to feel her breathing against his side.

There were telephone conversations often after that, then occasional lunches down-town, when Fancy, always modishly dressed, drew many an eye to her well-rounded, well-filled Eton jacket, her smart red hat, her fresh white gloves and her high-heeled shoes. Gay was proud of her, and he showed her off to his friends without caution. Fancy was nothing loath. Occasionally they went to the theater, dining previously in style at some popular restaurant, where Gay hoped

that he might be seen with her. To such as discovered them, he would bow with proud proprietorship; or perhaps saunter over, on some flimsy pretext, to hear his friends say, with winks and smiles:

"By Jove, that girl's all right, old man! She's a stunner. Say, introduce me, will you?"

To which Gay would answer:

"Not on your folding bed! This is a close corporation, old man. I've got that claim staked out, see? So long!" and walk away pleased.

At the theater, he always made a point of going out between the acts, in order that his reëntry might point more conspicuously at his conquest. Afterward, at Zinkand's, having engaged a table beside which all the world must pass, he would pose, apparently oblivious to the crowd, talking to her with absorbed interest.

Fancy suffered the exhibition without displeasure. She had no objection to being looked at. To make a picture of herself, to play the arch and coquettish before a room of well-dressed folk was one of the things she did best.

She was recognized occasionally and pointed out by one or another of Granthope's patrons. "There she is; over behind you, in the white lace hat, with a chatelaine watch—don't look just yet, though," was the almost audible formula which Gay P. Summer learned to wait for. At such times his chest swelled with pride. To walk into a restaurant with her late at night and leave a wake of excited whispers behind him, was all he knew of fame.

It did not escape Gay's notice, however, that Fancy's eyes were not always for him. In the middle of his longest and most elaborate story, she would often throw a surreptitious glance about the room, letting it rest for an instant—a butterfly's caress—upon some admiring stalwart stranger. Once or twice he detected the flicker of Fancy's smile, a smile not meant for him. He found that, although his attention was all for Fancy, Fancy's errant glances allowed nothing and nobody to escape her observation. If he mentioned any one whom he had seen in the room, Fancy had seen him, or more often her, first. Fancy always knew what she wore, what it cost, what she was doing, how much she liked him and what her little game was.

This sort of thing would have been an education for Gay, had he been amenable to such teaching; but what women see and know without a tutor he would and could never know. Wherefore, such dialogues as this were common:

Fancy: "The brute! He's actually made her cry, now. She's a little fool, though; it's good enough for her!"

From Gay: "Where?—who do you mean?"

"Over there in the corner—don't stare so, *please*!—See those two fellows and two girls? The girl in the white waist is tied up in a heart-to-heart talk with

that bald-headed chap, but she's dead in love with the other fellow, see? Yes, that fellow with the mustache. My! but she's jealous of the other girl."

"How can you tell? Oh, that's all a pipe-dream, Fancy!"

"Why, any fool would know it—any woman would, I mean. She had a few words with him—the fellow she's stuck on, just now! He must have said something pretty raw. Look at her eyes! You can tell from here there are tears in them. Look! See? I thought so. She's going to try and make him jealous! What do you think of that?"

"Why, she's changed places with him; what's that for?" To Gay, the drama was as mysterious as a Chinese play.

"Just to get him crazy, of course! That other fellow thinks she's really after him, too. The other girl sees through the whole game, of course. My, but men are easy! Those two fellows are certainly being worked good and plenty. Just look at the way she's freezing up to that bald-headed chap now. Well, I never! If that other girl isn't trying to get you on the string. Smile at her, Gay, and see what she'll do."

"Never mind about her!" said Gay, secretly pleased at the tribute. "You girls can always see a whole lot more than what really happens. She's just changed places on account of the draught, probably. She is lamping me, though, isn't she? Say, she's a peach, all right!"

"Yes, she's sure pretty. Say, Gay—"

"What?" His eye returned fondly to her.

"Do you think I'm as pretty as she is?"

"Oh, you make me tired, Fancy. Gee! You've got her sewed up in a sack for looks!"

So Fancy played her game cleverly, keeping Gay, but keeping him off at arm's length. But as time went on, his ardor grew and she was often at her wits' end to handle him. Though free from any conventional restraints, she did not yet consider her lips Mr. Summer's property, though she permitted him a cool and lifeless hand upon occasion. In time, the excitable youth began to understand her reserve; but instead of dampening his enthusiasm, it aroused his zest for the chase. She was not so easy game as he had thought. He waxed sentimental, therefore, and plied her with equivocal monologues, hinting, in the attempt to make sure of his way. At this, her sense of humor broke forth, effervescing in lively ridicule. This brought Mr. Summer, at last, to the point of an out-and-out proposal. Fancy, experienced in such situations, warned in time by his preludes, did not take it too seriously.

"I am sorry to say you draw a blank, Gay," she informed him lightly. "I'm not in the market yet. Many a man has expected me to become domesticated at sight, and settle down in content over the cookstove. But I haven't even a past

yet—nothing but a rather tame present and hope for a future. I don't seem to see you in it, Gay. In fact, there's nobody visible to the naked eye at present."

"Well," he said, "I'll cut it out for now, as long as I can't make good, but sometime you'll come to me and beg me to marry you, see if you don't. Whenever you get ready, I'll be right there with the goods."

Fancy laughed and the episode was closed.

"Say, Fancy, there's a gang of artist chaps and literary guys I'd like to put you up against," Gay said one afternoon. "I think you'd make a hit with the bunch, if you can stand a little jollying."

"You watch me!" Fancy became enthusiastically interested. "Where do they hang out?"

"They eat at a joint down on Montgomery Street. They're heavy joshers, though. They're too clever for me, mostly. It's the real-thing Bohemia down there, though."

"Why didn't you tell me about it before?" she pouted. "I'm game! Let's float in there to-night and see the animals feed."

So they went down to the Latin Quarter together.

Bohemia has been variously described. Since Henri Murger's time, the definition has changed retrogressively, until now, what is commonly called Bohemia is a place where one is told, "This is Liberty Hall!"—and one is forced to drink beer whether one likes it or not, where not to like spaghetti is a crime. Not such was the little coterie of artists, writers and amateurs, who dined together every night at Fulda's restaurant.

In San Francisco is recruited a perennial crop of such petty soldiers of fortune. Here art receives scant recompense, and as soon as one gets one's head above water and begins to be recognized, existence is unendurable in a place where genius has no field for action. The artist, the writer or the musician must fly East to the great market-place, New York, or to the great forcing-bed, Paris, to bloom or fade, to live or die in competition with others in his field.

So the little artistic colonies shrink with defections or increase with the accession of hitherto unknown aspirants. Many go and never return. A few come back to breathe again the stimulating air of California, to see with new eyes its fresh, vivid color, its poetry, its romance. To have gone East and to have returned without abject failure is here, in the eyes of the vulgar, Art's patent of nobility. Of those who have been content to linger peaceably in the land of the lotus, some are earls without coronets, but one and all share a fierce, hot, passionate love of the soil. San Francisco has become a fetish, a cult. Under its blue skies and driving fogs is bred the most ardent loyalty in these United

States. San Francisco is most magnificently herself of any American city, and San Franciscans, in consequence, are themselves with an abounding perfervid sincerity. Faults they have, lurid, pungent, staccato, but hypocrisy is not of them. That vice is never necessary.

The party that gathered nightly at Fulda's was as remote from the world as if it had been ensconced on a desert island. It was unconscious, unaffected, sufficient to itself. Men and girls had come and gone since it had formed, but the nucleal circle was always complete. Death and desertions were unacknowledged—else the gloom would have shut down and the wine, the red wine of the country, would have tasted salt with tears. There had been tragedies and comedies played out in that group, there were names spoken in whispers sometimes, there were silent toasts drunk; but if sentiment was there, it was disguised as folly. Life still thrilled in song. Youth was not yet dead. Art was long and exigent.

It was their custom, after dinner, to adjourn to Champoreau's for *café noir*, served in the French style. In this large, bare saloon, with sanded floor, with its bar and billiard table, foreign as France, almost always deserted at this hour save by their company, the genial *patron* smiled at their gaiety, as he prepared the long glasses of coffee. To-night, there were six at the round table.

Maxim, an artist unhailed as yet from the East, was, of all, the most obviously picturesque, with a fierce mustached face and a shock of black hair springing in a wild mass from his head to draggle in stringy locks below his eyes, or, with a sudden leonine shake, to be thrown back when he bellowed forth in song. He had been in Paris and knew the airs and argot of the most desperate studies. His laughter was like the roar of a convivial lion.

Dougal, with a dog-like face and tow hair, so ugly as to be refreshing, full of common sense and kindness, with a huge mouth full of little cramped teeth and a smile that drew and compelled and captured like a charm—he sat next. Good nature and loyalty dwelt in his narrow blue eyes. His slow, labored speech was seldom smothered, even in the wit that enveloped it.

Most masculine and imperative of all, was Benton, with his blur of blue-black hair, fine tangled threads, his melting, deep blue eyes, shadowy with fatigue, lighted with vagrant dreams or shot with brisk fires of passion. His hands were strong and he had an air of suppressed power.

The fourth man was Philip Starr, a poet not long for San Francisco, seeing that the Athanæum had already placed the laurels upon his brow—he was as far from the conventional type of poet as is possible. He had a lean, eager, sharply cut face, shrewd, quick eye and sinewy, long fingers. His hair was close cropped, his mouth was tight and narrow. Electricity seemed to dart from him as from a dynamo. Just now he was teaching the company a new song—an old one, rather, for it was an ancient Anglo-Saxon drinking-song, whose uproarious refrain was

well fitted to the temper of the assembly.

At one end of the table sat a young woman, *petite*, elf-like as a little girl, a brown, cunning, soft-haired creature, smiling, smiling, smiling, with eyes half closed, wrinkled in quiet mirth. This was Elsie Dougal.

Opposite her was a girl of twenty-seven, with a handsome, clear-cut, classic face, lighted with gray eyes, limpid and straightforward, making her seem the most ingenuous of all. Mabel's hair curled unmanageably, springy and dark. Her face was serious and intent till her smile broke and a little self-conscious laugh escaped.

Starr pounded with one fist upon the table, his thumb held stiffly upright:

"Dance, Thumbakin, dance!"

he sang, and the chorus was repeated. Then with the heel of his palm and his fingers outstretched, pounding merrily in time:

"Oh, dance ye merrymen, every one,"

then with his fist as before:

"For Thumbakin, he can dance alone!"

and, raising his fists high over his head, coming down with a bang:

"*For*
"Thumbakin he can dance alone!"

They went through the song together, dancing Foreman, Middleman, and Littleman, ending in a pianissimo. Then over and over they sang that queer, ancient tune, till all knew it by heart.

Benton pulled his manuscript from his pocket and read it confidentially to Elsie, who smiled and smiled. Starr recited his last poem while Dougal made humorous comments. Maxim broke out into a French student's *chanson*, so wildly improper that it took two men to suppress him. Mabel giggled hysterically and began a long, dull story which, despite interruptions, ended so brilliantly and so unexpectedly, that every one wished he had listened.

Then Dougal called out:

"The cavalry charge! Ready! One finger!"

They tapped in unison, not too fast, each with a forefinger, upon the table.

”Two fingers!”

The sound increased in volume.

”Three fingers, four fingers, five!”

The crescendo rose.

”Two hands! One foot! BOTH FEET!”

There was a hurricane of galloping fists and soles. Then, in diminuendo:

”One foot! One hand! Four fingers, three, two, one! Halt!”

The clatter grew softer and softer till at last all was still.

As Gay opened the door, Fancy heard a roar that increased steadily until it became a wild hullabaloo. Looking in, she saw the six seated about the table, the coffee glasses jumping madly with the percussion. The noise was like the multitudinous charge of troopers. Then the tumult died slowly away, the patter grew softer and softer, ending in a sudden hush as seven faces looked up at her. Gay P. Summer’s advent was greeted with frowns, but Fancy gathered an instant acclaim from twelve critical eyes.

She stepped boldly into the room and shed the radiance of her smile upon the company.

”I guess this is where I live, all right!” she announced. ”I’ve been gone a long time, haven’t I? Never mind the introductions. I’m Fancy Gray, drifter; welcome to our fair city!”

They let loose a cry of welcome, and Dougal, rising, opened a place for her between his chair and Maxim’s.

”I’m *for* her!” He hailed her with a good-natured grin. ”She’s the right shape. Come and have coffee!”

”I accept!” said Fancy Gray.

Gay’s reception was by no means as cordial as hers, which had been immediate and spontaneous at the sound of her caressing, jovial voice and the sight of her genial smile, which seemed to embrace each separate member of the party. They made grudging room for him beside Elsie, who gave him a cold little hand. Mabel bowed politely.

”Where’d you get her, Gay?” said Starr. ”You’re improving. She looks like a pretty good imitation of the real thing.”

”Oh, I’ll wash, all right,” said Fancy.

Gay P. proudly introduced her to the company. He played her as he might play a trump to win the seventh trick. Indeed, without Fancy’s aid, he would have received scant welcome at that exclusive board. Many and loud were the jests at Summer’s expense while he was away. Many and soft were the jests he had not wit enough to understand when he was present. Philip Starr had, at first

sight of him, dubbed him "The Scroyle," and this sobriquet stuck. Gay P. Summer was ill versed in Elizabethan lore, but, had his wit been greater, his conceit would still have protected him.

He had already unloaded Fancy, though he was as yet unaware of it. She was taken up with enthusiasm by the men, whom she drew like a magnet. Mabel and Elsie watched her with the keenness of women who are jealous of any new element in their group. It was, perhaps, not so much rivalry they feared, for their place was too well established, as the admittance into that circle of one who would betray a tendency toward those petty feline amenities that only women can perceive and resent.

But Fancy Gray showed no such symptoms. She did not bid for the men's attention. She made a point of talking to Elsie, and she managed cleverly to include Mabel in the attention she received. Fancy, in her turn, scrutinized the two girls artfully and made her own instantaneous deductions. All of this by-play was, of course, quite lost upon the men.

The talk sprang into new life and Fancy's eye ran from one to another member of the group, dwelling longest upon Dougal. His ugliness seemed to fascinate her; and, as is often the case with ugly men, he inspired her instant confidence. She made up to him without embarrassment or concealment, taking his hairy hand and caressing it openly. At this, Elsie's eyelids half closed, but there was no sign of jealousy. Mabel noticed the act, too, and her manner suddenly became warmer toward the girl. By these two feminine reactions, Fancy saw that she had done well.

They sang, they pounded the table; and, as an initiation, every man saluted Fancy's cheek. She took it like an empress. Then, suddenly, Dougal held up two fingers. Every one's eyes were turned upon him.

"*Piedra, Pinta?*" he cried, with a side glance at Fancy.

Every one voted. Mabel held up both her hands gleefully.

So was Fancy Gray, though she was not aware of the honor till afterward, admitted to the full comradeship of the Pintos. It was a victory. Many had, with the same ignorance as to what was happening, suffered an ignominious defeat. Fancy's election was unanimous.

And for this once, in gratitude for his discovery, Mr. Gay P. Summer, The Scroyle, was suffered to inflict himself upon the coterie of the Pintos.

There were other honors in store for Fancy Gray.

Piedra Pinta is two hours' journey from San Francisco to the north, in Marin County—a land of mountains, virgin redwood forests and trout-filled streams. One takes the ferry to Sausalito, crossing the northern bay, and rides for an hour

or so up a little narrow-gage squirming railroad into the canyon of Paper Mill Creek; and, if one has discovered and appropriated the place, it is a mile walk up the track and a drop from the embankment down a gravelly, overgrown slope, into the camp-ground. Here a great crag rears its vertically split face, hidden in beeches and bay trees. At its foot a flattened fragment has fallen forward to do service as a fireplace. Beyond, there are more boulders in the stream, which here widens and deepens, overhung by clustering trees. Save when an occasional train rushes past overhead, or a fisherman comes by, wading up-stream, the place is secret and silent. Opposite, across the brook, an oat-field slopes upward to the country road and the smooth drumlins beyond. A not too noisy crowd can here lie hugger-mugger, hidden from the world.

To Piedra Pinta that next Saturday they came, bringing Fancy Gray, a smiling captive, with them. The men bore blankets and books; the women food and dishes enough for a picnic meal. They came singing, romping up the track, big Benton first with the heaviest load. In corduroys and jeans, in boots and flannel shirts they came. Little Elsie, like a girl scout, wore a rakish slouch hat trimmed with live carnations, a short skirt, leggings, a sheath knife swinging from her belt. Mabel had her own pearl-handled revolver. The rest looked like gipsies.

They slid down the bank and debouched with a shout into the little glade. Fancy entered with vim into the celebration. Not that she did any useful work, that was not her field; she was there chiefly as a decoration and an inspiration. She had dressed herself in khaki. Her boots were laced high, her sombrero permitted a shower of tinted tendrils to escape and wanton about her forehead. She found fragrant sprays of yerba buena and wreathed them about her neck.

It was all new and strange to her, all delightful. She had seen the artificial side of the town and knew the best and worst of its gaiety; but here, in the open for almost the first time, she breathed deeply of the primal joys of nature and was refreshed. Her curiosity was unlimited; she played with earth and water, fire and air. She unbuttoned the collar of her shirt-waist and turned it in, disclosing a delicious pink hollow at her throat. She rolled up her sleeves, displaying the dimples in her elbows. At the preparations for the dinner she was an eager spectator, and when the meal was served, smoked and sandy, and the bottles were opened, all traces of the fairy in her disappeared; she was simple girl. She ate like a cannibal and ate with glee.

The shadows fell. The nook became dusky, odorous, moist; the rivulet rippled pleasantly, the ferns moved lazily in the night airs. The moon arose and gave a mysterious argent illumination. The going and coming ceased, the shouting and lusty singing grew still. The blankets were opened and spread at the foot of the rock. Dougal and Elsie took their places in the center and, the men on one side and the girls on the other, they lay upon the ground and wrapped

themselves against the cooling air. The fire was replenished and its glare lighted up the trees in planes of foliage, like painted sheets of scenery.

They lay down, but not to sleep. Dougal's coffee, black and strong, stimulated their brains. The talk ran on with an accompaniment of song and jest. One after another sprang up to sing some old-time tune or to recite a familiar, well-beloved poem; the dialogue jumped from one to the other. Some dozed and woke again at a chorus of laughter; some sat wide-eyed, staring into the fire, into the darkness, or into one another's eyes.

Maxim was prodigious. He blared forth rollicking airs, he did scenes from *La Bohème*, posturing picturesquely against the flame, his long black locks sweeping his face. Starr improvised while they listened, rapt. Benton climbed high into a beech tree and there, invisible, he recited *Cynara* and quoted *The Song of the Sword*, while Dougal jeered and fed the blaze. Mabel listened entranced and appreciative, and ventured occasionally on one more long, dull story—her tale always growing melodramatically exciting, as the attention of her listeners wandered. Elsie sat and smiled and smiled, wide awake till three.

Forgotten tales, snatches of song, jokes and verses surged into Fancy's head and one after another she shot them into the night. She, too, arose and sang, dancing. Not since her vaudeville days had she attempted it, but mounting to the spirit of the occasion, she thrilled and fascinated them with her drollery.

She and Dougal were the last ones awake. They spoke now in undertones. Maxim was snoring hideously, so was Benton. Starr lay with his mouth open, Mabel was curled into a cocoon of blankets, flushed Elsie was still smiling in her sleep.

At four the dawn appeared. They watched it spellbound, and as it turned from a glowing rose to straw color, the birds began to twitter in the boughs. Fancy shook off her lassitude.

"I'm going in swimming," she exclaimed, starting up. "Stay here, Dougal—I trust to your honor!"

"I'll not promise," he replied. "One doesn't often have a chance to see a nymph bathing in a fountain nowadays, but I have the artist's eye; it will only be for beauty's sake—go ahead!" He kept his place, nevertheless; the pool was invisible from the level of the camp-ground.

Fancy darted down the path to the wash of pebbles below. Dougal shook Elsie into a dazed wakefulness.

Mabel's eyes opened sleepily.

"Fancy's gone in swimming," he whispered. "Don't wake up the boys."

Like shadows the two girls slid after her. Dougal lay down to sleep.

In half an hour he was awakened by their return, fresh, rosy, dewy and jubilant. Elsie crawled to his side under the blankets; Fancy and Mabel scrambled

up the bank to greet the sun, chattering like sparrows. Maxim rolled over in his sleep. Benton and Starr, back to back, dreamed on. The sun rose higher and smote the languid group with a shaft of light. The men rose at last, and, dismissing Elsie from the camp, took their turns in the pool. At seven Dougal announced breakfast.

At high noon, after a climb up the hill and an hour of poetry, Fancy was crowned queen of Piedra Pinta, with pomp and circumstance. She was invested with a crown of bay leaves and, for a scepter, the camp poker was placed in her hand. Dougal, as her prime minister, waxed merry, while her loyal lieges passed before her to do her homage. She greeted them one by one: The Duke of Russian Hill, with his tribute of three square meals per week; Lord of the Barbary Coast; Elsie, Lady of Lime Point, Mistress of the Robes; Sir Maxim the Monster, Court Painter; Sir Starr of Tar Flat, Laureate; and Mabel the Fair, Marchioness of Mount Tamalpais, First Lady of the Bedchamber, to keep her warm.

She issued many titles after that, as her domain increased, and as "Fancy I," she always styled herself in signing her letters. Her royal edicts were not often slighted.

For she was gay and young, and she was bold and free. Life had scarcely touched her yet with care. This was her apotheosis. The scene went down in the annals of the Pintos and the tradition spread. Her reign was famous. Her accolade was a smile. Her homage was paid in kisses—and in tears.

Yet Fancy Gray was not a girl to commit herself to any one particular set. Her tastes were eclectic. She was essentially adventurous. It was her boast that she never made a promise and never broke one—that she never explained—that she liked everybody, and nobody. She guarded her independence jealously, restless at every restraint. With the friend of the moment she was everything. When he passed out of sight, she devoted an equal attention to the next comer, and she was faithful to both.

She was often seen with Granthope dining or at the theater. Mabel and Elsie whispered together, adding glances to smiles, and frowns to blushes, summing them up according to the feminine rules of psychological arithmetic. The men did not even wonder—it was none of their business, and was she not Fancy Gray? When they were seen together, they were conspicuously picturesque. Granthope had an air, Fancy had a manner, the two harmonized perfectly.

Mr. Gay P. Summer, meanwhile, had by no means given up the chase. He was not one to be easily snubbed, and the only effect of the slight put upon him by

the Pintos was to make him seek after Fancy still more energetically, and while he paid court to her, to keep her away from the attractions of that engaging set. Fancy accepted his attentions with condescension. After all, a dinner was a dinner—her own way of putting it was that she always hated to refuse "free eggs."

He still tried his best to draw her out, but when he asked her about Granthope, she gave a passionate, indignant refutation of his innuendoes.

"I owe that man everything, everything!" she exclaimed. "He took me when I was walking the streets, hungry, without a cent, and he has been good to me ever since! He's all right! And any one who says anything against him is crossed off my list!"

This was at Zinkand's. The slur had been occasioned by the sight of Granthope at table with a lady whom Gay knew rather too much about. It happened that there was another group in the room that drew Fancy's roving eye and nimble comment. She asked about the man with the pointed beard.

"Oh, that's Blanchard Cayley—everybody knows him," Gay explained. "He's a rounder. I see him everywhere. No, I don't know him to speak to, but they say he's a clever chap. I wonder who that is with him, though? I've seen her before, somewhere."

"I know," said Fancy; "that's Mrs. Page."

"H'm! Funny, every time I see her she's with a different man. She's pretty gay, that woman."

"Is she? You're a cad to tell of it."

"Why? Do you know her?"

She scorned to answer.

On a Sunday night soon after, Gay invited her to dinner at Carminetti's. She accepted, never having gone to the place, which was then in the height of its prestige, a resort for the most uproarious spirits of the town.

It was down near the harbor front, a region of warehouses, factories, freight tracks and desecrated, melancholy buildings, disheveled and squalid, that Mr. Summer took her. He pushed open the door to let upon her a wave of light frivolity and the mingled odor of Italian oil and wine permeated by an undercurrent of fried food. The tables were all filled, some with six or eight diners at one board, and by the counter or bar, which ran all along one side of the room, there were at least a dozen persons waiting for seats. Gay walked up to bald-headed "Dave," the patron, who in his shirt-sleeves was superintending the confusion, keeping an eye ready for rising disorder. After a quick colloquy, he beckoned to Fancy, who followed him down between the gay groups to a table in a corner. It was just being deserted by a short young hoodlum, with a pink and green striped sweater, accompanied by a girl several inches too tall for him,

dressed in a soiled buff raglan and a triumphal hat.

"Here we are," said Gay; "we're in luck to get a table at all, to-night. But I gave Dave a four-bit piece and that fixed it."

Fancy sat down and looked about. "It is pretty gay, isn't it? It looks as if it were going to be fun."

"Oh, you wait till nine o'clock," Gay boasted wisely. "They're not warmed up to it yet. The 'Dago Red' hasn't got in its work. There'll be something doing, after a while."

The walls were decorated with beer- and wine-signs in frames, and on either side of the huge mirror hung lithographic portraits of Humberto and the Queen of Italy. Opposite, a row of windows looking on the street was hung with half-curtains of a harsh, disagreeable blue; over them peeped, now and again, wayfarers or others who had dined too well, rapping on the glass and gesticulating to those inside. All about the sides of the room and upon every column, hats, coats and cloaks were hung, making the place seem like an old-clothes shop. The floor was covered with sawdust and the tables were huddled closely together.

For the most part the diners were all young—mechanics, clerks, factory girls and the like though here and there, watching the sport, were up-town parties, reveling in an unconventional air. The groups, now well on in their dinner, had begun to fraternize. Here a young man raised his wine-glass to a pretty girl across the room and the two drank together, smiling, or calling out some easy witticism. In one corner, a party of eight was singing jovially something about: "One day to him a letter there did come," and anon, encouraged by the applause and the freedom, a lad of nineteen, devoid of collar, closed his eyes, leaned back and sang a long song through in a vibrant, harsh voice. He was greeted with applause, hands clapped, feet pounded and knives clattered on bottles till the *patron* hurried from table to table quelling the pandemonium. Waiters came and went in bustling fervor, dodging between one table and another, jostling and spilling soup; at intervals a great clanging bell rang and the apparition of a soiled white cook appeared at the kitchen door ordering the waiters to: "Take it away!" The kitchen was an arcade into which from time to time guests wandered, to joke with the cook and beat upon the huge immaculate copper kettles on the wall.

The conversation at times became almost general, the party of songsters in the corner leading in the exchange of persiflage. Two girls dining alone, with hard, tired-looking eyes and cheap jewelry, began a duet; instantly, from a company of young men, two detached themselves, plates and glasses in hand, and went over to join them. A roar went up; glasses rang again and Dave fluttered about in protest at the noise.

Fancy talked little. The crowd, the lights, the *camaraderie* hypnotized her. She watched first one and then another group, picking out, for Gay's edification,

the prettiest girl and the handsomest man in the room. She waved her hand slyly at the collarless soloist and applauded two darkies who came in from outside to make a hideous clamor with banjos. As she waited to be served, she nibbled at the dry French bread and drank of the sour claret, watching over the top of her glass, losing nothing.

In the middle of the room, Blanchard Cayley sat with three ladies. One of them Fancy recognized as Miss Payson. Fancy's eyebrows rose slightly at seeing her, and a smile and a nod were cordially exchanged. The others Fancy did not know. They were both pretty women, well-dressed, with evident signs of breeding, and, as the urn waxed freer, apparently not a little embarrassed at being seen in such a place. Miss Payson showed no such feeling in her demeanor, however much she may have been amused or surprised at the spirit of the place. Blanchard Cayley divided his attentions equitably amongst them, till, looking across the room, he caught Fancy's errant glance. He smiled at her openly as if challenging her roguery.

She boldly returned the greeting. Gay caught the glance that was exchanged.

"See here, Fancy," he protested, "none of that now! He's got all he can do to attend to his own table. I'll attend to this one, myself."

Now, this was scarcely the way to treat a girl like Fancy Gray. At her first opportunity, she sent another smile in Cayley's direction. It was divided, this time, by members of his own party and the women began to buzz together. Gay was annoyed.

"There's something I like about that man," Fancy remarked presently. "What'd you say his name was? That's the one we saw at Zinkand's, wasn't it?"

"There's something I don't like about him. He'd better mind his own business," Gay growled, now thoroughly provoked.

"You can't blame any one for noticing *me*, can you, Gay?" Her tone was honey-sweet.

"I can blame you for flirting across the room when you're here with me!" he replied fiercely.

Fancy opened her eyes very wide. "Indeed?" she said with a sarcastic emphasis.

"That's right," he affirmed.

In answer, she cast another languishing glance toward Cayley. Cayley, despite Clytie's entreating hand upon his arm, sent back an unequivocal reply.

"Well," said Gay, rising sullenly, "I guess it's up to me to leave!" He reached for his hat.

"Oh, Gay!" she protested in alarm, "you're not going to throw me down

before this whole crowd, are you?" Already their colloquy had attracted the attention of the near-by tables.

He hesitated a moment. "Unless you behave yourself," he said finally. His tone of ownership decided her.

"Run along, then!" She gave him a smile of limpid simplicity, but her jaws were set determinedly. "I expect I can get some one to take care of me. Don't mind me!"

Their discussion had not been unnoticed at Mr. Cayley's table. Clytie was watching the pair interestedly, as if reading the motions of their lips. Fancy caught her eye and flushed a little.

Gay's brows gathered together in a sullen look as he crowded his hat upon his head savagely. He turned with a last retort:

"You'll be sorry you threw me down, Fancy Gray! You want too many men on the string at once!"

He turned and left her, passing sulkily along the passages between the tables with his hat on his head, till he came to the cashier, where he paid the bill for two dinners with lordly chivalry. Then, without looking back, he opened the door of the restaurant and went out.

An instant after, Fancy was on her feet. Gay's going had already made her conspicuous and her flush grew deeper. Cayley watched her without smiling, now, waiting to see what she would do. Beside him, Clytie Payson sat watching, her lips slightly parted, her nostrils dilated, absorbed, seeming to understand the situation perfectly, her eyes gazing at Fancy as if to convey her sympathy. Fancy looked and saw her there, and the sight steadied her. With all her customary nonchalance, with all that jovial, compelling air of optimism which she usually radiated, as if she were quite sure of her reception and came as an expected guest, she sauntered carelessly over to the central table.

Her smile was dazzling as it swept about the board, meeting the eyes of each of the women in turn. One by one it subjugated them. They even returned it with trepidation, not too embarrassed to be keenly expectant, waiting for the outcome. But it was for Clytie that Fancy Gray reserved her warmest, deepest look. In that glance she threw herself upon Miss Payson's mercy, and appealed to the innate chivalry of woman to woman, to the bond of sex—a sentiment in finer women more potent than jealousy.

Even before she spoke Clytie had arisen and stretched out her hand. In a flash she had accepted what had run counter to all her experience, and played up to Fancy's audacity with a spirit that ignored the crowd, the eyes, the whispers.

Who, indeed, could resist Fancy Gray in such a fantastic, tiptoe mood? Her act, audacious, even impertinent, was so delicately achieved, she was so sure of herself and her own charm that it was dramatic, poetic in its confidence,

picturesque. But no one could have equalled Clytie as she arose to meet such bravado, when she shook off her reserves and took her hand at such a psychological game. Not even Fancy Gray, with all her superb poise. On Fancy's cheek the color deepened—it was she who blushed so furiously, now, not Clytie. In that flush she confessed herself beaten at her own game.

"How do you do?" Clytie was saying. "We've been wishing all the evening that we could have you with us. Do sit down, here, beside me—we'll make room for you. I want you to meet Miss Gray, Mrs. Maxwell."

Something in the graciousness of her manner drew the other women up to her chivalrous level. Mrs. Maxwell bowed, smiled, too, with a word of welcome, so did Miss Dean as she was introduced. Fancy beamed. Meanwhile Cayley had arisen. He was the most perturbed of all. He offered his chair.

"You see what you've done, Mr. Cayley," said Fancy. "I've just been jilted for the first time in my life, and it was all your fault. I'm afraid I shall have to butt in and ask you to protect me!"

It was not Fancy but Clytie who had, apparently, most surprised him. He gave a questioning look at her as he replied, not a little confused:

"Won't you sit down here in my place? There's plenty of room. I'll get another chair—or," he stole another glance at Clytie, "I'll let you have half of mine!"

"I accept!" said Fancy Gray.

Clytie smiled encouragingly. "I'll divide mine with you, too, if you like."

"You're a gentleman! I'd much rather sit with you, Miss Payson; thank you!" Then she looked at Clytie fondly. "I *thought* I was right about you! You *are* a thoroughbred, aren't you?"

"We're educating Mr. Cayley, my dear." Clytie gave him a bright smile. "He has a few things yet to learn about women."

"I plead guilty," said Cayley, watching the two with curiosity.

"Miss Gray and I are disciples of the same school. She gave me the password." Clytie was fairly superb—she even outshone Fancy—she was regal.

Fancy laughed. "You're the only one who knows it, that *I* ever met, though."

"Ah," said Clytie, "then that's the only way I can beat you—I believe many women are initiated."

Fancy clapped her hands softly in pantomime. Then she turned to Mrs. Maxwell and the others. "I hope I'm not out of the frying-pan into the fire," she said. "Please let me down easy, ladies. If you don't make me feel at home pretty quick, I'll be up against it I You don't really have to *know* me, you know. Only it looked to me like when he had three such pretty women to take care of one more ought to be easy enough."

"We *were* three pretty women before, perhaps, my dear, but now I'm afraid

we're only one!" said Clytie. She herself, kindled with the spirit of adventure, and so adequately welcoming it, was irresistible.

Fancy blew a pretty kiss at her. "No man would know enough to say anything as nice as that, would he? But I'm afraid I can't trot in your class, Miss Payson. Why, every man in the room has been watching you all the evening. I really ought to sit beside Mrs. Maxwell, though, to show her off. It takes these brunettes to make me look outclassed, doesn't it? I used to be a brunette myself, but I reformed. Mr. Cayley, you may hold me on, if you like. And remember, when I kick you under the table it's a hint for you to say something about my hands." She laid them on the table-cloth ingenuously.

Clytie took one up and showed it to Mrs. Maxwell. "Did you ever see a prettier wrist than that?" she said.

"It's charming! I'm afraid she'd never be able to wear *my* gloves."

Fancy smiled good-temperedly. "That second finger is supposed to be perfect," she said, looking at it reflectively.

"It's queer that the fourth one hasn't a diamond on it," Mrs. Maxwell suggested amiably.

"It's only because I hate to fry my own eggs. I never could learn to play on the cook-stove."

"My dear, you'll never have to do that," said Clytie. "No man would be brute enough to endanger such a complexion as you have!"

Fancy rubbed her cheek. "Good enough to raise a blush on. Has it worn off yet? I wish you could make me do it again; I'd rather wear a good No. 5 blush than a silk-lined skirt."

The third lady at the table was thin and dark, a piquante, sharp-featured girl, with a dancing devil in her eyes. She had been watching Fancy with an amused smile. "I thought I'd seen you before," she said. "Now I remember. You're the young lady at Granthope's, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's my tag. I suppose I am entered for a regular blue-ribbon freak. But I've seen you, too, Miss Dean, once or twice, haven't I?"

Miss Dean hastened to say, "Mr. Granthope's a wonderful palmist, isn't he? He has told me some extraordinary things about myself." She held out her hand. "Do tell me what you think about my palm, please!"

But Fancy refused. "Oh, I don't want to make enemies, just as we've begun to break the ice. Every one would be jealous of the other, if I told you what I saw. Besides, I ought to be drumming up more trade for Mr. Granthope."

"How long have you been with him?" Cayley asked.

"Oh, about five years."

Clytie bit her lip. Granthope himself had said two.

"He has been fortunate to have such an able assistant as you," she said.

”Oh, Frank’s been mighty good to me. I owe him everything.” Fancy said it almost aggressively.

Cayley caught Clytie’s eye, and he smiled.

”Well, Blanchard,” she said, disregarding his hint, ”am I in your list of Improbabilities now?”

”You’re easily first! You certainly have surprised me.”

Heretofore Mrs. Maxwell, as chaperon of the party, had been the star, but now Clytie, with her intuitive grip on this human complication, established Fancy as the guest of honor. She drank Fancy’s health, and Fancy’s smile became more opulent and irresistible. She kept Fancy’s quick retorts going like fire-crackers, she manipulated the conversation so that it came back to Fancy at each digression. She put Fancy Gray in the center of the stage and kept her there in the calcium till her buoyant spirits soared.

”Drink with Fancy!” cried Fancy Gray, and the company, Mrs. Maxwell included, did her honor. ”Drink with Fancy,” she pleaded again, with a pretty, infantile pout, and Clytie knocked glasses with her every time. ”Drink with Fancy,” she repeated, and Cayley drew closer. It did not, apparently, daunt Clytie. She had accepted Fancy Gray as Fancy Gray had accepted her, and she did not withdraw an inch from her position. The talk ran on, with Fancy always the center of interest. Her sallies were original, brisk, and often witty. Fancy’s brain grew more agile and more bold. Also, her glances played more softly upon Blanchard Cayley. He made the most of them, with an eye on Clytie, awaiting her look of protest. But it did not come.

About them the revelry still continued amidst the clattering of knives and forks and dishes. Course after course had been brought on and removed by the hurrying, overworked waiters. Once, a madcap couple arose to dance a cake-walk up and down between the tables. Of the group of eight singers in the corner, three had fallen into a mild stupor, three were affectionately maudlin; two, still mirthful, sang noisily, pounding upon the table.

By twos and threes, now, parties began to leave.

There was a popular song swinging through the room, accented by tinkling glasses, when Fancy reached out her left hand, and took Clytie’s.

”I must be going, now; good night.”

Clytie held the hand. ”Oh, must you? Wait and let us put you on your car, anyway!”

”No, I’ll drift along. I can take care of myself, all right.”

She stopped, and, with her head slightly tilted to one side, looked Clytie in the eyes.

”What did you go to Granthope’s for?” she asked.

Clytie began to color, faintly. She seemed, at first, at a loss to know how to

reply.

Fancy prompted her. ”For a reading, of course—but what else?”

”I don’t know,” said Clytie seriously. ”Really I don’t.”

”That’s what I thought!” said Fancy. Then her troubled brow cleared, and she turned to Cayley.

”I must say ’fare-thee-well, my Clementine,’” she said. ”You certainly came to the scratch nobly. I hope it wasn’t all Miss Payson’s prompting, though!”

”Next time I hope I’ll be able to bring you,” he answered. ”I’m sorry I can’t take you home now.”

”Who said I was going home?” she smiled. Then she looked at him, too, and spoke to him with a variation of the quizzical tone she had used toward Clytie. ”I don’t know what there is about you that makes such a hit with me—what is it?”

”The dagoes say I have the evil eye,” he replied.

She laughed. ”That’s it! I *thought* it was something nice!”

Then she rose and bowed debonairly to Mrs. Maxwell and Miss Dean. ”Good night, ladies, this is where I disappear. I’m afraid you’ve impregnated me with social aspirations. Watch for me at the Fortnightly!”

The collarless youth stretched a glass toward her in salutation and sang: ”Good-by, Dolly Gray!” There was a burst of laughter that drew all eyes to Fancy Gray.

Cayley held her coat for her, and as she turned to him with thanks, a sudden mad impulse stirred her; she audaciously put up her lips to be kissed. He did not fail her. The ladies at the table looked on, catching breath, stopping their talk. A waiter, passing, stood transfixed. Every one watched. Then a cheer broke out and a clapping of hands all over the restaurant.

Fancy Gray bowed to her audience with dignity, as if she were on the stage. Then, with a comprehensive nod to her entertainers, she passed demurely down the aisle between the tables. Every eye followed her.

At the counter she turned her head to see Blanchard Cayley still standing by his place. She came hurriedly back as if drawn by some magic spell, blushing hotly, with a strange look in her eyes. She looked up at him as a little girl might look up at her father. The room was hushed. It was too much for that audience to comprehend. The act had almost lost its effrontery; the audacity had become, somehow, pathos.

Fancy walked like a somnambulist, her eyes wide open, staring at Blanchard. He had turned paler, but stood still, with his gaze fastened upon her, reveling, characteristically, in a new sensation. The ladies in his party did not speak. Nobody spoke. The room was like a well-governed school at study hour, every eye fixed upon Fancy Gray. Whatever secret emotion it was that drew her back, it was for its moment compelling, casting out every trace of self-consciousness.

She seemed to show her naked soul. She reached him, and again he put his arms about her and kissed her full on the lips. Again the tumult broke forth.

In that din and confusion she slipped back to the door. There was another hush. Then the crowd gasped audibly and tongues were loosened in a babel of exclamations. With a cry, some one pointed to the window. There stood Fancy Gray, pressing through the glass, histrionically, one last kiss to Cayley—and disappeared into the night. Half a dozen men jumped up to follow her, and turned back to account for a new silence that had abruptly fallen on the room.

Blanchard Cayley was still standing. He had snatched a wine-glass from the table, and now, with a silencing gesture, he held it above his head. He was perfectly calm, he had lost nothing of his usual elegance of manner.

"I don't know who she is, but here's to her!" he called out to the roomful of listeners. "Bottoms-up, everybody!"

He drank off his toast. Glasses were raised all over the room. Men sprang upon their chairs, put one foot on the table and drank Fancy Gray's health. Then the crowd yelled again.

In the confusion Mrs. Maxwell leaned to Clytie. "I don't know, my dear, whether I'll dare to chaperon you *here* again!" She herself was as excited as any one there.

Frankie Dean's thin lips curled in a sneer. "Oh, they call this Bohemia, don't they! Did you ever see anything so cheap and vulgar in your life? I feel positively dirty!"

Cayley watched for Clytie's answer. It came with a jet of fervor. "Why," she exclaimed, "don't you see it's real? It's *real*! It isn't the way we care to do things, but they're all alive and human—every one of them!"

"Bah! It's all a pose. They're pretending they're devilish."

"I don't care!" Clytie's eyes fired. "Even so, there's a live person in each of them—they're just as real as we are. I never understood it before. Look under the surface of it—there's blood there!"

"It's San Francisco!" said Cayley, "that explains everything. Oh, this town!" He sat down shaking his head.

The old *patron* bustled excitedly through the room.

"Take-a de foot off de table! Take-a de foot off de table!" he protested. "You spoil the table clot'—you break-a de dishes! I don't like dat! Get down, you! Get

down!"

CHAPTER VI
SIDE LIGHTS

> "Mrs. Chenoweth Maxwell would be very glad to see Mr. Francis Granthope next Friday evening at nine o'clock for an informal Chinese costume supper. Kindly arrive masked."

This invitation marked a climacteric in Granthope's social career. It was supplemented by an explanation over the telephone that left no doubt in the mind of the palmist as to the genuineness and friendliness of its cordiality. He had appeared already at several assemblies of the smarter set and had, by this time, a considerable acquaintance with the fashionable side of town. Of the information thus acquired he had made good use in his business. He had always gone, however, in his professional capacity as a paid entertainer; and no matter how considerately he had been treated, the fact that he was not present as a guest had always been obvious. He was in a class with the operatic star who consents to sing in private and maintains her delicate position of unstable social equilibrium with sensitive self-consciousness. In his rise from obscurity, at first, he had been pleased with such invitations, seeing that they brought him money and an increasing fame. He was now sought after as a picturesque and personable character. Women evinced a fearful delight in his presence; they treated him sometimes as if he were a handsome highwayman, tamed to drawing-room amenities, sometimes as they treated those mysterious Hindus in robes and turbans who occasionally appeared to prate of esoteric faiths in the salons of the Illuminati.

Granthope's sense of humor and his cynical view of life, had, so far, been sufficient to preserve his equanimity at the threshold of fashionable society. His equivocal position was tolerable, for he knew well enough what a sham the whole game was, and how artificial was the social position which permitted a woman to snub him or patronize him in public, and did not prevent her following him up in private. He had seen ladies raise their eyebrows at his appearance in the Western Addition, who had visited him for a chance to talk to him with astonishing egotism.

There was a strain in him, however, the heritage of some unknown ancestry, that, since meeting Miss Payson, began to give him more and more discomfort in the presence of such company. He had risen above the level of the mere professional entertainer, and had become fastidious. Clytie had met him upon terms of equality. Her frankness had flattered him, and her implied promise of friendship was like the opening of a door which had, hitherto, always been shut to him.

Mrs. Maxwell's bid, therefore, was a distinct advance, and he welcomed it, not so much because it unlocked for him a new sort of recognition, as that it furthered the game he had in hand. He could scarce have defined that game to himself. He was playing neither for position nor money nor power—his sport was perhaps as purely intellectual as that of chess, a delight in the pitting of his mind against others.

Mrs. Maxwell, with the tact of a woman of sensibility, had made it plain to him that he was invited for his own sake, upon terms of hospitality. As a lion, yes, she could not deny that. She confessed that she wished to tell people that he was coming—but he would not be annoyed by requests for entertainment. With another, he might have suspected that this was only a subterfuge to avoid the necessity of paying him his price, but Mrs. Maxwell's character was too well known to him for that possibility to be entertained.

He set himself, therefore, to obtain a costume for the affair at the "House of Increasing Prosperity," known to Americans as the shop of Chew Hing Lung and Company. With the assistance of the affable and discerning Li Go Ball, the only Chinese in the quarter who seemed to know what he required, Granthope selected his outfit, a costume of the character worn by the more prosperous merchant class of Celestials.

Granthope had fitted up the room next beyond his studio for a bed-chamber and sitting-room, access to it being had through the heavy velvet arras concealing the door between the two apartments. The place was severely masculine in its appointments and order, but bespoke the tasteful employment of considerable money. Here he had his library also, for since his earliest youth he had been a great reader. Prominent on its shelves were many volumes of medical books, and, to offset this sobriety, the lives and memoirs of the famous adventurers of history—Casanova, Cagliostro, Fenestre, Abbé Faublas, Benvenuto Cellini, Salvator Rosa, Chevalier d'Eon.

A massive Jewish seven-branch candlestick illuminated the place this evening, splashing with yellow lights the carved gilded frame of a huge oval mirror, glowing on the belly of a bronze vase, enriching the depths of color in the dull green walls, smoldering in the warm tones of the great Persian rug on the floor, twinkling upon the polished surface of the heavy mahogany table in

the center of the room. But it was concentrated chiefly upon the gorgeous oriental hues where his Chinese costume was flung, flaming upon the couch. There the colors were commingled as on an artist's palette, cold steel blue, pale lemon yellow, olive green that was nearly old gold, lavender that was almost pink in the candle-light, a circle of red inside the cap, and flashes of pale cream-colored bamboo paper here and there.

He had already put on the silken undersuit, a costume in itself, with its straight-falling lines and complementary colors. Fancy Gray was helping him with the other garments, enjoying it as much as a little girl dressing a doll, trying on each article herself first and posing in it before the mirror.

First, she wrapped the bottom of his lavender trousers about his ankles, over white cotton socks, tying them close with the silk bands, carefully concealing the knot and ends as Go Ball had instructed him. She held the black boat-shaped satin shoes for him to put on. Next she tied about his waist the pale yellow sash so that both ends met at the side and hung together in two striped party-colored ends. Then the short, padded jacket, and over all this the long, steel-blue, brocaded silk robe, caught in at the waist with a corded belt. Lastly the olive-green coat patterned with brocaded mons containing the swastika, and with long sleeves almost hiding the tips of his fingers. Upon its gold bullet-shaped buttons she hung the tasseled spectacle-case and his ivory snuff-box.

"Oh, Frank, I forgot!" said Fancy, as she paused with his wig of horse-hair eked out with braided silk threads, in her hand. "Lucie was here to-day."

Granthope was at the mirror, disguising himself with a long, drooping mustache and thin goatee. He put down his bottle of liquid gum and turned to her.

"What did she say?"

"Why, she said she didn't have time to wait, and didn't want to tell me anything."

"Why didn't she write?"

"Said she was afraid to. You're to manage some way to see her to-night, if you can, and she has a tip for you."

"H'm!" Granthope, with Fancy's assistance, drew on the wig, and clapped over his black satin skullcap with its red coral button atop. Then he paused again reflectively.

"It must be something important. If I can only get hold of some good scandal in this 'four hundred' crowd I can have some fun with 'em."

"I should be afraid to trust these ladies' maids; they might give you away any time, and then where'd you be? That would be a pretty good scandal, itself." Fancy shook her head.

"Aren't they all in love with me?" he said, smiling grimly.

Fancy looked dubious. "That's just the trouble. 'Hell hath no fury like a

woman scorned.'"

Granthope now laughed outright. "Fancy, when you get literary you're too funny for words."

She bridled, stuck out her little pointed tongue at him, and walked into the front office, where she sat down to attend to some details of her own work. At last she finished her writing and went to the closet to put on her hat and jacket.

"Oh, Frank!" she called out.

"Yes, Fancy!"

"You don't think I'm jealous, do you?"

"Yes!" he laughed.

She appeared at the doorway and called again:

"Mr. Granthope!" He was busy, and did not answer.

"Mr. Granthope!"

He looked up, now, to see her put her thumb to her nose with a playfully derisive gesture, such as gamins use.

He put his head back and laughed.

Then she looked at him seriously, saying, "When I am, you'll never know it. I'm not afraid of ladies' maids. When you really get into your own class it will be time enough for me to worry. But I wish you wouldn't use those girls. They're all cats, and they'll scratch!"

She was standing before the mirror inside the closet door, with her hat pin between her lips, adjusting her toque to the masses of her russet hair, when there came a knock at the hall door. She looked round and raised her eyebrows, then, after closing the door to the anteroom of the studio, she called "Come in!"

Madam Spoll, in a black silk gown covered with a raglan, entered. She wore a man's small, low-crowned, Derby hat trimmed with a yellow bird's wing.

"How d'you do?" said Fancy, not too cordially.

"Good evening," Madam Spoll panted; then, as her breath was spent with climbing the stairs, she dropped into a chair and gasped heavily. Fancy went on with her preparations without further attention to her visitor.

"Frank in?" was Madam Spoll's query as soon as she could breathe.

"Meaning Mr. Granthope?" said Fancy airily.

"You know who I mean well enough!" was her pettish reply.

"Oh, *do* I?"—and Fancy, her costume now in readiness for the street, walked jauntily into the anteroom and knocked at the door. "Madam Spoll is here to see you," she called out.

"Just a moment," he answered.

Fancy, pulling her jacket behind, wriggling, and smoothing down her skirt over her hips, walked to the window and cast a glance out. Then she slammed the drawers of her desk, put a hair-pin between the leaves of her novel, straight-

ened her pen-holders on the stand, stoppered a red-ink bottle, and marched out without looking to the left or to the right.

Madam Spoll glared at her in silence till she had gone; and then, with an agility extraordinary in so stout a woman, she sprang to the closet, opened the door and picked up an envelope lying on the floor. It had been opened. She took the letter out, gave it a hurried glance and then returned to her seat, stuffing the paper up under her basque.

The letter was short enough for her practised eye to master the contents almost at a glance. It ran:

My dear Mr. Granthope:—I hope you didn't take offense at my frankness the other day—if I was too candid don't misinterpret it and my interest in you. Sometime I may explain it more intelligently, but for the present believe me to be, Your friend, CLYTIE PAYSON.

Granthope came out after she had concealed the note. He was fully dressed and almost unrecognizable in his costume. He walked gracefully, with the light-footed stride of a mandarin, and saluted her with mock gravity. Madam Spoll stared at him with her mouth open. For a moment she did not appear to know him. Then she chuckled.

"For the land's sakes, what are you up to now, Frank? Doing the Chinese doctor's stunt and selling powdered sea-horses?"

He laughed at her surprise. "No, I'm doing society," he explained.

"Do 'em good, then! Lord, you are a-butting in this time, ain't you! I wouldn't know you from a Sam Yup highbinder on a Chiny New Year in that rig! What is it, a fancy-dress ball at the Mechanics' Pavilion?"

"Worse than that," he laughed; "this is a private supper-party in costume and I am a guest."

"Lord, you are getting on, for fair! You ain't been conning them swell girls for nothing, have you? And, to be frank with you, I always thought you was after something very different. I was kind of afraid they'd spoil you, too. It's a good graft, Frank, and if I can do anything to give you a lift, just say the word."

"Thanks," he said dryly, taking a seat in front of her and pulling his long sleeves up to his wrist.

She kept her eyes upon him, as if fascinated by the gorgeousness of his costume, seemingly a little in fear of his elegant manners as well. Then she broke out, pettishly:

"Say, Fancy's getting pretty fresh, seems to me. She's a very different girl

from what she was when she used to play spook for us. She was glad enough once to be polite—butter wouldn't melt in her mouth them days!"

"Oh, you mustn't mind Fancy; she's all right when you get used to her."

"She's pretty, if she is sassy," the medium acknowledged. "I can hardly blame you, Frank. I s'pose you find a good use for her. She seems to be pretty fond of you."

Granthope scowled. "Never mind about her. She's a great help to me here, and I like her—that's enough for you. You didn't come here to talk about Fancy Gray."

"I should think your ladies would object, though," the medium pursued. "It looks kind of funny, don't it? She stays here pretty late, it seems to me, if any one was to notice it. Some ladies don't like that sort of thing; they get jealous. Fancy's too pretty by half!"

"That'll be about all about Fancy Gray. Suppose we change the subject."

"Very good then; we'll change it to another girl that's as pretty. How would Miss Payson do to talk about?"

"What about her?"

"A whole lot about her. How are you getting along with her, for the first thing?"

Granthope smiled with an air of satisfaction, but contented himself with remarking, "Oh, I'm getting on all right. I can attend to my own end of the game, thank you. I've handled women before."

"More ways than one, eh?"

"She's not that kind. Don't you believe it!"

"Then what, for the Lord's sake, are you doing with her!" Madam Spoll gave her words a playful accent that he resented. Then she added, more seriously: "Frank, d'you know, I believe you could marry that girl. If you have changed yourself enough to like that kind, you might go farther and fare worse. She'd give you a good stand-in with the Western Addition, too. And we might help you out a bit; who knows! I can see all sorts of things in it, just as it stands."

"I haven't begun to think of anything like that," he replied carelessly.

"Of course not. I know well enough what you was thinking of. But you take my advice and don't spoil a big thing for a little one. Work her easy and you can land her. That's better a good sight than playing with her in your usual way."

He rose and walked to the window and looked out, vaguely annoyed. He turned, in a moment, to ask, "Has the old man made a will?"

"D'you mean to say you ain't found that out yet? Lord, Frank, you *are* getting slow. I don't know. I ain't come to that yet. But if he ain't, I'll see that he does make one, and that's where I can look out for your interests."

There was a slight sneer on his face. "Oh, don't trouble yourself. I've my

own system, you know. I haven't made many breaks yet. It's likely that I can help you more than you can me. That reminds me; you might take these notes. It's about all I have got from the girl so far. They may come in handy."

He went to his desk, took a couple of cards from a tin box in the top drawer, and handed them to Madam Spoll. She looked them over interestedly.

"Much obliged. H'm! So she thinks she's a psychic, does she? They might be something in that. Supposed to be engaged to B. Cayley. Well, you'll have to fix *him*, won't you! Father writing a book—ah! That's just what we want. Say, that's great! Me and Vixley will work that book, don't you worry! Wears a ring with 'Clytie' inside. Turquoises. Mole on left cheek. Goes to Mercantile Library three to five. Sun-dial with doll buried under it. That's funny. I wish it was papers, or something important—I don't see what we could do with a doll, do you? Still, you never can tell. All's generally fish that comes to my net. I've known stranger things than dolls. Making a birthday present of a hand-bound volume of what? Montaigne? What's that? Say, what's this about Madam Grant, anyway?"

He turned to her and held out his hand for the card, now distinctly impatient. "I don't know—that is, I forgot I put that on. There's nothing there that will help you, I guess. You'd better let me have it back, after all. It's chiefly about Miss Payson, anyway, and that isn't your business."

Madam Spoll refused to return the card. Instead, she tucked it into the front of her dress, saying, "Oh, I don't know. You never know what may be useful. It's well to be prepared."

"See here; you understand that you're to keep your hands off Miss Payson," said Granthope with emphasis. "She's my game. Do what you like with the old man, but leave me alone, that's all!"

"Don't you fret yourself about that. Ain't we worked together before, for gracious sakes? I guess I can mind my own business!"

The palmist walked over to the fireplace, stood leaning against the mantel and kicked the fender meditatively, somewhat disturbed by Madam Spoll's presence. He had seen Miss Payson only twice, yet he had already come to the point where he was annoyed to hear her so cold-bloodedly discussed, and his own heartless notes quoted. Even less could he enjoy thinking of so fine and delicate a creature in the toils of Vixley and Spoll. No, she was for his own plucking. She was a quarry well worth his chase. To share his plans with such vulgar plotters seemed to cheapen the prize, to rub off the bloom of her beauty and charm. He would play a more exquisite, a more subtle game. It would not do, however, to break with the mediums. They were still useful to him, in spite of his assertion of independence. They knew, besides, altogether too much about him for him to dare to kindle their resentment.

If Madam Spoll had noticed his detachment she did not show it. She herself had, evidently, been thinking something over, and now she interrupted his meditation.

"Say, Frank, about that old Madam Grant, now—"

"She wasn't so old, was she?"

"How d'you know she wasn't?"

He covered his mistake as well as he could with: "Oh, I've heard she was a young woman, not more than thirty, when she died."

"Well, it's so far back, it seems as though she must have been old. You know I fished a little with what you give me about her and Payson; putting that together with what Lulu Ellis got, I believe I can work him. Funny you happened on that bit. Did the Payson girl tell you?"

"Oh, I got it—she let it out in a way. You know."

Madam Spoll chuckled. "Lord, they tell us more'n we ever tell *them*, don't they! But I was saying: I wish I could find out more about that little boy Madam Grant used to keep. I wonder was he her son, now?"

"I suppose you might find out something if you looked up the files of the *Chronicle*."

"That's a good idea. I'll do it. D'you know what year it was?"

"1877."

"How d'you know?"

He walked away from her carelessly, replying: "That's the idea I got of it. About that time."

"Frank," she said, "ain't you ever got any clue to who you are, yet? Never got any hint at all?"

"Never."

"Why don't you go to some real sure-enough psychic? They might help. I've known 'em to do wonderful things."

Granthope gazed at her and laughed loud. "*You?*" was all he could say.

She drew herself up. "Yes, *me*! Sure. Why, you don't think I consider they ain't no genuine ones, even if I do fake a little, do you?"

"You actually believe there's a medium alive that can tell such things?"

"I'm positive of it. Why, when I begun, I give some remarkable tests myself. I used to get names, sometimes. But there *are* straight ones. Not here, maybe, but in New York. You could send a lock of your hair."

He went up to her and clapped his hand on her shoulder, still laughing. "You're beautiful, my dear; you're positively beautiful!"

She turned a surprised face to him. "What in the world d'you mean?"

He shook his head and walked away. "Preserve your illusions! It's too wonderful. I'll be believing in palmistry, next I'll believe myself in love, after that.

And then—I'll believe I'm honest, dignified, honorable, modest!" His tone grew, word by word, more hard and cynical. Then he turned to her with a whimsical expression: "So you believe your doll's alive!"

"I've no time to talk nonsense any longer!" she exclaimed, rising ponderously. "I can't make you out at all, Frank. Sometimes you're practical as insurance and sometimes you're half bug-house. Maybe it's them clothes!" She regarded him carefully.

He bowed to her with mock courtesy, spreading his fan.

"Lord, you *do* look like a fool in that Chink's rig. Have a good time with 'em—but keep your eyes and your ears open!"

She went out.

He was about to turn out the electric lights and leave, when he heard a knock at the door. He opened it, and saw the little freckled-face girl who had come to his office the day he had first met Clytie Payson. He recognized her instantly, but she, seeing him so extraordinarily disguised, drew back in surprise.

"Did you want Mr. Granthope?" he asked.

"Yes!" She finally made him out, but still gazed at him, somewhat frightened. Her face was bloodless.

"Come in," he said kindly. "I'm Granthope. You'll have to excuse this costume." He set a chair for her, but she stood, timidly regarding him.

"I'm awfully afraid I'm bothering you, Mr. Granthope, coming so late—I know I ought to have come in your office hours, but I couldn't possibly get off—and I did want to see you awfully! D'you suppose you could help me a little, now? I thought you might be able to, you said such wonderful things when I was here before, and I just can't stand it not to know, and I don't know what to do."

"Do sit down. Tell me what's the matter, my dear."

She crept into a chair, and sat with nervous hands, staring at him.

"Why, don't you remember?" She gazed at him in alarm. "Oh, I've depended so on what you said—it's all that kept me going!"

"Just pardon me a moment, please." He went to his desk drawer and began to fumble over his card catalogue. "I have a memorandum to make. Then I'll talk to you." He came to the card, and made a penciled note and glanced it over. Then he returned to her and sat down. "Now tell me all about it," he said gravely. "I remember perfectly, of course. Bill was in the Philippines, wasn't he? You hadn't heard from him for some time, and you were expecting him home on the next transport?"

She sat, limply huddled in her chair, gazing at him through her sad eyes.

"He did come back. I couldn't meet the boat. I missed him. And now he's gone!"

"He didn't let you know where he went?"

”Oh, Mr. Granthope, it’s too awful! I can’t bear it, but I could stand anything if I could only find him! You *must* find him for me.”

”I’ll do what I can, my dear. Your hand shows that it will all come out for the best. I wouldn’t worry.”

”Oh, but you don’t know! You don’t know how bad it is!” she moaned. ”I thought you might know. He was wounded in a battle.”

”But he came back?”

”Yes.” Then she burst into a hurried torrent of words. ”He didn’t want me to know. He was shot in the face—his nose was shot off—it’s awful—some of the men told me about it. Bill was ashamed to have me see him—he tried to make me think he wasn’t in love with me any more, so I’d go away. But I knew better. Bill’s so proud, Mr. Granthope, you don’t know how proud he is! He’d rather leave me than make me suffer. But what do I care for his nose being gone? Why, Bill’s a hero! He had more nerve than Hobson, anyway! Just because he was the only man in his company that dared to go through a swamp, under fire, to save his lieutenant—and he brought him in on his back, Bill did! Why, Bill’s father was killed at Antietam, but Bill’s luck was a heap worse than that! He has to live without a face and be despised and sneered at because he did his duty! Oh, if I can only find him, I’ll give him something that will make him forget. Don’t I love him all the more for it? He’s tried to sacrifice his whole life and happiness only for me—just to save me from suffering when I look at him. D’you know many men who’d do that for a girl? I don’t!”

She broke down and sobbed convulsively. The story seemed to Granthope like a scene from a play, and his inability to comfort her smote him while she fought to restrain her tears.

”And you can’t find out where he is?”

”No. The company was mustered out, and Bill just naturally disappeared. Nobody knows where he is. I’ve asked all his officers, and all the men I could find.”

He took her hand and looked at it soberly for a moment.

”It will all come out right, my dear. You trust me. There’s your line of fate as clean as a string. I see trouble in it, but only for a little while. You’ll be married, too. You must have patience and wait, that’s all. Suppose you come back and see me in a week or so, and tell me if you’ve heard any news of him. Meanwhile, I’ll see what I can find out myself. There’s a cross in your hand—that’s a good sign. Bill still loves you, and he won’t let you suffer long.”

He felt the pitiful emptiness of his words, but he had been too affected by her narrative to give her the smooth banalities that were always ready to his tongue. She got up and looked at him through her tears.

”You have helped me, Mr. Granthope. Somehow I knew you could. I’ll be

in again sometime. How much is it, please?"

"My dear girl, when you come again, you can thank the young lady whom you saw here before. Don't thank me."

She looked at him silently, then she took his hand and shook it very hard. "You mean that lady with red hair who sits at the desk?"

"Yes."

"I liked her when I saw her. She was nice to me. Is—is she Mrs. Granthope?"

Granthope shook his head and smiled.

The girl blushed at her indiscretion. "I kind of thought—she seemed to be, well, fond of you. I mean, the way she looked at you, I didn't know but what you were married. I hope you'll excuse me." She was visibly confused, and evidently had said much more than she had intended.

"My dear," Granthope replied, "she's far too good for me!"

The girl shook her head slowly, as she rose to go. A smile struggled to her face as if, for the first time, she noted the incongruity of the palmist's costume, then, with a grateful look she went out.

As soon as he had left, Granthope sat down at the desk and wrote a note upon a memorandum pad. It read:

Fancy—

To-morrow morning please go down to the ticket office at the Ferry, and see if you can find out where a soldier, with his nose shot off, bought a ticket to, about ten days ago.

He rose, yawned, stared thoughtfully at the cast; for a few moments, then snapped his fingers and walked to the window. His cab was waiting. He went down-stairs, got into the vehicle and drove off.

The Maxwells lived at Presidio Heights, in one of the newer residences of the aristocratic Western Addition, a handsome brick house decorated with Romanesque fantasies in terra cotta, behind a bronze rail guarded by heraldic griffins. Granthope walked up under the lantern-hung awning five minutes before the hour and was shown to a room up-stairs.

Here there were several men waiting and adjusting their garments. All but one were in Chinese costume; this was a fat, red-faced man, with a white mustache. He was in evening dress, and kept exclaiming:

"I won't make a damned fool of myself for anybody. It's all nonsense!" He

was obviously embarrassed at being the only nonconformist.

"Sully" Maxwell, arrayed in a magnificently embroidered Chinese officer's summer uniform—a long, flounced robe, with the imperial dragons and their balls of fire, the rainbow border and the all-over cloud-pattern—was helping the men to dress, chaffing each of them in turn. He was middle-aged and prosperous-looking, typically a "man's man" and "hail-fellow-well-met," despite his immense fortune. He greeted Granthope cordially, without hint of patronage, and introduced him to the others.

Of two, Keith and Fernigan, Granthope had heard much. They were the pets of a certain smartish social circle, in virtue of their cleverness and wit. They were of the kind who habitually do "stunts" and were always expected to make the company merry and informal. Keith was a tall, wiry, flap-eared, smiling fellow, made up as a Chinese stage-comedian, with his nose painted white. Fernigan, short, stout to rotundity, almost bald, with spectacles, and a round, Irish face, was dressed in woman's costume, head-dress, earrings, green coat and pink silk trousers. He was naturally droll, a wag at all times, and his whimsical way constantly approached a shocking limit but never quite reached it. He was speaking a good parody of the Cantonese dialect to his partner, and making eccentric gestures.

Both he and Keith greeted Granthope with mock gravity, addressing him in pidgin English. Granthope answered with what spirit he had, and, taking his place at the mirror, placed upon his nose an enormous pair of blue-glass spectacles, horn-rimmed. They disguised him effectually.

As he left the room, a man with a pointed, reddish beard entered, dressed in long flowing robes of plum-colored silk.

Granthope caught the greeting: "Hello, Blan!" and turned with curiosity to see the Mr. Cayley of whom he had heard so much. He did not, however, wait to be introduced, but passed on.

The great reception-room down-stairs presented one of the most beautiful, as well as one of the most original, of San Francisco interiors. It was entirely of redwood, panels six feet in width all round the walls extending up to a narrow shelf supported by carved brackets. The low-studded ceiling was broken by a row of finely adzed beams, carved tastefully at the ends. A feature of the reception-room was a wide fireplace of terra cotta surmounted by a mantel, consisting of at least a dozen combined moldings, each member of which showed a striking individuality of detail. The place was illuminated by side brackets in the form of copper sconces. Granthope entered, quite at his ease, with a long, swinging, heel-and-toe stride that comported well with his costume.

There were already some half-dozen persons sitting about the room, most of whom seemed afraid to talk for fear of disclosing their identity, or perhaps,

a little too self-conscious in their garish raiment. The silence, if it had not been painful, would have been absurd. Granthope looked in vain for any sign of his hostess' presence, and then suspecting that she, too, was masked to enjoy the piquancy of the situation, he saluted one of the ladies, sat down beside her and began a conversation. Knowing that few were acquainted with him he had no need to disguise his voice. He sat on a straight chair stiffly, as he had seen Chinese actors pose at the theater, his toes turned out in opposite directions so as to insure the proper fall of the skirt of his robe, and disclose, through a narrow gap, the splendor of his lavender trousers. His partner answered him in whispers.

As he sat talking nonsense gaily, a woman came into the room with so perfect an imitation of the "tottering lily" walk affected by high-caste Chinese women, that he turned his eyes upon her in delight at her acting.

She was of a good height; and her white embroidered shoes, whose heels were placed in the center of the sole, gave her nearly two inches more. Her costume was a rainbow of subdued contrasting colors. It was evident at a glance that every garment she wore was old, valuable and consistent with her character of bride.

The smoothly coiled rolls of her black wig were decorated by numerous gold ornaments and artificial flowers. Across her forehead was a head-dress of gold filigree-work and kingfisher feathers; its ribbon was tied in the back of her head and fell in fanciful ends. She wore two coats—the outer was of yellow brocaded silk, a pastel shade, trimmed with a wide stripe of close blue embroidery and rows of looking-glass buttons—the inner one, shorter, was of blue and black appliquéd work in bold, virile pattern. Below this showed her closely-pleated skirt of old rose with a panel of gold embroidery in the center; this, as she walked, revealed occasional glimpses of a pair of full straight green trousers trimmed with horizontal stripes, and a flash of white silk stockings. Necklaces she had in profusion, one of jade, one of purple mother-of-pearl, one of white coral, one of sandalwood; and others in graded sizes and colors. In her right hand she carried a narrow gold-paper fan; on her left wrist was a jade bracelet, and, pulled through it, a green silk handkerchief with a purple fringe.

Her entry made a sensation, as she courtesied gravely to each one in turn. So, playing her part cleverly, she came to Granthope, who arose and greeted her with a dignified salaam. So far they were the only ones who had at all entered into the spirit of the occasion, and he did his best to meet her character and play up to her elaborate salutation. He offered his arm, then, and escorted her, with considerable manner, to a long settee.

In all this pantomime she had preserved a serious expression, the repressed, almost inanely impassive, set face of a Chinese lady of rank; but when at last she was seated, she turned full upon him and smiled under her mask.

The effect upon Granthope was a sudden thrill of overpowering delight. He was deliciously weakened by the revelation. His breath came suddenly, with a swift intake—the blood rioted through his veins.

She wore a much wider mask than the others, so that nothing but her mouth and chin was shown. But that mouth was so tempting, with its ravishing, floating smile, and that smile so concentrated in its limitation to a single feature, that it turned his head. The lips were narrow and bright; the blood seemed about to ooze through the skin. The upper one was curved in a tantalizing bow between the drops of soft shadow at the corners. The cleft above seemed to draw her lip a little upward to disclose a line of small, perfect, regular teeth of a delicate, bluish white translucence, which, parting, showed a narrow rosy tongue. The lower lip was that delicious fraction of an inch lesser than the upper one which, in profile, gave her a touch of youthful, almost boyish, wistfulness. Her round, firm chin showed, from the same point of view, a classic right angle to her throat, where the line swept down the proud column of her neck, there to swing tenderly outward toward her breast.

He could not take his eyes from her, but he had not the will to restrain his staring. The spell was irresistible; he drank her deep and could not get enough. For these whirling moments he was at the mercy of the attraction of sex, impersonal, yet distilled to an intoxicating essence. Had it not been for her mask hiding the upper part of her face, had her eyes corrected this almost wanton loveliness with some reserve or with the effect of a more intellectual character, had his glance even been given a chance to wander over equally enchanting components of that expression, he undoubtedly would not have been so moved by the sight of her laughing, tempting mouth. But that, faultlessly formed, exquisitely sexed, whimsically provocative, had for him, with the rest of her face hidden, an original and freshly flavored delight. In the spectrum of her beauty the violets and blues of her spirit, the greens and orange of her mind were for the nonce inhibited; only the vibrant red rays of her physical personality smote him, burning him with their radiance. But there was, he felt, no malice behind that smile, though it was mischievous; there was nothing wanton there, though in this guise her lips seemed abandoned and inviting. There was, in their flexed contour, in the engaging mobility of their poise, no consciousness of anything sensually appealing. It was, rather, as if he gained some secret aspect of the woman beneath and behind all conventions of morality, of modesty, and of discretion. So far, indeed, she seemed, in a way, without a personality. She was Woman smiling at him. The vision was too much for him.

She bent toward him and her lips whispered:

"How do you do, Mr. Granthope? Why are you staring so? I thought of course you knew me—but I really believe you don't."

Even then he did not recognize her, and was profoundly embarrassed. That he should fail to remember such a mouth as that! He took her hand which had been concealed in her long sleeve and looked at it. She had glued long false nails of celluloid to her little fingers, completing the picture of a Chinese lady of quality. At the first sight of her palm, at the first touch of it, even, he knew her, and, with a rush, a dozen thoughts bewildered him. This was she whom he had been able so to influence, to cajole. He had, in a way, a claim to this comeliness. She had favored him, had confessed her interest in him. They were, besides, bound by a secret tie. He might hope for more of her, perhaps. She was already somewhat in his power; he had, at least, the capacity to sway her. She, alluring, delightful, might perhaps be gained, and in some way, won. She had known him at a glance—there was her prescience again! She had welcomed him, in assurance of her favor. What then was possible? What dared he not hope for? A great wave of desire overcame him.

Meanwhile he answered, distracted and unready:

"You knew me then? I thought I was pretty well disguised."

"Oh, you've forgotten how hard it is to deceive me. I should never try it, if I were you. Of course I knew you! I should know you if you had covered your head in a sack."

He stammered, and he was not often confused enough to stammer. "I don't know how to tell you how beautiful you are, Miss Payson."

She spoke low and slowly, with a wayward inflection, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Then she added, "I scarcely dared speak to you, you are so magnificent."

"I would need to be, to be worthy of sitting beside you," he replied, his wits floating, unmanageable.

"Did you get my note?"

"Yes, I want to thank you for it."

"I hope you've forgiven me."

"Of course, I was only flattered by your frankness."

"It's so easy to be frank with you," she said. "You see, I'm perfectly myself with you, even *en masque*. I doubt if any of my friends would know me as I am with you."

"But I've seen a new 'you' that I haven't known before."

"Then she owes her existence to your presence. But how am I different? Tell me."

"You take my breath away. You say such charming things to me that it deprives me of the power of answering you—anything I could say seems ineffective and cheap. You get ahead of me so. Really, you'll have to be positively rude to me before I can summon presence of mind enough to say anything gallant."

Again her lips curved daintily. Her voice was dulcet:

”Then I am afraid I shall never hear any nice things from you.”

He was reduced; baffled by her suavity. He sought in vain for a fitting return. He had the impulse to take advantage of her courtesy, however, and gratify some portion of his desire to be nearer her. She wore, suspended from the gold top-button of her ”qua,” a red silk tassel with a filigree network of silver threads, containing a gold heart-shaped scent bottle. He reached to it and tried to remove it from its place, covering this slight advance jocosely, with the remark:

”Is that your heart you have there? It seems to be pure gold.”

She did not resent what might possibly have been considered a familiarity, but smiled when she saw that he could not remove the bottle from the meshes.

”I’m afraid you won’t be able to get at it, that way.” There was a touch of playful emphasis in her voice.

Their hands met as she assisted him, showing him how to pull up the sliding ring and open the net. At that contact he became a little giddy. The blood surged to her cheeks. She took out the bottle and handed it to him. That moment was tense with feeling. Then she said, as he tried in vain to unstopper the little jar:

”Can you open it, do you think?”

He attempted futilely to open the little heart. ”I’m afraid I can’t,” he said disconsolately. ”Won’t you help me?”

”No, you must do it yourself. There is a way—see!”

She took it from him and, concealing it in her hand, opened the top and reached it out for him to smell. He whiffed a penetrating perfume, disturbingly pungent, then she withdrew it from him and closed the heart.

”May I take it?” he asked.

She returned it now, saying, and her smile was more serious than before, ”Learn to open it. There is a way.”

Granthope took the heart and tried to master its secret. The room had by this time filled up so that a further tête-à-tête was impossible. Miss Payson was now besieged by maskers and held court where she sat. Fernigan, the stout young man with the powdered face, dressed as a woman, was particularly offensive to Granthope, and especially so because it could not be denied that his antics and sallies were witty.

Granthope arose therefore, and walked about the room looking for some one whom he might recognize. There was little likelihood of his succeeding had not his professional capacity given him a clue to follow. He passed from one group to another, bowing, gesticulating and joking, as all had now begun to do, keeping his eyes alertly on the hands of different members of the assembly. It was not long before he suspected Mrs. Page, and, after reassuring himself by closer inspection, he went up to her.

She was as expensively dressed as Clytie, but without Clytie’s taste. Mrs.

Page's magnificence was barbaric, untamed to any harmony of color, though effective in its very violence. She had not left her diamonds at home. She blazed in them. Tall, dark, well-formed and deep-breasted, not even the loosely hanging folds of a Chinese costume could hide the luxuriance with which Nature had endowed her figure. She was laughing with abandon, reveling in the freedom of the moment, when Granthope touched her on the shoulder and whispered:

"Violet!"

She turned to him and stared, puzzled by his well-disguised face.

"Who are you?"

"I know more about you than any one here!"

"Good heavens!" she laughed, "what do you know about me?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Not here, for mercy's sake! Don't give me away in respectable society, please. Come out in the hall where we won't be eavesdropped."

She took his arm energetically and romped him out to the staircase. The masks and costumes had let loose all her folly. She effervesced in giggles.

"Let's go up-stairs in the library," she proposed. "We have the run of the house to-night, and nobody'll be there. I want to see if I can't guess who you are. I haven't the least idea who you are, but I believe you're going to be nice."

She tapped him on the cheek playfully with her fan, then picked up her skirts and ran up-stairs, giving him a glance of red silk hose, as she went. He was still quivering with the excitement of Clytie's smile, still warm from her nearness, still full of her, though he would not share her wholesale glances to her throng of admirers. He was still rapt with the exhilaration her smile had kindled, he still held her little perfumed heart. As he followed Mrs. Page up-stairs he smelt again of the gold bottle. The fragrant odor fired him anew. He grew perfervid.

Mrs. Page, unmasked, was awaiting him in the library.

When they came down ten minutes later, he made way to where Clytie sat, talking to the gentleman with the reddish pointed beard and plum-colored garments. Seeing Granthope approach, she turned to her companion, saying:

"Would you mind getting me a glass of water, Blanchard? This mask is fearfully warm. I hope we won't have to keep them on much longer."

Cayley left to obey her and Granthope took his place by her chair. She looked up at him quickly, and said, in a low voice:

"I think you had better give me back my scent-bottle, please."

A pang smote him. He felt the shock of reproach in her voice, knowing what she meant immediately, though he rallied to say, faint-heartedly:

"Why, I haven't learned how to open it yet."

”I’m afraid you’ll never learn.” She did not look at him.

”What do you mean?” he asked, summoning all his courage. ”I thought you had given it to me.”

She kept her eyes away from him. ”If I did, I must ask it back, now.”

Perturbed as he was by this new proof of her intuition, he refused to admit it. After all, it might have been merely her quick observation. At any rate, he would make another attempt to pit his cleverness against her sapience.

”Oh, we only went up to see Mr. Maxwell’s books. He has a first edition of Montaigne there.” He was for a moment sure that she was only jealous.

She bent her calm eyes upon him. There was no weakness in her mouth, though it seemed more lovely in its tremulous distress. The upper lip quivered uncontrolled; the lower one fell grieving, as she said:

”I asked nothing. I want only honesty in what you do tell me.”

This time he was fairly amazed. The hit was deadly. He dared not suspect that she had taken a chance shot. He was too humbled to attempt any denial, knowing how useless it would be in the face of her discernment. Yet she had showed nothing more than disapproval or distress. Her reproof could scarcely be called an accusation, and her chivalry touched him.

”I don’t know what you will think of me,” he said.

”Oh, I’ve heard so much worse of you than that,” she said, ”and it hasn’t prevented my wanting to be friends with you. I hope only that you will never misinterpret that friendliness. You don’t think me bold, do you?”

”I wish you were bolder.”

”Oh, you don’t know my capacity yet. But, really, do you understand? It’s that feeling, you know, that in some way we’re connected, that’s all. It’s unexplainable, and I know it’s silly of me. I’m not trying to impress you.”

”But you are!”

In answer, she smiled again, and again that flood of delight came over him rendering him unable, for a moment, to do anything but gaze at her. Luckily just then Cayley returned with a glass of water; at the same time, the order was given by Mrs. Maxwell to unmask.

Clytie drew off her visor immediately. As Granthope watched her he felt the quality of his excitement change, transmuted to a higher psychic level. Somehow, with her whole face revealed, with her serene eyes shining on him, he was less in the grip of that craving which had held him prisoner. It fled, leaving him more calm, but with a deepened, more vital desire. The completed beauty of her face now thrilled him with a demand for possession, but the single note of passion was richened to a fuller chord of feeling. The mole on her cheek made her human, and almost attainable.

That feeling gave him a new and potent stimulus, as, under his hostess’

direction, he offered Clytie his arm into the supper-room, and took a place beside her. It buoyed him with pride when he looked about at the gaily clad guests and noticed, with a quickened eye, the distinction of her face and air, comparing her with the others. That dreamy, detached aspect in which he had seen her before had given way now to a fine glow of excitement which stirred her blood. How far she responded to his enthusiasm he could not tell; she was, at least, inspired with the novelty of the scene—the gaudy dresses, the warm red lights of monstrous paper lanterns, the odors of burning joss-sticks, the table, flower-bedecked and set out with strangely decorated dishes, and the monotonous, hypnotic squeak and clang and rattle of a Chinese orchestra half-way up the stairs.

All trace of her annoyance had gone from her now, and that unnamable, untamed spirit, usually dormant in her, had retaken possession of her body. She was more jubilantly alive than he had thought it possible for her to be. He dared not attribute her animation to his presence, however, gladly as he would have welcomed that compliment. It was the spell of masquerade, no doubt, that had liberated an unusual mood, emboldening her to show those nimble flashes of gallantry. At any rate, that revelation of her under-soul was a piquant subject for his mind to think on; there was an evidence of temperament there which tinctured her fragile beauty with an intoxicating suggestion. It was a sign of unexpected depths in her, a promise of entrancing surprises.

For the first time in his life he lacked the audacity to woo a woman boldly. There had never been enough at stake before to make him count his chances. There had been everything to win, nothing to lose. Women had solicited his favor, but there was something different in Clytie's approaches toward familiarity. She spoke as with a right-royal and secure from suspicion, with a directness which of itself made it impossible for him to take advantage of her complaisance. He was put, in spite of himself, upon his honor to prove himself worthy of her confidence. There was, besides, a social handicap for him in her assured position—he could see what a place she held by the treatment she received from every one—while he was in his novitiate at such a gathering, newly called there, his standing still questionable. But, most of all, to make their powers unequal, was his increasing fear of her as an antagonist with whom he could not cope intellectually. He, with all his clever trickery and his practical knowledge of psychology, was like a savage with bow and arrow; she, with her marvelous intuition, like a goddess with a bolt mysteriously and dangerously effective.

Already his instinct accepted this relation, but his brain was still stubborn, seeking a refuge from the truth. He was to have, even as he sat there with her, another manifestation.

Clytie sat at his left hand. Mrs. Page, at his right, had been assigned to the bald, red-faced gentleman with white mustache, who had so profanely refused to

make a fool of himself by wearing a Chinese costume. His sprightly, flamboyant partner was ill-pleased with her lot. She proceeded to spread an airy conversational net for Granthope, endeavoring to trap him into her dialogue, with such patent art that every woman at the table noticed her tactics.

Granthope, however, shook her off with a smile and a joke, as if she were an annoying, buzzing fly. Still she hummed about him, leaving her partner to himself and his food. However clever and willing Granthope might have been, ordinarily, at such an exchange of persiflage, it was all he could do to parry her thrusts and at the same time keep up with Clytie. But she, noticing Mrs. Page's game, was mischievous enough, or, perhaps, annoyed enough, to give the woman her chance and submit to a trial of strength. So, as if to give Granthope the choice between them, she turned to her left-hand neighbor, Fernigan, who, in his female costume, had kept that end of the table, by his wit, from interfering with her colloquy.

Granthope was in a quandary, fearing to be inextricably annexed. Mrs. Page at this moment increased his dilemma by casting a languishing look at him and pressing his foot with hers under the table.

All that was flirtatiously adventurous in him boiled up; for Mrs. Page was, in her own way, a beauty, and, as he had reason to know, amiable.

He drew away his foot, however, and as he did so, gave a quick inward glance at himself, wondering, and not a little amused, at the change that had taken place in him. Novelty is, in such dalliance, a prime factor of temptation—it was not a lack of novelty, however, which made her touch unwelcome, for he was, in his relations with the woman, at what would be usually a parlous stage. He had already been gently reproved for his weakness—but it was not the smart of that disapproval that withheld him. He had begun to fear Clytie's vision—yet he was not quite ready to admit her infallible. His self-denial, then, was indicative of an emotional growth. He smiled to himself, a little proud of the accompaniment of its tiny sacrifice.

Clytie, turning to him, rewarded him with a smile, and, leaning a little, said under her breath:

"I'm so glad that you find me more worth your while."

He could but stare at her. Mrs. Page was quick enough to see, if not hear, what had happened; she turned vivaciously to the gentleman in evening dress.

Granthope exclaimed, "You knew that?"

"Ah, it is only with you that I can do it." She seemed to be more confused at the incident than he. "I know so much more than I ever dare speak of," she added.

This did not weaken her spell.

She continued: "Do you remember what you said, when you read my palm,

about my being willing to make an exaggerated confession of motives, rather than seem to be hypocritical, or unable to see my own faults?"

He did not remember, but he dared not say so. He waited a fraction of a second too long before he said:

"Certainly I remember."

She looked hard at him and mentally he cowered under her clear gaze. Then her brows drew slightly together with a puzzled expression, as if she wondered why he should take the trouble to lie about so small a matter. But this passed, and she did not arraign his sincerity.

"Well, what I want you to know now is that I don't consider myself any better—than she is. Do you know what I mean? I don't condemn her. Oh, dear, I'm so inarticulate! I hope you understand!"

"I think I do," he answered, but he could not help speculating as to the definiteness of her perception. She answered his question unasked.

"I get things only vaguely—that's one reason why I could not judge a person upon the evidence of my intuition—I couldn't tell you, for instance, exactly what happened between you two just now. I know only that I was disturbed, and that you, somehow, reassured me."

"But you were more precise about what happened up-stairs." He was still at a loss to fix her limitations.

"Oh, there I pieced it out a little. Shall I confess? I knew you well enough to fill in the picture. I know something of her, too."

"Witch!"

"You're a wizard to make me confess!" she replied, brightly shining on him. "I don't often speak. It's usually very disagreeable to know so much of people—indeed, I often combat it and refuse to see. But with you it's different."

"It's not disagreeable?"

"No, it is disagreeable usually. It makes me feel priggish to mention it, too, but, with you, the impulse to speak is as strong as the revelation itself; that's the strangest part of it."

This confession gave him a new sense of power, for he saw that, sensitive as was her intuition, he controlled and appropriated it. It had already occurred to him what splendid use he might make of her, compelling such assistance as she could render. Vistas of ambition had opened to his fancy. For him, as a mere adventurer, her clairvoyance might reinforce his scheming most successfully. With her he could play his game as with a new queen on the chess-board. But he saw now how absurd was the possibility of harnessing her to such projects. He was, in fact, a little dazzled by the prospect she suggested. As he corrected that mistake with a blush for his worldly innocence, he saw what the game with her alone could be—his game transferred from the plane of chicanery to the level of

an intimate friendship—or even love. He saw how she would play it, how she would hold his interest, keeping him intellectually alive with the subtlety of her character.

So far he had not taken her seriously; he had reveled in the possibility of a love affair, but he had not even contemplated the possibility of a permanent alliance. As Madam Spoll had said, he had had his pick of women—and each had ended by boring him. Granthope, besides, with all his delight in strategy, was modest, and desire for social establishment had not entered into his plans. He had accepted Clytie as one of a different world, desirable and even tempting, but not at all as one who would change either his theory or his mode of life. But now, with a sudden turn, his thoughts turned to marriage with her. Madam Spoll's words leaped to his memory—she had said that it was possible. This idea came as the final explosion of a long, tumescent agitation. He looked at Clytie with new eyes. His ambition soared.

The meal went on in a succession of bizarre courses—seaweed soup, shark's fins, duck's eggs, fried goose and roasted sucking pig, boiled bamboo sprouts to bird's nests and mysterious dishes—with rice gin and citron wine. The company was rollicking now; even the gentleman in black evening dress was laughing, and, goaded on by the irrepressible Mrs. Page, had taken a large crown of gold paper, cut into rich patterns and decorated with colored trimmings, from its place in the center of the table and had set it upon his bald head. The walls of the dining-room were covered with a row of paper costumes, elaborate robes used by the Chinese tongs in their triennial festival of the dead. They were of all colors, decorated with cut paper or painted in dragon designs with rainbow borders and gold mons. Mrs. Page tore one from the wainscot and wrapped it about her partner's shoulders. Fernigan gibbered a fantastic allegiance before him; Keith, he of the white nose, called for a speech. Over all this mirth the clashing cymbals, the rattling tom-toms and squeaking two-stringed fiddles kept up an uncouth accompaniment. Granthope, so far, had been a quiet observer, but when at Clytie's request he removed his wig and false mustache, he was recognized by Frankie Dean, who sat further up the table.

"Oh, Mr. Granthope," she cried out. "Won't you please read my hand?"

Every one turned to him. Clytie watched him to see what he would do. Mrs. Maxwell, at the head of the table, obviously annoyed at this indelicacy, sought to rescue him.

"I promised Mr. Granthope that he wouldn't be asked," she interposed, smiling with difficulty.

"Office hours from ten till four," Fernigan announced. The guests tittered.

Granthope arose calmly and walked up to the young lady's side, taking her hand. Then he turned to his sarcastic tormentor.

”This is one of the rewards of my profession,” he said, smiling graciously. ”I assure you I don’t often get a chance to hold such a beautiful hand as this.”

Clytie got a glance across to him, and in it he read her approval. He bent to the girl’s palm gravely:

”I see by your clothes-line,” he said, ”that you have much taste and dress well. Your fish-line shows that you have extraordinary luck in catching anything you want. There are many victories along your line of march. There is a pronounced line of beauty here; in fact, all your lines are cast in pleasant places. You will have a very good hand at whatever game you play, and whoever is fortunate enough to marry you will surely take the palm.”

He retired gracefully, followed by laughter and applause, and was not troubled by more requests. Clytie whispered to him:

”I think you saved yourself with honor. It was a test, but I was sure of you!”

Mrs. Maxwell, immensely relieved, almost immediately gave the signal for the ladies to leave. After the men had reseated themselves, heavy Chinese pipes with small bowls were passed about. Most of the guests tried a few puffs of the mild tobacco, and then reached for cigarettes or cigars. As the doors to the drawing-room were shut they drew closer together and began to talk more freely.

Blanchard Cayley came over and sat down beside Granthope in Clytie’s empty chair. He, too, had taken off his wig. His smile was ingratiating, his voice was suave, as he said:

”I don’t want to make you talk shop if you don’t care to, Granthope, but I’d like to know if you ever heard of reading the character by thumb-prints. I don’t know exactly what you’d call it—papilamancy, perhaps.”

”I don’t think it has ever been done, but I don’t see why it shouldn’t be,” said Granthope, amused.

”What is necessary to make it a science?”

Granthope, quicker with women than with men, was at a loss to see what Cayley was driving at, but he suspected a trap, and foresaw that his science was to be impugned. He countermined:

”Oh, first of all, a classification and a terminology,” he suggested. Cayley was caught neatly. He was more ignorant than he knew.

”Why don’t you classify the markings then? I should think it might be considered a logical development of chiromancy.”

”One reason is, because they have already been classified by Galton. I’ve forgotten most of it, but I remember some of the primary divisions. Have you a pencil?”

Cayley unbuttoned and threw open his plum-colored, long-sleeved ’dun,’ disclosing evening dress underneath, and produced a pencil which he gave to

the palmist. Granthope smoothed out his paper napkin, and, as he talked, drew illustrative diagrams upon it.

"You see, the identification of thumb-prints is made by means of the characteristic involution of the nucleus and its envelope. One needs only a few square millimeters of area. There are three primary nuclei—arches, whorls and loops. Each has variously formed cores. The arch, for instance, may be tented or forked—so. The whorls may be circular or spiral. The loops may be nascent, invaded or crested, and may contain either a single or several rods, as they are called. Let me see your thumb, please. You have a banded, duplex, spiral whorl. It was there when you were born, it will be the same in form when you die. Mine is an invaded loop with three rods."

He saw by Cayley's face that he had scored. Such technical detail was, in point of fact, Cayley's penchant, and he was interested. Granthope proceeded:

"Almost every distinguishing characteristic of the human body has been used at one time or another for divination or interpretation, as I suppose you know."

Cayley saw an opening. "But what do you think the reading of moles, for instance, amounts to, really?"

"The reading of them, very little, of course. But the location of them, a good deal."

"Ah," said Cayley, "I thought so. Then you affirm an esoteric basis with regard to such interpretations? You think that a mass of absolute knowledge has been conserved, coming down from no one knows where, I suppose?"

"There are several ways of looking at it," Granthope answered him. He threw himself back in his chair and gathered the company in with his eyes. "One theory, as you know, is that palmistry derives its authority from the fact that the lines are produced by the opening and closing of the hand—originally, at least—the fundamental markings being inherited, as are our fundamental mental characteristics—and that such alteration of the tissue is directly affected by the character. One stamps his own particular way of doing things upon his palm. Using the right hand most, more is shown there that is individually characteristic. Of course this theory will not apply to the distribution of moles upon the body. But it seems to me that every part of an organic growth must be consistent with the whole, and with what governs it. Everything about a person must necessarily be characteristic of the individual. There are really no such things as accidents, if we except scars. We recognize that in studying physiognomy, and, to a certain extent, in phrenology. It is suggested less intelligibly in a person's gait, gesture and pose. Everything that is distinctive must be significant, if only we have the power of interpreting it. Of course we have not that power as yet. Palmistry, being the most obvious and striking method, has been more fully developed. A

great amount of data has been collected upon the subject, and every good palmist is continually adding to that material. But I believe that, to a possible higher intelligence, any part of a man's body would reveal his character—since every specialized partial manifestation of himself must be correlated with every other part and the whole. How else could it be? An infinite experience would draw a man's mental and physical portrait, for instance, from a single toe, as it is possible for a scientist to portray a whole extinct animal from a single bone. I think that there can be, in short, no possible divergence from type without a reason for it; and that reason is the same one that molded his character."

"But that doesn't explain prognostication of the future." By this time the animus of Cayley's attack had died out. He was now impersonally interested.

"No scientific palmist attempts to give more than possibilities. He must combine with the signs in the hands a certain amount of psychology—a knowledge of the tendencies of human nature—in order to predict. But, after all, his diagnosis, when it is logical, is as accurate as that of the ordinary physician, and the risk is less serious. How many doctors look wise and take serious chances—or prescribe bread-pills? There's guess-work enough in all professions."

By this time the two had been joined by several others who hung over them in a group, listening. Fernigan interjected:

"That's right! Even Blanchard has to guess what he's talking about most of the time!"

"And you have to guess whether you're sober or not!" said slim Keith with the white nose.

"When you talk about the probable tendencies of human nature, you don't know what you're up against," said Cayley, retreating. "San Francisco is a town where people are likely to do anything. There's no limit, no predicting for them. They were buying air-ship stock on the street down at Lotta's fountain, the last thing I heard."

The old gentleman in evening dress, still wearing his Chinese paper crown, took him up enthusiastically.

"You can be more foolish here without getting into the insane asylum than any place on earth, but you have to be a thoroughbred spiritualist before you can really call yourself bug-house. Look at old man Bennett! You couldn't make anything up he wouldn't believe!"

"What about him?" said Cayley. "I would like to have him for my collection of freaks.

"Oh, he was a furniture manufacturer here. I knew him well, but I forget the details. It was something fierce though, the way they worked him."

Granthope smiled. "I can tell you something about Bennett," he offered. "I happened to hear the whole story nearly at first hand."

”Let’s have it,” Cayley proposed.

Granthope leaned back in his chair and began, rather pleased at having an audience.

”Why, he went to investigating spiritualism and fell into the hands of a man named Harry Wing and a gang of mediums here. They won Bennett over to a firm belief, step by step, till he was the dupe of every ghost that appeared in the materializing circles, which cost him twenty-five dollars an evening, by the way. One man that helped Wing out, played spirit, pretended to be his dead son, and used to ask him for jewelry so that he could dematerialize it, and then rematerialize it for identification. If Bennett went down to Los Angeles he’d take the same train and turn up at a circle there, proving he was the same spirit by the rings that had been given him up here. Well, Bennett got so strong for it that after a while they didn’t bother with cabinets and dark séances—the players used to walk right in the door. Then they’d tell him that, as partly materialized spirits, they ought to have dinner to increase their magnetism, and he’d send out for chicken and wine. Finally they got him so they’d point out people on the street and assert that they were spirits. The prettiest test was when they materialized Cleopatra. I’ve never seen the Egyptian queen, but she certainly wasn’t a bit prettier than the girl who played her part. Bennett, as an extraordinary test of her strength, was allowed to take her out to the Cliff House in a hack. The curtains of the carriage had to be pulled down to keep the daylight from burning her.”

”Oh, Cliff House, what crimes have been committed in thy name!” Fernigan murmured.

”Next, they made Bennett believe that his influence was so valuable in accustoming spirits to earth-conditions, that they were going to reveal a new bible to him, with all the errors and omissions corrected, and he would go down to posterity as its author. In return, he was to help civilize the planet Jupiter. You see, Jupiter being an exterior planet was behind the earth in culture. Bennett contributed all sorts of agricultural implements and furniture to be dematerialized and sent to Jupiter, there to be rematerialized and used as patterns. Wing even got him to contribute a five hundred dollar carriage for the same purpose. It was sold by the gang for seventy-five dollars, and even when it was shown to Bennett by his friends, who were trying to save him, he wouldn’t believe it was the same one. They milked him out of every cent at last, and he died bankrupt.”

Granthope had scarcely finished his story when the drawing-room doors were half opened and Mrs. Page appeared on the threshold pouting.

”Aren’t you ever coming in here?” she exclaimed petulantly. ”You might let us have Mr. Granthope, at least.”

The men rose and sauntered in, one by one.

Granthope had but a moment in which to reflect upon what he had done,

but in that moment he regretted his indiscretion in telling the Bennett story. He had not been able to resist the opportunity to make himself interesting and agreeable; now he wondered what price he would have to pay for it. The next moment his speculations vanished at the sight of Clytie.

He went directly to her and sat down. Although the party was dispersed in little groups, the conversation had become more or less general, and he had no chance to talk to her alone. He received her smile, however, and she favored him with as much of her talk as was possible.

As she sat there, with relaxed grace that was almost languor, she made the other women in the room look either negligently lolling or awkwardly conscious. He noticed how some of them showed the fabled western influence of environment by the frank abandon of their pose, how others held themselves rigidly, as if aware of their own lack, and sought, by stern attention, to conceal it. Clytie's head was poised proudly, her hands fell from her slender wrists like drooping flowers. Her whole body was faultlessly composed, unified with harmonious lines, as if a masterly portrait were gently roused into life.

Fernigan now began, upon request, a Chinese parody, accompanied by absurd pantomime. Granthope could not bear it, and, seeing Clytie still busy with her admirers, slipped out of the room and went up to the library.

Mr. Maxwell's books were rare and carefully selected, a treat for such an amateur as Granthope. He went from case to case fingering the volumes, opening and glancing through one after another. The pursuit kept him longer than he had intended.

There was a smaller room off the library, used as a study and shut off by a portière. Granthope, standing near the entrance, suddenly heard the sound of swishing skirts and footsteps, then the subdued, modulated voices of two women. With no intention at first of eavesdropping, he kept on with his perusal of the book in his hand. The first part of the conversation he remembered rather than listened to, but it soon attracted his alert attention.

"I think it's a rather extraordinary thing, Mrs. Maxwell's asking him, though, don't you?" one of the ladies said.

The reply was in a gentle and more sympathetic voice: "Oh, she wanted an attraction, I suppose, and he's really very good-looking, you know."

"He's handsome enough, but he's too much like a matinee hero for me; my dear, he's absolutely impossible, really! He's not the sort of person one cares to meet more than once. He's beyond the pale.

"It's rather cruel to invite him just to show him off, I think. In a way, he had to accept."

"Oh, I expect he's only too glad to come."

"I wonder how he feels! Do you suppose he has any idea that he's out of

his element? It must be strange to be willing to accept an invitation when you know you are, after all, only a sort of freak."

"Don't worry. A charlatan has to have a pretty thick skin—no doubt he'll make use of all of us, and brag about his acquaintance. That's his business, you know; he has to advertise himself."

"I know; but every man has his own sense of dignity, and it must be somewhat mortifying—no self-respecting coal-heaver would accept such an invitation—his pride would keep him from it.

"I don't see how a man like that can have much pride. A coal-heaver has, after all, a dignified way of earning his living. This man hasn't. His trade can't permit him to be self-respecting. It's more undignified than any honest labor would be. Why, he lives by trickery and flattery, and now he's beginning to toady, too. Just look at the way he is after Clytie Payson, already."

"Yes, I can't see why she permits it, but she seems to be positively fascinated by him. Isn't it strange how a fine girl like that is usually the most easily deceived? Did you see the way she was looking at him at supper? That told the story. Of course, you'd expect it of Mrs. Page, but not of Cly."

"Don't you believe it! Cly's no fool—she sees through him. He's interesting, you can't deny that; and you know that a clever man can get about anything he wants in this town. There are too few of them to go round, and so they're all spoiled. But Cly's only playing him."

"You don't think she's deliberately fooling him, do you?"

"Nonsense! I know Cly as well as you do. She would always play fair enough, of course, but that doesn't prevent her wanting to study a new specimen, especially one as attractive as Granthope. But it won't last long. Cly's too honest. It's likely that he'll go too far and take advantage of her—then she'll call him down and dismiss him."

"Do you think he imagines that he could really—" began the other.

"Oh, *he's* no fool either! He knows perfectly well where he belongs, but he's working his chances while they last."

Granthope had been deliberately listening and, as the last words came to his ears, his emotion burst into flame. This, then, was how he was regarded by the new circle into which he had been admitted. He was a curiosity, handsome, but beyond the pale—even Clytie, it was probable, was willing to amuse herself with him. The illumination it gave him as to his status was vivid, its radiance scorched him.

He had never caught this point of view before. He had been too interested in his emergence from obscurity, he had even congratulated himself upon his increasing success. Now he saw that the further he went on that road the further away from Clytie he would be—he saw the chasm that separated them. His

undignified profession appeared to him for the first time in its true aspect. The humiliation and mortification of that revelation was sickening. He had not believed that it was possible for him to suffer over anything so keenly. The insults he had received, produced, after a poignant moment of despair, an energetic reaction. His fighting instinct was awakened. He had achieved a certain control of himself, he had a social poise and assurance that kindled his mind at the prospect of an encounter.

He drew aside the portière and walked boldly into the little room.

Two ladies were sitting there, picturesque in their costumes. Their rainbow-hued garments showed a bizarre blotch of color in the quiet monochrome of the place. Their faces were whitened with powder, their eyebrows blackened to the willow-curve, their lips lined with red—they looked, in the half-light, like fantastic, exotic Pierrettes. As they caught sight of him they started up with surprise, almost with fear. Granthope bowed with a quiet smile, perfectly master of himself.

"I want to apologize for having overheard your conversation," he said. "I must confess that I was eavesdropping. My business is, you know, to read character for others, and I don't often have a chance to hear my own so well described. I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure."

He had the whip-hand now. There was nothing for them to say; they said nothing, staring at him, their lips parted.

He walked through to the door of the hall and there paused like an actor making his exit from the stage. A cynical smile still floated on his lips. He had never looked more handsome, with his black hair, his clean-cut head, and his fine, deep eyes that looked them over calmly, without haste. His costume became him and he wore it well. Now, as he raised his hand, the long sleeve of his olive green coat fell a little away from his fingers. Below, his lavender trousers gleamed softly. It was a queer draping for his serious pose. It was a strangely figured pair that he addressed as they sat, embarrassed, immovable in their splendid silken garments.

He added more gently, with no trace of sarcasm in his smooth voice: "I would like to tell you, if it is any satisfaction for you to know, that your operation has been successful. It was rather painful, without the anesthetic of kindness, but I shall recover. I think I may even be better for it, perhaps restored to health—who knows!" Then his smile became enigmatic; he left them and went down the stairs.

He made his way to Clytie with a new assurance; inexplicably to him, some innate power, long in reserve, had risen to meet the emergency. He was exhilarated, as with a victory. She looked up at him puzzled.

"I wonder if you know what has happened this time?" he said.

”Oh, if I only did! Something has—you have changed, somehow.”

”Is it an improvement?”

”You know, it is my theory that you’re going to—” She gave up her explanation—her lips quivered. ”Well, yes! You have been embarrassed?”

”I suppose it was good for my vanity.”

”Then you have heard something unpleasant.”

”The truth often is.”

”Was it true?”

He laughed it off. ”It was nothing I mightn’t have known.”

”Then it is for you to make it false, isn’t it?”

”If I can.”

”I think there is nothing you couldn’t do if you tried.”

”There is nothing I couldn’t do if I had your help,” he answered.

For answer, she took the little gold heart-shaped bottle from its mesh-work and handed it to him.

”You must learn—but perhaps this may help you. Will you keep it?”

He took it and thanked her with his eyes. Then, their dialogue being interrupted, he moved off. He wandered about, speaking to one and another for a few moments, gradually drifting toward the hall.

As he stood just outside the reception-room he glanced up the broad stairs carelessly, thinking of the two ladies to whom he had spoken. He smiled to himself, wondering if they had yet come down. While he was watching, he saw a woman at the top of the stairs, looking over the rail. A second glance showed her to be a servant. She descended slowly, and, in a moment, beckoned stealthily. He paid no attention.

She came nearer, and, finally, seeing no one with him, called out to him in a whisper. It was Lucie, Mrs. Maxwell’s maid. The moment Granthope recognized her, he walked into the parlors again, as if he had not noticed her.

Soon after that he paid his farewell amenities to his hostess and went up to where he had left his hat and coat. Lucie was in the upper hall waiting for him.

”Mr. Granthope,” she whispered, ”may I speak to you a moment? I have something.”

”Not now,” he said, passing on.

She plucked at his sleeve. ”I’ve got a great story,” she insisted.

He shook his head.

”Shall I come down to your office?”

”Be quiet!” he said under his breath, and went in for his things.

She was waiting for him when he emerged.

”I’ll come down as soon as I can get off,” she continued.

He shrugged his shoulders without looking at her, and went down-stairs,

and out.

CHAPTER VII
THE WEAVING OF THE WEB

Madam Spoll was sitting in her study on Eddy Street, awaiting her victim, when Francis Granthope, immaculate as usual, appeared in her doorway, having been admitted by Spoll. She was in front of the glass, pinning on a lace collar.

"Hello, Frank," she said cordially, looking over her shoulder, "you're a sight for sore eyes! We don't see much of you, nowadays."

"I've been pretty busy, lately," he answered, sitting down and looking about with an expression of ill-concealed distaste. The stuffy, crowded room seemed more unpleasant than ever, after his evening at the Maxwells'. Madam Spoll seemed more gross. Everything that had been familiar to him had somehow changed. He seemed to have a different angle of vision. It was close and warm, and the air smelled of dust.

"You ain't a-going to forget your old friends, now you've got in with the four hundred, are you, Frank?" she said earnestly.

He pulled out a cigarette-case and lit a cigarette. As he struck the match he answered:

"Not if they don't meddle in my affairs." He gazed at her coolly as he inhaled a puff of smoke and sent a ring across the room.

Madam Spoll's face grew stern. "That's no way to talk, Frank. I've been the same as a mother to you, in times past, ever since you went into business, in fact. It looks like you was getting too good for us."

"Why, what's the matter now?"

"Oh, you're so stand-off, nowadays."

He laughed uneasily. "You always said I was spoiled."

"Well, who's spoiling you now? Miss Payson?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, well enough! Lord, why don't you come out with it! It's all in the family, ain't it? You've got her on the string, all right, ain't you?"

"I have not." The frown grew deeper in his forehead.

"H'm!" She drew a long breath. "Well, that means we'll have to begin at the beginning, then, I expect. I had a sort of an idea that you *had* got her going, and

wouldn't mind saying so, but if you're going to go to work and be mysterious, why, I'll have to talk straight business." She pointed at him with her pudgy finger. "Now, see here, she's been writing to you, anyways. You can't deny *that*."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think anything at all about it; I know. What d'you take me for? A Portugee cook? It's my business to know all about the Paysons, that's all. Very good."

Granthope looked more concerned, and eyed her suspiciously.

"There's only one way for you to have found that out," he said. "And that reminds me. I want to get those notes I gave you about her when you were up at my place. I didn't keep a copy, and I've forgotten some of the details that I need."

Madam Spoll raised her eyebrows, also her shoulders, and made an inarticulate noise in her throat. "Funny you need them so bad all of a sudden. Not that they done us much good—we've found out a lot for ourselves; about all we need for the present."

"Well, I haven't interfered with your game, and I don't see why you should interfere with mine. Only, I'd like those memoranda back, please." His tone was almost peremptory.

"I'm sorry, but I ain't got 'em."

"Where are they?"

"Why, I give 'em to Vixley."

Granthope saw that it was no use to go further. He had, in spite of his precautions, already aroused her suspicions, and so he pretended to consider the matter of no moment. Madam Spoll, however, was now thoroughly aroused.

"What I want to know, Frank, is whether you're with us or not."

"I thought the understanding was that we were to work separately."

"Separately *and* together. Mutual exchange *and* actual profit, for each and for all. We got a mighty good thing in Payson, me and Vixley have, and we propose to work it for all it's worth. It'll be for your interest to come in and help us out. True, you have done something, but now you're lallagagging, so to speak, when you might be making a big haul. Payson's easy, and we can steer the girl your way, through him. He'll believe anything. All we got to do is to say my guides want him to have you for a son-in-law, and the trick is as good as turned. I agree to get him started this afternoon. He's a ten-to-one shot. I can see that with half an eye. It'll only be up to you to make good with the girl, and Lord knows that'll be easy for you. Now is that straight enough for you?"

Granthope rose and began to pace the floor nervously. He paused to straighten some magazines upon the table, he adjusted a photograph upon the wall, he moved back a chair; then he turned to her and said:

"I don't see how there's anything in this for me. I'm through with all that

sort of thing, and I think, on the whole, I'll stay out. I'm going in for straight palmistry—and—well, another kind of game altogether. You wouldn't understand it even if I explained. I've got a good start, now, and I don't want to queer myself."

Madam Spoll made a theatrical gesture of surprise. "Lord, Frank, who would have thought of you doing the Sunday-school superintendent act on me! A body would think you'd never faked in your life! My Lord, I'm trying to lead you astray, am I?"

"That's all right. I don't pretend to be very virtuous, but some of this is getting a little raw for me."

Madam Spoll opened her eyes and her mouth. "What's got into you, anyway?"

"Something's got out, perhaps," he said, frowning. "At any rate, I don't care to make use of Miss Payson to help you rob her father."

"Rob her father!" Outraged innocence throbbed in Madam Spoll's voice. "Lord, Frank, you're plumb crazy! Why, he won't spend no money he don't want to, will he? He can afford it well enough! He'll never miss what we get out of him. You might think I was going to pick his pockets, the way you talk." She took him by the arm. "See here! You ain't really stuck on that Payson girl, are you? Why, if I didn't know you so well, I'd be almost ready to suspect you of it! But land, you've had women running after you ever since you went into business! But I notice you don't often stay away from the office more'n two days running."

"I don't know that my private affairs are any of your business," he said curtly. He was rather glad, now, of the chance for an outright quarrel.

But she would not let it come to that, and continued in a wheedling tone: "Well, this happens to be my business, and I speak to you as a friend, Frank, for your own good as well as mine. You can take it or leave it, of course; I ain't a-going to try and put coercion on to you, and there's time enough to decide when we get Payson wired up. Then I'll talk to you just once more. You just think it over a while, and don't do nothing rash."

Granthope arose to leave. He was for a more romantic game, himself. The vulgarity here offended him esthetically rather than ethically, and yet he winced at the insinuations Madam Spoll had made.

"I think I can go it alone," he said; "as for rashness, I won't promise."

He had gone but a few minutes when Professor Vixley entered and shook a long lean claw with Madam Spoll, took off his coat and sat down. "Well," he said affably, "how're they coming, Gert?"

"Oh, so-so; Frank Granthope's just been here."

"Is that so! Did you get anything out of him?"

"No. And he wants his Payson notes back again. What d'you think of that!"

Vixley crossed his legs, and whistled a low, astonished note. "We're goin'

to have trouble with Frank, I expect."

Madam Spoll's smooth forehead wrinkled. "Frank's a fool! He's leary of us, and I believe he'll throw us down if we don't look out."

"Most time to put the screws on, ain't it?"

"I don't know; we'll see. We can go it alone for a while. Wait till we really need him and I'll guarantee to make him mind. He's got the society bug so bad I couldn't do anything with him."

"The more he gets into society the more use he is to us," said Vixley. "He's a pretty smooth article."

"Do you know, I have an idea he's getting stuck on that Payson girl."

Vixley cackled.

"You never can tell," said Madam Spoll. "I believe Frank's got good blood in him. Sooner or later it's bound to come out."

"Well, if he's after the girl, it'll be easier for us to bring him around. He won't care to be gave away."

"That's right, and we'll use it. I can see that girl's face when she hears about him crawling through the panel at Harry Wing's to play spook for Bennett."

"Not to speak of Fancy," Vixley added, grinning.

To them, Ringa entered. He slunk into a chair beside Vixley, smoothed down his tow hair, stroked his bristling mustache, and allowed his weak gray eyes to drift about the room.

"Well?" Madam Spoll queried, giving him a glance over her fat shoulder.

"I found him all right, and I've got something. I guess it's worth a dollar, Madam Spoll."

"Let's hear it, first," said Vixley.

"I done the insurance agent act, and I jollied him good." Ringa grinned, showing a hole in his mouth where two front teeth should have been.

"You jollied him," Vixley showed his yellow teeth. "Lord, you don't look it!"

"I did though," the pale youth protested. "I conned him for near an hour."

"You're sure he didn't get on to you?" Madam Spoll asked, regarding her head sidewise in the glass and patting the blue bow on her throat.

"Sure! I was a dead ringer for the real-thing agent, and I had the books to show for it. I worked him for an insurance policy."

"Well? What did he say?" Madam Spoll turned on him like a mighty gun.

"He was caught between two trains once on the Oakland Mole, and I guess he was squeezed pretty bad. He said it was a close call."

"That's all right," said Vixley; "we can trim that up in good shape, can't we, Gert?"

"It'll do for a starter. Give him a dollar."

”Anything more to-day?” Ringa asked, rising slowly.

”No; I’ll let you know if I want you,” said the Madam.

Ringa slouched out.

”I’d let that cool off a while till he’s forgotten it,” Vixley suggested.

”I’ll make him forget it, all right,” Madam Spoll returned. ”That’s my business. You do your part as well as I do mine and you’ll be all right.”

”It’s only this first part that makes me nervous.”

”Oh, he ain’t going to catch *me* in a trap. I got sense enough to put a mouse in first to try it.”

She stood in front of the mirror in the folding-bed, arranging her hair, which had been wet and still glistened with moisture, holding her comb, meanwhile, in her mouth. Professor Vixley tilted back in his plush chair, his head resting against the grease-spot on the wall-paper which indicated his habitual pose.

”Now don’t you go too fast,” he said, pulling out a square of chewing-tobacco and biting off a corner. ”This here is a-goin’ to be a delicate operation. Payson ain’t so easy as Bennett was. Bennett would believe that cows was cucumbers, if we told him so, but this chap is too much on the skeptic. We got to go slow.”

”You leave me alone for *that*,” Madam Spoll replied easily. ”I guess I know how to jolly a good thing along. Has he got the money? That’s all I want to know about him.”

”He’s got money all right. That’s a cinch. I’m not in this thing for my health. What’s more, he’s got the writin’ bug, and I can see a good graft in that.”

”Well, I’ll give it a try.”

”No, you better keep your hands off that subject, Gertie. I can work that game better’n you. I got it all framed up how I can string him good. I’m goin’ to make that a truly elegant work of art. All you got to do is to get him goin’, and then steer him up against me.”

The door-bell rang noisily up-stairs and Mr. Spoll’s footsteps were heard going to answer the summons.

”I guess that’s my cue,” said Madam Spoll, smiling affably. ”I wish I had more magnetism to-day.” She shook her hands and snapped her fingers. ”I can’t stand so much of this as I used to. I can remember when I could get a name every time without fishing for it. But what I’ve lost in one way I have learned in another. I’m going to give him a run for his money, and don’t you forget it.”

Vixley smiled and rubbed his hands. ”Go in and win, Gert. I guess I’ll take a nap here on the lounge while I’m waitin’ for you, and see if the Doc doesn’t come in.”

”All right,” she replied; then marched up-stairs and went into action.

The upper parlor, where she received her patrons for private sittings, was a large room separated from the back part of the house by black walnut double doors. Upon the high-studded walls were draperies of striped oriental stuffs, caught up with tacks and enlivened by colored casts of turbaned Turks' heads, most of which were chipped on cheek and on chin, showing irregular patches of white plaster. Upon the mantel chaos reigned, embodied in a mass of minor decorations of all sorts, such as are affected by those who deem that space is only something to be as closely filled as possible. The furniture was cheaply elaborate and formally arranged, running chiefly to purple stamped plush and heavy woolen fringe. The silk curtains in the windows were severely arranged in multitudinous little pleats, fan shaped, drawn in with a pink ribbon at the center. There was scarcely a thing in the room, from the fret-sawed walnut whatnot in the corner to the painted tapestry Romeo upon the double doors, that an artist would not writhe at and turn backward. A little ineffective bamboo table in the center was made a feature of the place, but supported its function with triviality.

Mr. Payson had just entered, cold and blue from the harsh air outside. He bowed to the seeress.

She began with the weather, referring to it in obvious commonplaces, eliciting his condemnation of the temperature. She offered to light the gas-log and succeeded, during the conversational skirmish, in drawing from him the fact that he suffered from rheumatism, especially when the wind was north.

Madam Spoll allowed the ghost of a smile to haunt her face for a brief moment. "Lucky you ain't got my weight, it gets to you something terrible when you're fat. I ain't quite so slim as I used to be." She looked up from the grate coquettishly, marking the effect of her words.

"Now let's set down and get ready," she said, going over to the frail table and pressing her hands to her forehead. "I ain't in proper condition to-day; I've been working hard and my magnetism's about wore out. But I'll see what I can do."

He took a seat opposite her and waited. His attitude was benignly judicial; his eyes were fixed upon her, through his gold-bowed spectacles.

"Funny thing how different people are," she began. "Now, I get your condition right off. You ain't at all like the rest of the folks that come here. I get a condition of study, like. I see what you might call books around you everywhere—not account-books, but more on the literary. Books and sheep, you understand. Not live ones! I would say they was more on the dead sheep. Flat ones, too, with hair, like—queer, ain't it? Sounds like nonsense I suppose, but that's just what I get. They must be some mistake somehow." She drew her hand across her forehead and snapped the electricity off her finger-tips. Then she rubbed her hands and twisted her mouth. "Do you know what I mean?"

”Why, it might be wool perhaps; I have something to do with wool,” he offered.

”Now ain’t that strange? It *is* wool, as sure’s you’re born! I can see what you might call skins and bales of wool. And I get a condition of business, too—but not what you might call a retail business. Seems like it was more on the wholesale.”

”Yes, that’s right,” he assented, nodding.

”What did I tell you!” she exclaimed. ”I do believe I may get something after all, though very often the first time ain’t what you might call a success, and sitters are liable to get discouraged. I can tell you only just what my guides give me, you know, and sometimes Luella is pernickerty. She’s my chief control. You know how it is yourself, for you’ll be a man that knows women right down to the ground, and you’ve always been a favorite with the ladies, too.”

”Oh, I never knew many women,” he said modestly.

”It ain’t the number I’m speaking of. It’s the hold you had over ’em, specially when you was a young man. They was women who would do anything you asked them and be glad of the chance; now, wasn’t they? Did you ever know of a party, what you might call a young woman, though not so very young, with the initial C?” She mumbled the letter so that it was not quite distinguishable.

”G?” he said. ”Why, yes!—was that the first name or the last?”

”It seems like it was the first name, the way I get it—would it be Grace?”

This was, of course, a random ”fishing test,” and she got a bite.

”My wife’s name was Grace.”

She hooked the fact, noticing the tense, and let her line play out to distract his attention temporarily.

”It don’t seem quite like your wife. Seems like it was another woman who you was fond of. Maybe it was meant for the last name. Sometimes my control does get things awfully mixed. Or, it might be a middle initial. You wait a minute and maybe I’ll get it stronger.”

”Oh, if it was the last name, I think I recognize it.”

She had another line out and another bite, now, and played to land both, coaxing the truth gently from him.

”Yes, it’s a last name, and she was terrible fond of you. She was in love with you for some time, you understand? And there was some trouble between you.”

”There was, indeed!” Mr. Payson shook his head solemnly.

The hint now made sure of, she heightened it to make him forget that he himself had given the clue.

”I get a feeling of worry, and what you might call a misunderstanding. You didn’t quite get along with each other and it made a good deal of trouble for you. You was what I might call put out, you understand? She’s in the spirit now, ain’t

she?"

"Yes; she died a good many years ago."

Madam Spoll returned to her first fish and began to reel in. "Your wife's passed out, too, and Luella tells me she's here now. She says Grace was worried, too. But she's happy now and wants you to be. You was a young man then, and yet you have never got over it. You wasn't rightly understood, was you?"

Mr. Payson shook his head again. He was listening attentively.

"But it wan't your fault, do you understand? It was something that couldn't be helped. And sometimes when you think of this other lady you say to yourself, 'If she only knew! If she only knew!'"

"Yes, I wish she did. It really wasn't my fault."

Madam Spoll cast more bait into the pool.

"Now, would her given name be Mary, or something like that?"

"No—it was an uncommon name."

The medium persisted stubbornly.

"That's queer. I get the name of Mary very plain."

"My mother's name was Mary; perhaps you mean her?"

"It might be your mother, and yet it seems like it was a younger woman. Now, this lady I spoke of had dark hair, didn't she? or you might call it medium—sort of half-way between light and dark."

"No; she had white hair."

Another fish was on the hook. Madam Spoll had got what she wanted. This admission of Mr. Payson's, coupled with the fact Granthope had discovered, that Clytie had visited the crazy woman, identified the old man's first love, she thought, effectually. She kept this for subsequent use, however. It would not do, as Vixley had said, to go too fast.

"Then this Mary must be some one else," she said. "You may not recognize her now, but you probably will. I can't do your thinking for you, you know. It may possibly be that you'll meet her some day; at any rate, my guides tell me you must be careful and don't sign no papers for Mary. I don't know whether she's in the spirit or not. You may understand it and you may not. All I can do is to give you what I get."

Madam Spoll now became absorbed in a sort of reverie. When at last she emerged it was with this:

"I see your mother and your wife now, and I get the words, 'It's a pity Oliver couldn't marry her.' I don't know what they mean at all."

"I understand. I was intending to marry another woman, the one you spoke of just now, but something prevented."

"That must be it. My guide tells me that something dreadful happened, and it was what you might call hushed up and you separated from her."

”It was not my fault.”

”I get a little child, too”—Mr. Payson grew still more absorbed. The medium noticed his instant reaction in eyes, mouth and hands. On the strength of that evidence, she took the risk of saying:

”The child was the lady’s with the white hair.”

”What about it?” demanded Mr. Payson.

”I see the child standing by a lady who grew gray very young, you understand. And now they’re both gone. Was you ever interested in Sacramento or somewhere east of here?”

”Stockton?” he asked. ”I lived there for a while.”

”That’s it. I see a river, and steamboats coming in, and there’s the child again.”

”A boy or a girl?”

She hesitated for a moment to dart a glance at him as swift as an arrow. Then she risked it. ”A girl.”

He drew a long breath. ”I don’t quite understand.”

”It certainly is a little girl, and she’s with the lady with the gray hair. But wait a minute. Now I get a little boy, and he’s crying.”

”Where is he?” came eagerly from Payson’s lips.

”He’s on this side. He’s alive. I’ll ask my guide.” She plunged into another stupor, then shook herself, rubbed her forehead, wrung her hands.

”I can’t get it quite strong enough to-day, but I’ll find out later. He seems to be mixed up with you, some way, not in what you might call business, but more personally. You’re worried about him.”

Mr. Payson, with a shrug of his shoulders, appeared to disclaim this.

”Yes, you are! You may not realize it, but you are. The time will come when you understand what I mean. Now you’re too much interested in other things. Your mind is way off—toward New York, like, or in that direction.”

He looked puzzled.

”Maybe it ain’t as far as New York, but it’s somewhere around there, and I see books and printing presses. Do you have anything to do with printing?”

This he also disclaimed.

”Funny!” she persisted. ”I get you by a printing-press looking at a book and then I see you at a table writing.”

”I have done some writing, but it has never been printed.”

”Well, it will be! My guide tells me that you have a great talent for literary writing, and it could be developed to a great success.

”Now,” she added, ”you let me hold your hands a while till I get the magnetism stronger. Just hold them firm—that’s right. Lord, you needn’t squeeze them *quite* so hard!” She beamed upon him with obvious coquetry. ”Now I’m

going into a trance. I don't know whether Luella will come, or maybe little Eva. Eva's the cunningest little tot and as bright as a dollar. She's awful cute. You mustn't mind anything she says or does, though. Sometimes, I admit, she mortifies me, when sitters tell me what she's been up to. I've known her to sit on men's laps and kiss 'em and hug 'em, like she was their own daughter, but Lord, she don't know any better. She's innocent as a baby."

His face grew harder as she said this, but she proceeded, nevertheless, with her experiment, closing her eyes and sitting for a while in silence. Then her muscles twitched violently; she squirmed and wriggled her shoulders. Finally she spoke, in a high, squeaky falsetto, a fair ventriloquistic imitation of a child's voice.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Payson, I'm little Eva! I brought you some flowers, but you can't see 'em, 'cause they're spirit flowers. You don't look very well. Ain't you feelin' well to-day? I'm always well here, and it's lovely on this side."

He made no response. Madam Spoll's soft hand, obviously controlled by her spirit guide, moved up Mr. Payson's arm and patted his cheek. He drew back suddenly.

"My!" little Eva exclaimed. "You frightened me! What a funny man you are! Won't you just let me smoove your hair, once? I'd love to. Oh, I think you're horrid! I'm just doin' to slap your face—there!" Which she did quite briskly.

Mr. Payson loosened his hold with some annoyance.

"Well, I ain't doin' to stay if you don't love me," the shrill voice went on. "I don't *like* men who don't love me. Good-by, old man, I'm doin'."

There was another wriggle on the part of the medium, after which a lower-toned voice said:

"How do you do! I'm Luella."

He watched the medium's blank, expressionless face as she spoke.

"Say, you ain't well, I can see that. Haven't you got a pain in your leg? Excuse me saying it, but I can feel it right there."

She touched him gently on the thigh.

"Oh, that's only a touch of rheumatism," he replied.

"No, it ain't," she said, "it's more serious than that. It's chronic, and it's growing worse. Sometimes it's so painful that you almost die of it, isn't it? I know where you got it; it come of an accident. I can see you in a big crowded house, like, and there's railroad trains coming and going, and you're crowded and jammed. You got internal injuries and a complication. You didn't realize it at the time, but it's growing worse every day. If you don't look out you'll pass out through it, but if you went right to work, you could be cured of it, before it gets too bad."

"What could I do about it?" he asked. "The doctors don't help me much."

”Of course they don’t. You haven’t been to the right ones. I was an Indian doctor, and I can see just what’s the matter with you. You need a certain kind of herb I used to use when I was on the flesh-plane in Idaho.”

”Can’t you help me, then?”

”Oh, I’ve got to go now, they’re calling to me. So good-by.” Another wriggle and Madam Spoll was herself again.

”Well, what did you get?” she asked when she recovered.

”Why, don’t you know?”

”No more’n a babe unborn,” she said. ”I was in a dead trance, and I never remember anything that happens. I hope little Eva didn’t tease you any.”

”Who is the other one—Luella?”

”Why, she’s an Indian princess that passed out about ten years back. She’s got a great gift of diagnosing cases. She’s helped my sitters a good deal.”

”She told me something about my trouble.”

”You mean about the gray-haired lady or the child?”

”Oh, no, about my leg!”

”Did she, now? Well, what did I tell you! Seems to me you *do* look peaked and pale, like you was enjoying poor health. I noticed it when you first come in. I don’t believe your blood’s good. Luella don’t prescribe ordinarily, but she can diagnose cases something wonderful. If I should tell you how many doctors in this town send their patients to me to be diagnosed before they dare to treat them themselves, you’d be surprised. Why, only the other day a lady come in here that was give up by four doctors for cancer, and Luella found it was only a boil in her kidney. She went to a magnetic healer and was cured in a week. Now she’s doing her own work and taking care of her babies, keeping boarders and plans to go camping this very month.”

”Who was the doctor?” Mr. Payson asked, much impressed.

”Doctor Masterson. He’s up on Market Street somewhere. Perhaps I’ve got a card of his around. I’ll see if I can find it.”

She walked over to the mantel and fussed among its dusty ornaments, saying, with apparent concern, as she rummaged:

”I don’t know as I ought to send you to Doctor Masterson, after all. You see, he ain’t a man I like very much, and few do, I find. He don’t stand very well with the Spiritual Society, nor with anybody else that I know of. He ain’t quite on the square, do you understand what I mean? To be perfectly frank, I think he’s a rascal. He has a bad reputation as a man, but all the same, he’s a good medium, nobody denies *that*, and he does accomplish some marvelous cures! If Luella said your complaint was serious, she knows, and it looks to me like you must go to Doctor Masterson or die of it, for if he can’t cure you, nobody can. He’s certainly a marvelous healer.”

She found the card at last, and brought it over to Mr. Payson.

"Here it is, but you better not tell him I give it to you, for we ain't on very good terms, and I wouldn't want him to know that I was sending him business."

As Mr. Payson rose to go, the medium stopped him with a gesture.

"Wait a minute," she said, passing her hand across her forehead. "Grace is here again and she says: Tell him that we're doing all we can on the spirit plane to help him and we want him to cheer up, for conditions are going to be more favorable in a little while, say, by the end of September.'"

She paused a moment and then added:

"Who's Clytie? Would that be the gray-haired lady?"

"What about Clytie?" He was instantly aroused.

"It don't seem to me like she's in the spirit, exactly. She's on the material plane. Let's see if I can get it more definite. Oh, Grace says she's your daughter."

"That's true."

"What do you think of that? I get it very plain now. Grace says she's watching over Clytie and will help her all she can."

"Can't she tell me anything more?"

The medium became normal. "No, I guess that's about all I can do for you to-day. I think you got some good tests, specially when you consider it was the first time. When you come again I expect we can do better, and I'm sure we can find that little boy you was interested in."

Mr. Payson rose and stood before her, sedate, dignified, and said, in his impressive platform-manner:

"I don't mind saying that I consider this very remarkable, Madam Spoll, very remarkable. I shall certainly call again sometime next week. I am much interested. Now, what is the charge, please?"

"Oh, we'll only call this three dollars. My price is generally five, but I'm sort of interested in your case and I want you to be perfectly satisfied. You can just ring me up any time and make an appointment with me."

She bowed him out with a calm, pleasant smile.

Down-stairs, Professor Vixley was awaiting her. With him was a shrewd-eyed, bald-headed, old man, with iron spectacles, his forehead wrinkled in horizontal lines, as if it had been scratched with a sharp comb. He had a three days' growth of red beard on his chin and cheeks, and his teeth, showing in a rift between narrow, bloodless lips, were almost black. He wore a greasy, plaid waistcoat, a celluloid collar much in need of the laundry and a ready-made butterfly bow.

"Why, how d'you do, Doctor Masterson?" said Madam Spoll. "I was hoping you would get around to-day, so's we could talk business. I suppose you put him wise about Payson, Vixley?"

”Certainly,” said the Professor. ”We’re goin’ to share and share alike, and work him together as long as it lasts. How did you get on with him to-day?”

”Oh, elegant,” was the answer, as she took a seat on the couch and put up her feet. ”I don’t believe we’re going to be able to use Flora, though.”

Professor Vixley’s black eyes glistened and he grinned sensuously. ”Why, couldn’t you get a rise out of him?”

Madam Spoll shook her huge head decidedly. ”No, that sort of game won’t work on him. He ain’t that kind. I went as far as I dared and give him a good chance, but he wouldn’t stand for it.”

”That’s all right, Gert,” said Vixley, ”I ain’t sayin’ but what you’re a fine figure of a woman, but he’s sixty and he might prefer somebody younger. You know how they go. Now, Flora, she’s a peach. She’d catch any man, sure! She knows the ropes, too, and she can deliver the goods all right. Look at the way she worked Bennett. Why, he was dead stuck on her the first time he seen her. She put it all over Fancy at the first rattle out of the box.”

Again Madam Spoll’s crisp, iron-gray curls shook a denial. ”See here, Vixley!” she exclaimed, ”I ain’t been in this business for eighteen years without getting to know something about men. Bennett was a very different breed of dog. I can see a hole in a ladder, and I know what I’m talking about. Payson ain’t up to any sort of fly game. He’s straight, and he’s after something different, you take my word for that. If there was anything in playing him that way, I’d be the first one to steer him on to Flora Flint, but he’d smell a mice if she got gay with him and he’d be so leary that we couldn’t do nothing more with him.”

”Well, what *did* you get, then?” Vixley asked.

”Did you wire it up for me?” Doctor Masterson added.

”Oh, I fixed you all right, Doc. He’ll show up at your place, sure enough. That accident tip worked all right and I got him going pretty good about his leg. He’s got your card and I give you a recommendation, I don’t think! You want to look out about what you say about me. We ain’t on speaking terms, you understand, and you’re a fakir, for fair. You can get back at me all you want, only don’t draw it hard enough to scare him away.”

Doctor Masterson grinned, showing his line of black fangs, and stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets placidly. ”Oh, I’m used to being knocked, don’t mind me. I’ll charge him for it. If I’m going to be the villain of this here drama, I’ll do it up brown.”

”Let’s see now. I s’pose you can probably hold him about two months, can’t you?” said Vixley, stroking his pointed black beard and spitting into the fireplace.

”Oh, not so long as that,” said Madam Spoll. ”We want to get to work on that book proposition. A month’s plenty long enough. They ain’t much money in it.”

”I don’t know.” Doctor Masterson shook his head. ”I’ve strung ’em for six months many’s the time.”

”Women, perhaps, but not men,” said the Madam.

”Well, maybe. Men are liable to be in more of a hurry, of course.”

”And women ain’t so much, with you, are they?”

The two men laughed cynically.

”Oh, they’s more ways to work women than men, that’s all,” the doctor replied. ”They’re more interested in their symptoms, and they like to talk about ’em. Then, again, they’s a more variety of complaints to choose from. I don’t say I ain’t had some pretty cases in my day.”

”Say!” Madam Spoll interposed. ”Who’s having a circle to-night—Mayhew?”

”Let’s see—it’s Friday, ain’t it? Yes, Mayhew and Sadie Crum,” Vixley replied.

”Well, I s’pose we got to put ’em wise about Payson,” said the Madam. ”He’s got the bug now and he’s pretty sure to make the rounds.”

”Can’t we keep him dark?” said Vixley. ”He’s our game and they might possibly ring him in.”

”No, that won’t do,” she answered emphatically. ”We got to play fair. They’ve always been square with us, and they won’t catch him, I’ll see to that. Mayhew’s straight enough and if Sadie tries to get gay with us, we can fix her and she knows it. And the more easy tests he gets, the better for us. It’ll keep him going, and so long as they don’t go too far, it’ll help us. The sooner he gets so he don’t want to impose test conditions, the better, and they can help convert him for us. I’ll ring up Mayhew now. I’ve got a good hunch that Payson will show up there to-night.”

She raised her bulk from the couch and went to the telephone by the window, calling for Mayhew’s number. When she had got it, she said:

”Is this number thirty-one? ... Yes, I’m number fifteen.... Sure! Oh, pretty good! ... I got a tip for you. I’m playing a six-year-old for the handicap, named Oliver. Carries sixty pounds, colors blue and gray, ten hands, jockey is Payson. He’s a ten-to-one shot. My wife Grace lived in Stockton. Do what you can for me, but keep your hands off, do you understand? Numbers forty and thirteen are with me in this deal and we’ll fix it for you if you stand in ... yes, all right! If he shows up let me know to-morrow morning, sure.”

She turned to the two men. ”I guess that’s all right now.”

”What’s all that about Stockton?” Vixley asked.

”He lived there once and there’s something more about his wife or something. Mayhew may fish it out of him, and if he does I’ll put you on.”

”I ain’t seen him yet,” said the doctor, ”but I guess I’ll recognize him. Sixty

years old, Oliver Payson, one hundred and sixty pounds, blue eyes and gray hair, six feet tall. Are you sure he's a ten-to-one, though? That cuts more ice than anything."

"Oh, sure!" said Madam Spoll. "Why, he swallowed the whole dose. He ain't doing no skeptic business. He thinks he's an investigator. Wait till you hear him talk and you'll understand. Not religious, you know, but a good old sort. He's caught all right, and if we jolly him along, we can polish him off good."

"They ought to be some good materializin' graft in that wife proposition. Grace, was it? We might turn him over to Flora for that." This from Vixley.

"I've been thinking of that," said Madam Spoll, "but I don't know whether he'll stand for it or not. It won't be anywheres near the snap it was with Bennett, in full daylight, and we'll have to have special players. I believe I can put my hands on one or two that can help us out, though. Miss French for one; she's got four good voices. Then there's a young girl I got my eye on that'll do anything I say. She's slim and she can work an eight-inch panel as slick as soap; and she's got a memory for names and faces that beats the directory. Besides, I believe she's really psychic. I've seen her do some wonderful things at mind-reading."

"No, can she really!" said Vixley.

"Oh, I used to be clairaudient myself when I begun," said Madam Spoll a little sadly. "I could catch a name right out of the air, half the time. I've gave some wonderful tests in my day, but you can't never depend upon it, and when you work all the week, sick or well, drunk or sober, you have to put water in the milk and then it's bound to go from you. You have to string 'em sooner or later. This girl's a dandy at it, though, but that'll all wait. There's enough to do before we get to that part of the game. I expect I had better go out and see Sadie Crum myself. I don't trust her telephone. She's got a ten-party line, what do you think of that?"

"A ten-party line don't do for business," said Vixley, "but it's pretty good for rubberin'. I've got some pretty good dope off my sister's wire. She spends pretty near all her time on it and it does come in handy."

"Oh, pshaw!" Madam Spoll looked disgusted. "I ain't got time to spend that way. What's the use anyway? They ain't but one rule necessary to know in this business, and that is: All men is conceited, and all women is vain."

"That's right!" Vixley assented. "Only I got another that works just as good; all women want to think they are misunderstood, and all men want to think they understand. Ain't that right, Doc?"

Masterson grinned. "I guess likely you ought to know, if anybody does. But I got a little one of my own framed up, too. How's this? All men want to be heroes and all women want to be martyrs."

The three laughed cynically together. They had learned their practical psy-

chology in a thorough school. Madam Spoll chuckled for some time pleasantly.

"You're the one had ought to write a book, Masterson. I'll bet it would beat out Payson's!"

"Lord!" said Vixley. "If I was to write down the things that have happened to me, just as they occurred—"

"It wouldn't be fit to print," Madam Spoll added. Vixley looked flattered.

"How about that pickle-girl?" he asked next.

"What's that?" said Doctor Masterson.

"Oh, a new graft of Gertie's. Did she come, Gert?"

"I should say she did," Madam Spoll replied. "And I got her on the string staking out dopes, too. Why, she's mixed up with a fellow at the Risdon Iron Works, and she don't dare to say her soul's her own since she told me."

"Nothin' like a good scandal to hold on to people by," Masterson remarked. "Where'd you get her?"

"Oh, she floated in. I give her a reading and found out she worked in a pickle factory down on Sixth Street where there are fifty or more girls. Soon as I found out the handle to work her by, I made her a proposition to tip off what's doing in her shop. She makes her little report, steers the girls up here, and then she comes round and tells me who they are and all about 'em."

"That's what I call a good wholesale business," said Vixley enviously. "I wish I could work it as slick as that. She uses the peek-hole in the screen, I suppose?"

"Sometimes, and sometimes she sits behind the window curtain up-stairs."

"You have to give yourself away, that's the only trouble," said Doctor Masterson.

"Oh, no," Madam Spoll remarked easily, "I just tell her that I can't always get everybody's magnetism, though of course I can always get hers. That gives her an idea she's important, don't you see? Then I can always lay anything suspicious to the Diakkas. Evil spirits are a great comfort."

"And anyways, if she should want to tell anything," Vixley suggested, "you can everlastingly blacklist her at the factory with what you know."

"Yes," Madam Spoll assented; "she's got a record herself, only she hasn't got sense enough to realize on it the way I do on mine. Is they any bigger fool than a girl that's in love?"

"Only a man that is," Vixley offered sagely.

"Oh, *men*!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "I believe they ain't more'n but three real ones alive to-day!"

The Professor's eyes snapped. "Well, they's women enough, thank the Lord!"

"Well," said Doctor Masterson, "I got to go to work; I'm keeping office hours

in the evening now and I have to hump. So long, Gertie, I'll be all ready for Payson, but you and Vixley have got to keep jollying him along. You want me to hold him about a month? I'll see what I can do, and if I get a lead, I'll let you know." He shook hands and left them.

"I ain't so sure of the Doc as I'd like to be," said Madam Spoll after he had gone.

"Nor me neither," Vixley replied. "We've got to watch him, I expect, but he'll do for a starter and we can fix him if he gets funny. There ain't nothin' like coöperation, Gertie."

As Madam Spoll sat down again to open a bottle of beer she had taken from beneath the wash-stand, Professor Vixley began to twirl his fingers in his lap and snicker to himself.

"What are you laughing at, Vixley?" she asked, pouring out two frothing glasses.

"I was just a-thinkin' about Pierpont Thayer. Don't you remember that dope who went nuts on spiritualism and committed suicide?"

"No, I don't just recall it; what about it?"

"Why, he got all wound up in the circles here—Sadie Crum, she had him on the string for a year, till he didn't know where he was at. He took it so hard that one day he up and shot hisself and left a note pinned on to his bed that said: 'I go to test the problem.' Lord! I'd 'a' sold every one of my tricks and all hers to him for a five-dollar bill! Why didn't he come to *me* to test his problem? He'd 'a' found out quick enough."

"Yes, and after you'd told him all about how it was done, I'll guarantee that I could have converted him again in twenty minutes."

"I guess that's right," said Vixley. "Them that want to believe are goin' to, and you can't prevent 'em, no matter what you do. They're like hop fiends—they've got to have their dope whether or no, and just so long as they can dream it out they're happy."

CHAPTER VIII
ILLUMINATION

It is easy to imagine the virtuous pride with which the civil engineer, Jasper O'Farrell, set about the laying out of the town of San Francisco in 1846. Here

was the ideal site for a city—a peninsula lying like a great thumb on the hand of the mainland, between the Pacific Ocean and a deep, land-locked bay, an area romantically configured of hills and valleys, with picturesque mountain and water views, the setting sun in the west and Mount Diablo a sentinel in the east; to the northward, the sea channel of the Golden Gate overhung by the foot-hills of Tamalpais.

There was still chance to amend and improve the old town site of Yerba Buena, the little Spanish settlement by the cove in the harbor, whose straight, narrow streets had been artlessly ruled by Francisco de Haro, alcalde of the Mission Dolores. He had marked out upon the ground, northerly, La Calle de la Fundacion and the adjacent squares necessary for the little port of entry in 1835. Four years later, when Governor Alvarado directed a new survey of the place, Jean Vioget extended the original lines with mathematical precision to the hills surrounding the valley; and it would have been possible to correct that artistic blunder of the simple-minded alcalde. But Jasper O'Farrell had seen military service with General Sutter; his ways were stern and severe, his esthetic impulses, if he had any, were heroically subdued. Market Street, indeed, he permitted to run obliquely, though it went straight as a bullet towards the Twin Peaks. The rest of the city he made one great checkerboard, in defiance of its natural topography.

As one might constrict the wayward fancies of a gipsy maiden to the cold, tight-laced ethics of a puritanical creed, so O'Farrell bound the city that was to be for ever to a gridiron of right-angled streets and blocks of parallelograms. He knew no compromise. His streets took their straight and narrow way, up hill and down dale, without regard to grade or expense. Unswerving was their rectitude. Their angles were exactly ninety degrees of his compass, north and south, east and west. Where might have been entrancingly beautiful terraces, rising avenue above avenue to the heights, preserving the master-view of the continent, now the streets, committed to his plan, are hacked out of the earth and rock, precipitous, inaccessible, grotesque. So sprawls the fey, leaden-colored town over its dozen hills, its roads mounting to the sky or diving to the sea.

So the stranger beholds San Francisco, the Improbable. Its pageantry is unrolled for all to see at first glance. Never was a city so prodigal of its friendship and its wealth. She salutes one on every crossing, welcoming the visitor openly and frankly with her western heart. In every little valley where the slack, rattling cables of her car-lines slap and splutter over the pulleys, some great area of the town exhibits a rising colony of blocks stretching up and over a shoulder of the hill to one side and to the other. Atop every crest one is confronted with farther districts lying not only beneath but opposite, across lower levels and hollows, flanking one's point of vantage with rival summits. San Francisco is agile in displaying her charms. As you are whirled up and down on the cable-car, she

moves stealthily about you, now lagging behind in steep declivities, now dodging to right or left in stretches of plain or uplifted hillsides, now hurrying ahead to surprise you with a terrifying ascent crowned with palaces. Now she is all water-front and sailors' lodging-houses; in a trice she turns Chinatown, then shocks you with a Spanish, Italian or negro quarter. Past the next rise, you find her whimsical, fantastic with garish flats and apartment houses. She lurks in and about thousands of little wooden houses, and beyond, she drops a little park into your path, discloses a stretch of shimmering bay or unveils magnificently the green, gently-sloping expanse of the Presidio.

No other city has so many points of view, none allures the stranger so with coquetry of originality and fantasy. Some cities have single dominant hills; but she is all hills, they are a vital part of herself. They march down into the town and one can not escape them, they stride north and west and must be climbed. The important lines of traffic accept these conditions and plunge boldly up and down upon their ways. And so, going or returning from his home, the city is always with the citizen—from Nob Hill he sees ships in the harbor and the lights of the Mission; from Kearney Street he keeps his view of Telegraph Hill and Twin Peaks—the San Franciscan is always in San Francisco, the city of extremes.

Of all this topographical chaos, the most spectacular spot is Telegraph Hill. To the eastward on the harbor side, it rises a sheer precipice over a hundred feet high, where a concrete company has quarried stone for three decades despite protest, appeal, injunction and the force of arms. To the north and west the hill falls away into a jumble of streets, cliffed and hollowed like the billows of the sea, crusted with queer little houses of the Latin quarter.

Francis Granthope, after the Chinese supper, had found himself swayed by an obsession. The thought of Clytie Payson was insistent in his mind. She troubled him. He recognized the symptom with a grim sense of its ridiculousness. It was, according to his theory, the first sign of love; but the idea of his being in love was absurd. Certainly he desired her, and that ardently. She stimulated him, she stirred his fancy. But he was jealous of his freedom; he would not be snared by a woman's eyes. Marriage, indeed, he had contemplated, but, to his mind, marriage was but a part of the game, a condition which would insure for him an attractive companion, a desirable standing; in short, a point of vantage. What had begun to chafe him, now, was a sort of compulsion that Clytie had put upon him. Somehow he could not be himself with her—he was self-conscious, timid—he was sensitive to her vibrations, he was swayed by her fine moods and impulses. Though the strain was gentle, still she coerced him. He felt an impulse to shake himself free.

In this temper, he decided, while he was at dinner, to see her, and, if he

could, regain possession of the situation, master her by the use of those arts by which he had so often won before. He would, at least, if he could not cajole her, assert his independence. No doubt he had been misled by her claims of intuitive power. He would put that to the test, as well.

It was already after sunset when he started across Union Square. Kearney Street was alight with electric lamps and humming with life. He walked north, passing the gayer retail shopping district towards the cheaper stores, pawnshops and quack doctors' offices to where the old Plaza, rising in a green slope to Chinatown, displayed the little Stevenson fountain with its merry gilded ship. Here the waifs and the strays of the night were already wandering, and he responded to frequent appeals for charity.

Beyond was the dance-hall district, where women of the town were promenading, seeking their prey; sailors and soldiers descended into subterranean halls of light and music. Then came the Italian quarter with its restaurants and saloons.

He paused where Montgomery Avenue diverged, leading to the North Beach, consulted his watch, and found that it was too early to call. He decided to kill time by going up Telegraph Hill, and kept on up Kearney Street.

Across Broadway, it mounted suddenly in an incline so steep, that ladder-like frameworks flat upon the ribbed concrete sidewalks were necessary for ascent. Two blocks the hill rose thus, encompassed by disconsolate and wretched little houses, with alleys plunging down from the street into the purlieus of the quarter; then it ran nearly level to the foot of the hill. The track there was up steps and across hazardous platforms, clambering up and up to a steep path gullied by the winter rains, and at last, by a stiff climb, to the summit of the hill.

From here one could see almost the whole peninsula, the town falling away in waves of hill and valley to the west. The bay lay beneath him, the docks flat and square, as if drawn on a map, red-funneled steamers lying alongside. In the fairway, vessels rode at anchor, lighted by the moon. The top of the hill was commanded by a huge, castellated, barn-like white structure which had once been used as a pleasure pavilion, but was now deserted, save by a rascally herd of tramps. At a near view its ruined, deserted grandeur showed unkempt and dingy. By its side, a city park, crowning the crest, scantily cultured and improved, indicated the first rude beginning of formal arrangement. Moldering, displaced concrete walls and seats showed what had been done and neglected.

He skirted the eastern slope of the hill, went up and down one-sided streets, streets that dipped and slid longitudinally, streets tilted transversely, keeping along a path at the top till he came to the cliff.

Here was the prime scandal of the town, naked in all its horror. The quarrymen had, with their blasting, robbed the hill inch by inch, foot by foot and acre by acre. Already a whole city block had disappeared, caving gradually away to

tumble to the talus of gravel at the foot of the steep slope. For years, the neighborhood had been terrorized by this irresistible, ever-approaching fate. The edge of the precipice drew nearer and nearer the houses, bit off a corner of the garden here, ate away a piece of fence there, till the danger-line approached the habitations themselves. Nor did it stop there; it crept below the floors, it sapped the foundations till the house had to be abandoned. Then with a crash, some afternoon, the whole structure would fall into the hollow. House after house had disappeared, family after family had been ruined. The crime was rank and outrageous, but it had not been stopped.

As Granthope walked, he saw bits of such deserted residences. Here a flight of stone steps on the verge of the height, there fences running giddily off into the air or drain-pipes, broken, sticking over the edge. The hazardous margin was now fenced off—at any moment a huge mass might slip away and slide thundering below. At the foot of the cliff stood the lead-colored building housing the stone-crusher, whose insatiate appetite had caused this sacrifice of property. It was ready to feed again on the morrow.

He walked to the edge and looked down a sharp incline, a few rods away from the most dangerous part of the cliff. He was outside the fence, now, with nothing between him and the slope. As he stood there, a dog barked suddenly behind him. He turned—his foot slipped upon a stone, twisted under him, and he fell outward. He clutched at the loose dirt, but could not save himself and rolled over and over down the slope. Forty feet down his head struck a boulder and he lost consciousness.

He came to himself with a blinding, splitting pain in his head; his body was stiff and cold in the night air. He lay half-way down the slope, his hands and face were scratched and bleeding, his clothes were torn. He was motionless for some time, endeavoring to collect his senses, wondering vaguely what to do. Then he stirred feebly, tried his limbs to see what damage had been done and found he had broken no bones. His ankle, however, was badly strained, and it ached severely. As he sank back again, far down the hill towards the crusher building, a voice came up to him:

”Francis! Francis!”

It penetrated his consciousness slowly. Still a little dazed, he rolled over and looked down to the deserted street below. He tried to rise and his ankle crumpled under him. He answered as loud as he could cry, then lay there watching.

Sansome Street lay bare in the moonlight. On the near side the hill sloped up to him from the rock crusher. On the other side was a row of gaunt buildings—a pickle factory, a fruit-canning works, and so on, to the dock. An electric car

flashed by and, as it passed, he saw a woman moving to and fro at the foot of the talus.

He sat up as well as he could on the slope and again shouted down to her. She stopped instantly. Then, waving her hand, she started to scramble up the slippery gravel of the hill.

As she ascended, she had to zigzag this way and that to avoid sliding back. Part of the time, she was forced to go almost on hands and knees. The moon was behind her, throwing her face into shadow. She climbed steadily without calling to him again. When she was a few yards away, he cried to her:

"Miss Payson! Is that you?"

"Yes! Don't try to move, I'm coming."

She reached him at last and knelt before him anxiously. Her tawny, silken hair was loosened under her hat and streamed down into her eyes. She had on a red cloth opera cloak with an ermine collar; this was partly open, showing, underneath, a white silk evening dress cut low in the neck. Her hands were covered with white suede gloves to the elbow—they were grimy and torn into ribbons. Her white skirt, too, was ripped and soiled. She put her hand to her hair and tossed it back, then took his hands in hers.

"Are you hurt?" she asked anxiously.

"Not much. I believe I was stunned. I have no idea how long I've been here. What time is it?"

"It is almost eleven. Oh, I'm so glad I found you! I'm going to help you down." She stooped lower to assist him.

"But I don't understand," he said in astonishment. "How in the world did you happen to come? What does it all mean?" His bewilderment was comic enough to draw forth her flashing smile.

"We'll talk about that afterwards. We must get down this hill first. Oh, I hope there are no bones broken."

"Oh, no, I'm all right," he insisted, "but it's like a dream! Let me think—I was up on Telegraph Hill, and I slipped and fell over—then I must have been unconscious until you came.—How did you happen to come? I don't understand. It's so mysterious."

"You must get up now. See if you can walk." She gently urged him. "I'll explain it all when you're safe down there where we can get help."

With her assistance he raised himself slowly, but the pain in his ankle was too great for him to support his own weight. He dropped limply down again and smiled up at her.

"I think I might make it if I had a crutch of some kind—any stick would do."

"Wait, I'll see if I can find one."

She left him, to go down, slipping dangerously at times, using her hands to

save herself. Part-way down she found an old broom—the straw was worn to a mere stub, and this she brought back.

With its aid and that of her steady arm, he hobbled down foot by foot. He slid and fell with a suppressed groan more than once, but she was always ready to lift him and support his weight in the steeper descents. The lower part of the hill fanned out to a more gradual slope, where it was easier going. They reached the sidewalk at last and he sat down upon a large rock almost exhausted.

Just then an electric car came humming down Sansome Street. In an instant she was out on the track signaling for it to stop.

"If you pass a cab or a policeman, please send them down here!" she commanded. "This gentleman has met with an accident and we must have help to take him home."

The conductor nodded, staring at her, as she stood in her disheveled finery, splendidly bold in the moonlight, like a dismounted Valkyr. The car plowed on and left them. Calmly she stripped off her slashed gloves and repaired the disorder of her hair. A long double necklace of pearls caught the moonlight, and in the front breadth of her gown, a rent showed a pale blue silken skirt beneath. Granthope, bedraggled and smeared with blood and dust, was as grotesque a figure. The humor of the picture struck them at once, and they burst into laughter.

Then, "How did you know?" he said.

She became serious immediately. "It was very strange. I was at a reception with Mr. Cayley. I happened to be sitting on a couch by myself, when—I don't know how to describe the sensation—but I saw you, or felt you, lying somewhere, on your back. I was so frightened I didn't know what to do. I knew something had happened, yet I didn't know where to find you. I gave it up and tried to forget about it, but I couldn't—it was like a steady pain—then I knew I had to come. It seemed so foolish and vague that I didn't want to ask Mr. Cayley to go on such a wild-goose chase with me. Father understands me better and if he'd been there I would have brought him along. So I slipped out alone, put on my things and took a car down-town. I seemed to know by instinct where to get off—you should have seen the way the conductors stared at me!—and I turned right down this way, trusting to my intuitions. I seemed to be led directly to the foot of the cliff here where I first called you."

"Yes, you called 'Francis,' didn't you?" he said, looking up at her in wonder.

"Did I? I don't know what I said—if I did it was as instinctively done as all the rest. We'll have to go into business together." Her laugh was nervous and excited.

He frowned. "Miss Payson, I don't know how to thank you—it was a splendid thing to do."

"Oh, it has been a real adventure—almost my first. But it's not over yet. I

must take you home now. What a sight I am! You, too! Wait—let me clean you off a little."

She stooped over him and, with a lace handkerchief, lightly brushed his face free of the dust, wiped the blood away, then, with gentle fingers, smoothed his black hair. Both trembled slightly at the contact. She stopped, embarrassed at her own boldness, then stood more constrained and self-conscious, till the rattling wheels of a carriage were heard. A hack came clattering up over the cobble-stones and drew up at the curb. The driver jumped down from his seat.

There were a few words of explanation and direction, then the man and Clytie, one on either side, helped Granthope into the vehicle. She followed and the cab drove off up-town. For a few moments the two sat in silence, side by side. An electric lamp illuminated her face for an instant as the carriage whirled past a corner. Her eyes were shining, her lips half open, as she looked at him.

The sight of her, and the excitement of her romantic intervention, made him forget his pain. He felt her spell again, and now with this appearance how much more strongly! There was no denying her magic after such a bewildering manifestation. The event had, also, brought her humanly more near to him—he had felt the strong touch of her hand, her breath on his face—the very disorder of her attire seemed to increase their intimacy. He leaned back to enjoy the full flavor of her charm. He was suddenly aroused by her placid, even voice:

"Mr. Granthope, there's one thing you didn't tell me the other day, when you described that scene at Madam Grant's."

He caught the name with surprise, remembering that he had never spoken it to her. In her mention of it he felt a vague alarm.

"What?" He heard his voice betray him.

"That there was a little boy with her, that day." Clytie turned to him, and for the first time he felt a sudden fear that she would find him out.

"Was there a little boy there? How do you know?"

She kept looking at him, and away, as she spoke. In the drifting of her glances, however, her eyes seemed to seek his continuously, rather than continually to escape. "Quite by accident—never mind now. But this is what is most strange of all—I didn't tell you, before—while I was there, that time, so many years ago—you know what strange fancies children have—you know how, if one is at all sensitive to psychic influence, how much stronger and how natural it seems when one is young—well, all the while, I seemed to feel there was some one else there—some one I couldn't see!"

She was too much for him, with such intuition. His one hope was, now, that she would not plumb the whole depth of his deceit. He managed his expression, drawing back into the shadow.

"Did you know who it was, there?"

”No—only that I was drawn secretly to some one who was there, near me, out of sight. Of course, I’ve forgotten much of the impression, but now, as I remember it, it almost seems to me as if this little boy—whoever he was—must be related to me in some vague way—as if we had something in common. I wish I could find out about it. You know better the rationale of these things—they come to me only in flashes of intuition, suddenly, when I least expect them.”

He sought desperately to divert her from the subject, summoning to his aid the tricks experience had taught him. First to his hand came the ruse of personality.

”You called me ’Francis’ before—that was strange, for few people call me that or Frank nowadays—only one or two who have known me a long time.”

”Ah, I didn’t know what I was saying. It was strange, wasn’t it? But you won’t accuse me of coquetry at such a time, will you? You were in danger—I thought only of that.”

”Oh, I don’t mind,” he said playfully.

”Nor do I.”

”You’ll call me Francis?”

She smiled. ”Every time I rescue you.”

There was evidently no lead for him there. He had to laugh, and give it up. Clytie’s mood grew more serious.

”Mr. Cayley was telling me how interesting you were after the ladies had left; really, he was quite complimentary. He told me all about that absurd Bennett affair you talked about.”

”Yes, it was an extraordinary case.” He wondered what was coming.

”I mean the story was absurd to hear, but I can’t help wondering what sort of people they were who would deceive an old man like that. It seems pitiful to me that any one could have the heart to do it—and for money, too.”

Granthope cursed his indiscretion. Must she find this out, too? Was no part of his life, past or present, safe from her? If so, he might as well give her up now. It seemed impossible to conceal anything from her clear vision. But he still strove to put her off.

”Oh, these people were weak and ignorant—we haven’t all the same advantages or the same sensitiveness to honor and truth. They were used to this sort of thing, hardened to it, and perhaps unconscious of their baseness by a constant association with such deceptions.”

”But didn’t Mr. Bennett have any friends to warn him—to show these people up in their true light?”

”Oh, that was no use. It was tried, yes; that is, he was shown his carriage, for instance, after it was sold, but he refused to believe it was the same one. He confessed that it was just like it, but he knew that his was then on the planet

Jupiter. I don't think the mediums themselves could have convinced him."

"Think of it! It makes their swindling even worse. If he had doubted, if he had tried to trap them, it wouldn't be quite so bad, it would have been a battle of brains—but to impose on such credulity, to make a living by it—oh, it's unthinkable!"

"Well, after all, they made him happy. In a way, they were telling him only pleasant lies, as a parent might tell a child about Santa Claus and the fairies."

He could not keep it up much longer. It was too perilous; and he played for her sympathy. "After all, I suppose my business is about as undignified."

"But it's really a science, isn't it? Mr. Cayley gave me to understand that you had a convincing theory to explain all personal physical characteristics."

"There's a little more to palmistry than that, I think—an instinctive feeling for character."

"Of course. You must have felt my personality intuitively, or you would never have been able to get it so well. But it was most extraordinary of all, I think, the way you got my name. How do you account for that?"

He felt the net closing about him.

"Oh, I'm sometimes clairaudient."

She took it up with animation. "Are you? I must try to send you a message!"

"Haven't you?" he said, still attempting to keep the talk less serious. "All day I have heard you saying, 'You must learn.' But learn what?"

"It seems so queer to me that you shouldn't know, yourself."

"Then tell me. Explain."

"No, you'll find out, I think."

He waited a while, for a twinge of pain gave him all he could do to control himself. Somehow it sobered him. "I wish I dared to be friends with you."

She gave him her hand simply and he returned its cordial pressure. He was sincere enough, now. He was not afraid of mere generalities.

"I'm not worthy of your friendship," he said. "I'd hate to have you know how little I am worth it. If you knew how I have lived—what few chances I have had to know any one really worth while. I've never yet had a friend who was able to understand me."

"I have given you my hand," she replied, "and I shall not withdraw it. It is my intuition, you see, and not my reason, that makes me trust you."

They relapsed for a while into silence. Then, as the cab turned up into Geary Street, past the electric lights, she went on as if she had been thinking it out to herself.

"You know what I said the other day about its being easier to say real things at the first meeting. I am afraid I said too much then. But I was impatient. I felt that I might never see you again and I wanted to give you the message. Now,

when I feel sure that we're going to be friends, I am quite willing to wait and let it all come about naturally. The only thing I demand is honesty."

"Is that all?" he asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

She laughed unaffectedly. "Are you finding it so hard?"

The cab drew up to the curb at the door of his rooms. Immediately she became solicitous, helping him to alight. He used the broom for a crutch, and, scratched and torn, his clothes still stained with clay, she in her harlequin of dirt and rags, they presented an extraordinary spectacle under the electric light, to a man on the sidewalk who was approaching leisurely, swinging his stick. As they reached the entrance he drew nearer, making as if to speak to them; instead, he lifted his hat, stared at them and passed on. It was Blanchard Cayley.

Clytie's face went red. Cayley turned for an instant to look at them again and then proceeded on his way. Granthope did not notice him.

Clytie disregarded his protest, and, saying that she would see him safely to his room, at least, accompanied him up-stairs.

As he fumbled for his key in his pocket, the office door was suddenly opened and Fancy Gray appeared upon the threshold.

Her eyebrows went up and Granthope's went down. Her eyes had flown past him to stare at Clytie. The two women confronted each other for a tense moment without a word.

Fancy had taken off her jacket; her hair was braided down her back. She wore an embroidered linen blouse turned away at the neck, and pinned over her heart was a little silver chatelaine watch with a blue dial. It rose and fell as she drew breath suddenly.

"Mr. Granthope has met with an accident," Clytie announced, the first to recover from the shock of surprise.

"I should say he had," was her comment, "and you, too?" Then she laughed nervously. "It must have been a draw."

Clytie did not catch the allusion. "I happened to find him and brought him back," she explained. "He had fallen down the cliff on Telegraph Hill."

As Granthope limped in, Fancy put a few more wondering inquiries, which he answered in monosyllables. Seeing Fancy so disconcerted, Clytie left Granthope in a chair and turned directly to her with a conciliatory gesture.

"We always seem to meet in queer circumstances, Miss Gray, don't we?" she said kindly. "It's really most fortunate that you happened to be here at work. I don't quite know what I should have done, all alone, but I'm sure you will do all that's necessary for Mr. Granthope, better than I. I must hurry home; father will be expecting me."

During this speech, Fancy's eyes had filled, and now they shone soft with gratitude.

”Oh,” she said, ”I can fix him up all right. It’s only a bad strain, I guess.”

Granthope watched the two women in silence.

”Well, then, I’ll go.” Clytie walked to the mirror, smiled with Fancy at the image she saw there, touched her hat and rubbed her face with her handkerchief. Then she held out her hand with a charming simplicity.

”I do wish you’d come and see me sometime, Miss Gray!” she said.

Fancy choked down something in her throat before she replied.

”I will—sometime—sure. If you *really* want to see me.”

”Yes, I really do.” Clytie smiled again. Then she went up to Granthope. ”Good night, Mr. Granthope, I’m sure I’m leaving you in kind hands. I hope it won’t prove a serious injury. And—remember!” Then, bowing to both, she left the room and went down to her cab.

Two vertical lines were furrowed in Granthope’s brow. He turned to Fancy with a look that barely escaped being angry.

”God! I’m sorry you were here!”

”Yes? That’s easily remedied; you only have to say the word.”

”Too late, now!” His tone was sad rather than cruel.

”I hardly expected you to bring home company—” she began.

”I’m sure it was as much a surprise to me—”

”I’m sorry, Frank, but I had to see you—Vixley was here after you left.”

He groaned with the pain his ankle gave him and she flew to him and knelt before his chair.

”Oh, Frank, I’m so sorry. What can I do for you? First, let me take off your shoe and attend to your foot. I can run out and get something to put on it. It was awkward, my being here—but I don’t mind on my own account, so much. If it embarrassed you, forgive me.”

”It’s worse than that,” he said.

”You mean—that you *care* for her?”

”I don’t know what I do mean—but you’ll have to go.”

She looked up at him for a moment, searching his drawn face.

”I will, just as soon as I’ve bound up your ankle and got your couch ready. It won’t take long.”

”No, I can attend to that myself. I’ll telephone for a doctor and have him fix me up. You must go now.”

”All right. Just wait till I put on my jacket and do up my hair.”

Walking off, proudly, she opened the door of the closet and stood before the mirror there, while he, a limp, relaxed figure in the arm-chair, watched her as she unbraided her hair and combed it out in a magnificent coppery cascade to her waist. Tossing her head, she said:

”Vixley’s laying for you, Frank! You’d better watch out for him. It’s some-

thing shady about the old man's past, I believe. Anyway, I hope you'll fool 'em, Frank!"

With this complication of his position, he bent his head on his hand as if he were weary. "I don't know what I'm going to do," he said. "It's too much for me, I'm afraid."

"What's the matter?" said Fancy solicitously. "Didn't I work it right? Honest, Frank, I didn't give you away a bit—I didn't tell him a word. You know my work isn't lumpy—I just pumped him. I beat him at his own game, and it didn't taste so good, either. Oh, I'm so sorry if I did anything to hurt you. I'd die first!"

As he did not answer her she came over to him and knelt on the floor, seizing his hand. Her tears fell upon it.

"You've been mighty good to me, Frank, you sure have! You took me off the streets when I was starving. I don't know whatever would have become of me. I suppose I'd gone right down the line, if it hadn't been for you. You're the only friend I've got, and I only wish I could do something to prove how grateful I am. Honest, I thought I was helping you out when I kept Vixley here. You don't think—you don't think I *like* him—do you? Don't say *that*, Frank!"

She was speaking in gasps now; her tears were unrestrained. Her hand clutched his so fiercely that he could scarcely bear the pain. He did not dare to look at her.

"I've always been square with you, Frank, haven't I?"

He patted her hand softly.

"We've kept to the compact, haven't we? The compact we made at Alma? You trust me, don't you?"

"Of course! You're all right—you're true blue. I couldn't distrust you. You'll always be the Maid of Alma. It was a game thing you did for me. Nobody else would have done it. You have helped me, but I can't tell you what a corner I'm in." He paused and looked at her intensely. "Fancy—you haven't forgotten—have you?"

She forced a trembling smile, as she said bravely:

"'No fair falling in love'?"

"Yes."

She shook out a laugh and stroked his hand, looking up at him through her tears. "Oh, no danger of that, Frank. You don't know me. I'm all right, sure! Only—and I owe you so much! You've taught me everything. If I could only do something to prove that I'm worth it."

"You can—that's the trouble. I believe I'm almost cur enough to ask it of you."

"What is it? Tell me, quick! You know I'd black your boots for you. I'd do anything."

”Did you notice Miss Payson’s face when she saw you?”

”Yes.” Fancy dropped her head.

”I’d hate to have her suspect—if she thought—”

”Oh!” She sprang to her feet and stood as proud as a lioness. ”Is that it? You want me to go for good?” Even now there was no anger in her look or tone. The little silver watch heaved up and down on her breast.

He sought for a kind phrase. ”I’m afraid it would be better—it makes me feel like a beast—of course, you understand—” his eyes went to her, pleading.

”Then it *is* Miss Payson? Oh, Frank, why didn’t you tell me! You might have trusted me! You ought to have known better! Haven’t I always said that when the woman who could make you happy did come, how glad I’d be for you?”

”You’re really not hurt, then? I was afraid—”

”Poor old Frank! You goose! Of course not—it makes me sorry to think of leaving you, that’s all. Never mind—there’s nothing in the race but the finish! I’m all right.” She had become a little hysterical in her actions, but he was too distracted to notice it.

”I’ll let you have all the money you want—I’ll get you a good place——” he began.

She shook her head decidedly. ”Cut that out, please, Frank; but thanks, all the same. If I ever want any money, I’ll come to you. Why shouldn’t I? But not now. Don’t pay me to go away—that sounds rotten. I’ll get a position all right. Didn’t I turn down that secretary’s place only last week? But I guess I’ll travel on my looks for a while. I’m flush.”

”I hope I can tell her all about this, sometime,” he said wearily.

”Bosh! What’s the use? Thank God some women know that some women are square without being told. Men seem to think we’re all cats. Even women talk of each other as if they were a different sort of human animal. But not Miss Payson—she’s a thoroughbred. I can see *that* all right. You can’t fool Fancy Gray about petticoats. I take off my hat to her. She’s got every woman *you* ever had running after you beaten a mile. Don’t you worry—she’ll never be surprised to find that a woman can be square. Well, I’ll fade away then.”

As she talked she buttoned up her jacket and stuck the hat pin in her hair. Now her eyes grew dreamier and she went over and sat on the arm of his chair and put her hand on his hair affectionately, saying:

”Say, Frank, I don’t know—after all, perhaps sometime you might just tell her this—sometime when the thing’s all going straight, when she’s got over—well, what I saw in her eyes to-night—when she finds out what you’re worth—when she really knows how good you are—you just tell her this—say: ’There’s one thing about Fancy Gray, she always played fair!’ She’ll know then; but just now, you can be careful of her—watch out what you do with her, she’s going to suffer

a whole lot if you don't. You know something about women, but you'll find out that when you're sure enough in love you'll need it all, and what you know isn't a drop in the bucket to what you've got to learn. I hope you'll get it good and hard. It'll do you good. You only know one side now. You'll learn the rest from her. She's not the sort to do things half-way. When she begins to go she'll go the limit."

She leaned over him. "You might give me one kiss just to brace me up, will you? It may take the taste of Vixley off my lips. Well, so long. Don't take any Mexican money! If there's anything I can do, let me know." She rose and tossed a smile at him with her old jaunty grace. Then she patted him on the cheek and went swiftly out.

CHAPTER IX
COMING ON

By artful questions, and apparently innocent remarks to lure his confidence, by a little guess-work, more observation, and a profound knowledge of the frailties of human nature, Madam Spoll had plied Oliver Payson to good advantage.

She got a fact here, a suggestion there, and, one at a time, she arranged these items in order, and with them wove a psychological web strong enough to work upon. It was partly hypothetical, partly proved, but, slender and shadowy as it was, upon it was portrayed a faint image of her victim—a pattern sufficient for her use. Every new piece of information was deftly used to strengthen the fabric, until at last it was serviceable as a working theory of his life and could be used to astonish and interest him. Of this whole process he was, of course, unaware, so cleverly disguised was her method, so skilful was her tact. She never frightened her quarry, never permitted him to suspect her. Her errors she frankly acknowledged and set down to the ignorance of her guides. She had, indeed, many holes by which she could escape—set formulæ for covering her petty failures.

After two or three interviews, she had filled up almost all the weak spots in her web, and was prepared to encompass her victim by wiles with which to bleed him.

Mr. Payson had gone away from his first interview limping slightly more than usual, and had talked considerably about his ailment to his daughter. Clytie, not knowing what had increased his hypochondria, was inclined to laugh at his

fears and complaints. He found a more sympathetic listener in Blanchard Cayley, who took him quite seriously and discoursed for an hour in Payson's office upon the possibilities of internal disorders, such as the medium had mentioned.

The result was a visit to Doctor Masterson.

The healer's quarters were two flights up in one of the many gloomy buildings on Market Street, half lodging-rooms, half offices, inhabited by chiropodists, cheap tailors, "painless" dentists and such riffraff. The stair was steep and the halls were narrow. The doctor's place was filled with a sad half-light that made the rows of bottles on the shelves, the skull in the corner and the stuffed owl seem even more mysterious. The room was dusty and ill-kept; the floor was covered with cold linoleum.

The magnetic healer's shrewd eyes glistened and shifted behind his spectacles; the horizontal wrinkles in his forehead, under his bald pate, drew gloomily together as Mr. Payson poured out the story of his trouble. For a time the doctor said nothing. Then he took a vial full of yellow liquid from his table, carried it to the window, held it to the light, examined it solemnly and put it back. He sat down again and looked Mr. Payson over. Then he tilted back in his chair, stuck a pair of dirty thumbs in the armholes of his plaid waistcoat, and said, "H'm!" Finally, his thin lips parted in a grisly smile showing his blackened teeth.

His victim watched, anxiously waiting, with his two hands on the head of his cane. The gloom appeared to affect his spirits; he seemed ready to expect the worst.

Doctor Masterson took off his spectacles and wiped them on a yellow silk handkerchief. "It looks pretty serious to me," he said, "but I calculate I can fix you up. It'll cost some money, though. Ye see, it's this way: I'm controlled by an Indian medicine-man named Hasandoka and his band o' sperits. Now, in order to bring this here psychic force to bear on your case, it's bound to take considerable o' my time and their time, and I'll have to go to work and neglect my reg'lar patients. It takes it out o' me, and I can't do but just so much or I peter out. I'll go into a trance and see what Hasandoka has to say, and then you'll be in a condition to know what to decide. O' course, you understand, I ain't no doctor and don't claim to be, but I got control of a powerful psychic force that guides me in my treatment, and I never knew it to fail yet. If my band o' sperits can't help you, nobody can, and you better go to work and make your will right away. See?"

Mr. Payson saw the argument and manifested a desire to proceed with the investigation.

The doctor loosened his celluloid collar and closed his eyes. In a minute or two he appeared to fall asleep, breathing heavily.

Then, through him, the great Hasandoka spoke, in the guttural dialect such as is supposed to be affected by the American Indian, using flowery metaphors

punctuated by grunts.

The tenor of his communication was that Mr. Payson was undoubtedly afflicted with something which was termed a ”complication.” He went into fearsome prophecies as to its probable progress downward to the feet, upward to the brain and forward to the kidney, with minor excursions to the liver and lights. The patient’s spine was preparing itself for paralysis; it seemed that death was imminent at any moment. Hasandoka expressed his willingness to accept the case, however, and promised to effect a radical cure in a month at most, if treatment were begun immediately, before it was too late. The cure would be accomplished by massage, used in connection with a potent herb, known only to the primitive Indian tribes. After this message Hasandoka squirmed out of the medium’s body and the soul of Doctor Masterson squirmed in again. There were the customary spasmodic gestures of awakening before he opened his eyes.

”Well, what did he tell you?” he asked.

Mr. Payson repeated the communication in a dispirited tone.

”Bad as that, is it?” said Masterson. ”One foot in the grave, so to speak. Well, I tell you what I’ll do. I’m interested in your case, for if I can go to work and cure you it’ll be more or less of a feather in my cap. See here; I won’t charge you but fifty dollars a week till you’re cured, and if you ain’t a well man in thirty days, I’ll hand your money back. That’s a fair business proposition, ain’t it? I guarantee to put all my time on your case.”

Mr. Payson gratefully accepted the terms. A meeting for a treatment was appointed for the next day.

This time Doctor Masterson was prepared for his victim.

[image]

Doctor Masterson was prepared for his victim

”I’ve been in direct communication with Hasandoka,” he said, ”and I’m posted on your case now, and have full directions what to do. The first thing is a good course of massage. Now, which would you prefer to have, a man or a woman? I got a girl I sometimes employ who’s pretty slick at massage. She’s good and strong and willing and as pretty as a peach, if I do say it—she’s got a figger like a waxwork—I think p’raps Flora would help you more’n any one—”

Mr. Payson shook his head coldly, saying that he preferred a man.

”Oh, o’ course,” Doctor Masterson said apologetically, shrugging his shoulders, ”if you don’t want her I guess I better go to work and do the rubbing myself, if you’d be better satisfied.”

The Indian herb prescribed by Hasandoka was, it appeared, a rare, secret and expensive drug. The doctor's price was ten dollars a bottle, in addition to his weekly charge for treatment. He presented Mr. Payson with a bottle of dark brown fluid of abominable odor.

The treatment went on thrice a week, the massage being alternated with trances in which the doctor, under the cogent spell of the medicine man, uttered many strange things. The whole effect of this was to reassure Mr. Payson upon the fact that powerful influences were at work for his especial benefit.

Whether induced by Hasandoka's aid or by Doctor Masterson's suggestion, an improvement in the patient's mind, at least, did come. He was met, the following week, by the magnetic healer in his rooms with a congratulatory smile. Doctor Masterson inaugurated the second stage of his campaign.

"Say, you certainly are looking better, ain't you? How's the pain, disappearing, eh? I thought we could bring you around. Yesterday I was in a trance four hours on your case and it took the life out o' me something terrible. I knew then that I was drawing the disease out o' you. You just go to work and walk acrost the room, and see if you ain't improved. We got you started now, and all we got to do is to keep it up till you're absolutely well."

Blanchard Cayley also seemed interested when Mr. Payson told him of the improvement.

"You certainly are growing younger every day," said Cayley. "I don't know how you manage it at your age, in this vile weather, too, but I notice you've got more color and more spring in you. You're a wonder!"

One afternoon, during the third week of his treatment, as Mr. Payson was seated in his own office, the door opened and a chubby, roly-poly figure of a woman, with soft brown eyes and hair, came in timidly and looked about, seemingly perplexed and embarrassed. She walked up to his desk.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but could you tell me where Mr. Bigelow's office is, in this building? I thought it was on this floor, but I can't find his name on any door."

He replied, scarcely glancing at her: "Down at the end of the corridor, on the left."

She stood watching him for a moment as he continued his writing, and then ventured to say:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but ain't you the gentleman that come to me some time ago to have your life read?"

He looked up now and recognized her as the one who had initiated him into the occult world, through the medium of the "Egyptian egg."

"Why, yes." He smiled benevolently. "You're Miss Ellis, aren't you?"

She seemed pleased. "Yes," she answered; "I hope you don't mind my re-

minding you of it, but I took an interest in your case more than usual, on account of your reading being so different, and I was surprised to see you here. You're looking much better than you did then. When you come into my place, I said to myself, 'There's a man that'll pass out pretty soon if he don't take care of himself.' You seemed so miserable. Why, I wouldn't know you now, you're so much improved. You must have gained flesh, too. Well, I congratulate you. If you ever want another reading, come around—here's my card, but perhaps you've tried Madam Spoll since. She's the best in the business. I go to her myself sometimes."

He walked to the door with her and bowed her out politely.

A week after he made another visit to Madam Spoll. The medium was gracious and congratulatory.

"Why, you look like a new man, that's a fact!" she said. "Between you and me, I never really expected that you could recover, but I knew if anybody could help you it would be Masterson. I suppose he come pretty high, didn't he? Two hundred! For the land sake! I'm sorry you had to fall into the hands of that shark, but, after all, it's cheaper than being dead, ain't it? A desperate disease requires a desperate remedy, they say. I wouldn't take you for more than forty years old now, in spite of your gray hairs.

"Now," she continued, "you've had experience and you're in a position to know whether there's any truth in spiritualism or not. No matter what anybody tells you about fakes or tricks and all that nonsense—I don't say some so-called mediums ain't collusions—you've demonstrated the truth of it for yourself, and you've found out that we can do what we say. You can afford to laugh at the skeptics and these smart-Alecs who pretend to know it all. What we claim can be proved and you've proved it. Lord, I'd like to know where you'd be now if you hadn't. I've always said: 'Investigate it for yourself, and if you don't get satisfaction, leave it alone for them that do. Go at it in a frank and honest spirit and try to find out the truth, and you'll generally come out convinced.' I don't believe in no underhanded ways of going to work at it neither. If you was going to study up Christian Science, or Mo-homedism, we'll say, you wouldn't be trying to deceive them and giving false names and all, and why should you when you want to find out about the spirit world? What you want to do is to depend upon the character of the information you get, to test the truth of what we claim. You treat us square and we'll treat you square. We ain't infalliable, but we can help. Whatever is to be had from the spirit plane we can generally get it for you."

"I'm very much interested," Mr. Payson said. "There does seem to be something in it, and I want to get to the bottom of it. There are several things I'd like to get help on, too."

"Do you know, I knew they was something worrying you," she replied, smiling placidly. She laid her fingers to her silken thorax. "I felt your magnetism

right here when you came in, and I got a feeling of unpleasantness or worry. It ain't about a little thing either; it's an important matter, now, ain't it?"

Mr. Payson, affected by her sympathy, admitted that it was. Under his shaggy eyebrows, his cold eyes watched her anxiously, as if gazing at one who might wrest secrets from him. His belief in her had increased with every sitting, so that now the old man, gray and bald, in his judicial frock-coat, lost something of his influential manner and became more like a child before his teacher, swayed by every word that fell from her lips.

Her manner was half patronizing, half domineering. "What did I tell you? You feel as if, well, you don't quite know *what* to do, and you're saying to yourself all the time, 'Now, what *shall* I do?' That's just the condition I get."

"Do you think you could help me?"

"I don't know; I'll try. I ain't feeling very receptive to spirit influence today; I guess I overeat myself some; but then, again, I might be very successful; there's no telling. You just let me hold your hands a few minutes and I can see right off whether conditions are favorable or not."

He did so. Suddenly she turned her head to one side and spoke as if to an invisible person beside her.

"Oh, she's here, is she? What is it? She says she can't find him? Well, what about him? What? Shall I tell him that?"

She opened her eyes and drew a long breath.

"Luella is here and she says to tell you that Felicia wants to give you a message. Do you understand who I mean?"

"Yes, I know. She's the lady you spoke to me about before, with the white hair."

"Would her name be Felicia Grant?"

He assented timidly, as if fearing to acknowledge it.

"Well, Felicia says she has found the child—child, the one that was lost. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes. Go on!"

"Really, I don't like to tell you this, Mr. Payson—"

"Tell anything."

Madam Spoll dropped her voice, as if fearful of being overheard. "You was in love with her.

"Yes." He eyed her glassily.

"And you was the father of the child?"

He nodded, still staring.

Madam Spoll smiled complacently. "Well, Felicia says she has found the boy, and she's going to bring him to you as soon as conditions are favorable. She can't do it yet; the time ain't come for it. That's all I can get from her. But Luella

says you're worried about a book, and she wants to help you."

"How can she help?"

"Wait a minute." Madam Spoll smoothed her forehead with both hands for a while, then went on: "It seems that she can't work through me so well, it being what you might call a business affair, and she recommends that you try some one else, while I'll try to get the boy. I think a physical medium could help you more. There's Professor Vixley; he's something wonderful in a business way. I confess I can't comprehend it. Are you selling books?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, whatever it is, Vixley's the one to go to. He'll do well by you and you can trust him. I'll just write down his address; you go to see him and tell him I sent you, and I guarantee he'll give satisfaction. About the child, now, we'll have to wait. I shouldn't wonder if you could be developed so you could handle the thing alone. You've got strong mediumistic powers, only they're what you might call asleep and dormant. If you could come to me oftener we might be able to produce phenomena, for you're sensitive, only you don't know how to put your powers to the right use. You could join a circle, I suppose, but the quickest way is to have sittings with me, private."

The old man took off his spectacles and wiped off a mist. His hand was trembling. "I might want to try it later," he said at last, "but I'm not quite ready to, yet—I want to think it over. If you really think that this Vixley can help about the book, I'll look him up first. I want it to be a success, and I am a bit worried about it."

When he reached home he went into the living-room, to find Blanchard Cayley sitting there at ease, bland, suave and nonchalant. Clytie had not yet returned for dinner. Mr. Payson shook his hand cordially.

"I'm glad to see you, Blanchard. Been looking over that last chapter of mine? What do you think of it?"

"I haven't had time to read it yet. I've been expecting Cly home any minute."

"How are you getting on with her? Is she still skittish?"

"Oh, it'll come out all right, I expect," the young man said carelessly.

"I hope so! She's a good girl. I know she'll see it my way in the end—you just hold on and be nice to her. You know I'm on your side. I'd give a good deal to see Cly married to a good man like you. Strange, she doesn't seem to take any interest in my work at all. If I didn't have you to talk to, I don't know what I'd do. Suppose I read you that last chapter while we're waiting for her. I'd like to get your criticism of it. That trade dollar material has helped me immensely."

For half an hour, while Mr. Payson read the driest of dry manuscripts,

Blanchard Cayley yawned behind his hand or nodded wisely, with an approving word or two. The old man had pushed up his spectacles over his forehead and held the sheets close to his eyes. He read in a mellow, deep voice, but it was the voice of a pedant.

"There," he said at last, stacking up the scattered papers. "I guess that will open their eyes, won't it?"

"It's great; that book will make a sensation."

"Well, it isn't finished yet, and what's to come will be better than what I've done. I'm on the track of something that may help it a good deal."

"What's that?" said Cayley perfunctorily.

"See here," Mr. Payson drew his chair nearer and shook his pencil at the young man. "I've had some wonderful experiences lately. You may not believe it, but I tell you there's something in this spiritualistic business. I've been investigating it for a month now all alone, and I'm thoroughly convinced that these mediums do have some sort of power that we don't understand."

"Really?" Cayley was beginning to be interested. "I knew you had always been an agnostic, but I had no idea that you had gone into this sort of thing. Have you struck anything interesting?"

"I certainly have. I went into it in a scientific spirit, as a skeptic, pure and simple, but I've received some wonderful tests. Why, they told me my name the very first thing and a lot about my life that they had no possible way of finding out. The trouble is, they know too much."

Cayley laughed. "Found out about your wild oats, I suppose?"

Mr. Payson frowned at this frivolity. "There are things they've told me that no one living could possibly know. Whether it's done through spirits or not, it's mysterious business. You ought to go to a séance and see what they can do."

"I'd hate to have them tell my past," Cayley said jocosely, "but I don't take much stock in them. They're a gang of fakirs."

"They're pretty sharp, if they are. I haven't lived fifty years in the West to be taken in as easily as that. I ought to know something about men by this time. Why, see here! You know what trouble I had with my leg? It was something pretty serious. Well, look at me now. You've noticed the change yourself. I went to a medium and now I'm completely cured. That's enough to give any one confidence, isn't it? It's genuine evidence."

Cayley agreed with a solemn nod. "But what about the book?"

"Why, if they can influence the right forces so that it'll be a success, why shouldn't I give them a trial? Look at hypnotism! Look at wireless telegraphy! For that matter, look at the telephone! Fifty years ago no one would believe that such things were possible. It may be the same with this power, whatever it is, spirits or not. I'm an old man, but I keep up with the times. I'm not going to set

myself up for an authority and say, because a thing hasn't seemed probable to me, that I know all about the mysterious forces of nature. I've come to believe that there are powers inherent in us that may be developed successfully."

The incipient smile, the attitude of bantering protest had faded from Cayley's face, as the old man spoke. He listened sedately. Oliver Payson was a rich man. He had an attractive, marriageable daughter. Blanchard Cayley was poor, single and without prospects.

"Of course, there's much we don't yet understand," he said gravely. "One hears all sorts of tales—there must be some foundation to them."

"That's so—why, just look at Cly! She's had queer things happen to her ever since she was a child."

"Yes, I suppose that's why she's so interested in this palmist person; though I confess I don't take much stock in him."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Payson demanded.

"Why, I thought of course you knew. Granthope, the palmist—you know, the fellow everybody's taking up now—he has been here, hasn't he? I had an idea that Cly had taken rather a fancy to him."

"He was here?" Mr. Payson seemed much surprised.

"Why, I wouldn't have spoken of it for the world if I had known you didn't know—but I've seen her with him several times, and I thought, of course—" Cayley threw it out apologetically in apparent confusion at his indiscretion.

Mr. Payson stared. "Granthope, did you say? I believe I have heard of him. Cly and a common palmist? I can't believe it. What can she want of a charlatan like that?"

"I was sorry to see it myself," Cayley admitted, "but I suppose she knows what she's doing. The man's notorious enough. Only, she ought to be careful."

"I won't have it!" Mr. Payson began to storm. "Reading palms for a lot of silly women is a very different thing from spiritualism. I don't mind her going to see him once for the curiosity of the thing, but I won't have him in the house. I'll put a stop to that in a hurry. You say you've seen them together? Where?"

"Oh, I think it was probably an accidental meeting," he said. "I wish you wouldn't say anything about it, Mr. Payson. Very likely it doesn't mean anything at all. Tell me about this fellow you spoke of going to. Do you think he's all right?"

"I'll soon find out if he isn't—trust me!" Mr. Payson wagged his head wisely. "His name is Professor Vixley, and I've heard he's a very remarkable man. I'm going to see him next week and see what he can do for me. I'm not one to be fooled by any claptrap; I intend to sift this thing to the bottom."

"How do you intend to go about it?" Cayley asked. "I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd ask him to answer a few definite questions. If he can do that, it'll be a

pretty good test, even if it is only thought-reading."

"If there's anything in thought transference there may be something in spiritualism, too. One's as unexplainable as the other. See here! Suppose I ask him something that I don't know the answer to myself—wouldn't that prove it is not telepathy?"

"I should say so; but what could you ask?"

Mr. Payson had arisen, and was walking up and down the room with his hands behind his back. He stopped to deliberate beside the bookcase, then he took down a volume at random. "Suppose I ask him what the first word is on page one hundred of this book."

He looked over at Cayley, then down at the title of the book.

"*The Astrology of the Old Testament*—queer I should put my hand on that! I'll try it. I won't look at the page at all." He put the book back on the shelf. "Can't you suggest something? Suppose you give me a question that you know the answer of and I don't."

Blanchard Cayley sought for an idea, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Then he said slowly: "I used to know a girl once in Sacramento who lived next door to me. Try Vixley on her name, why don't you?"

"Good! I'll do it. Now one more."

"You might ask him the number of your watch."

"That's a good idea; then I can corroborate that on the spot."

"You'd better let me see if there's one there, though," Cayley suggested. "I believe sometimes they are not numbered. Just let me look."

Mr. Payson took out his watch and handed it to the young man, who opened the back cover and inspected the works. He noted the number, took a second glance at it and then snapped the cover shut. "All right, if he can tell that number, he's clever." He handed it back to Mr. Payson. "When did you say you were going to see him?" he asked.

"Next Tuesday or Wednesday, I expect," was the reply. "I've got to go up to Stockton to-morrow, and I may be gone two or three days attending to some business. By the by, Cayley, I heard rather a queer story last week when I was up there. You're interested in these romantic yarns of California; perhaps you'd like to hear this."

"Certainly, I should. It may do for my collection of Improbabilities."

"Well, I met the cashier of the Savings Bank up there—he's been with the bank nearly thirty years and he told me the story. It seems one noon, about twenty years ago, while he was alone in the bank, a little boy of seven or eight years of age came in, and said he wanted to deposit some money. The cashier asked him how much he had, thinking, of course, that he'd hand out a dollar or two. The boy put a packet wrapped in newspaper on the counter, and by Jove! if

there wasn't something over five thousand dollars, in hundred-dollar greenbacks! What do you think of that? The cashier asked the boy where he got so much money, suspecting that it must have been stolen. The boy wouldn't tell him. The cashier started round the counter to hold the boy till he could investigate, and, if necessary, hand him over to the police. The little fellow saw him coming, got frightened, and ran out the door, leaving the money on the counter. He has never been heard from since."

"Well, what became of the money, then?"

"Why, it had to be entered as deposited, of course. The boy had written a name—the cashier doesn't know whether it was the boy's own name or not—on the margin of the newspaper, and the account stands in that name, awaiting a claimant."

"What was the name?"

"The cashier wouldn't tell me, naturally. It has been kept a secret. With the compound interest, the money now amounts to something like double the original deposit."

"It's a pity I don't know the name; I might prove an alibi."

"Oh, I forgot—and it really is the point of the whole story. The package was wrapped in a copy of *Harper's Weekly*, and the boy, whose hands were probably dirty, had happened to press a perfect thumb-print on the smooth paper. Of course, that would identify him, and if any one could prove he was in Stockton at that time, give the name and show that his thumb was marked like that impression, the bank would have to permit him to draw that account."

"That lets me out," said Cayley, "unless that particular thumb-print happens to show a banded, duplex, spiral whorl."

"What in the world do you mean?" Payson asked.

"Why, you know thumb-prints have all been classified by Gallon, and every possible variation in the form of the nucleal involution and its envelope has been named and arranged."

"I didn't know that," said Payson. "But I did know there were no two thumbs alike. That's the way they identified my partner when he was drowned. He was interested in the subject, having read of the Chinese method, and he happened to have a collection of thumb-prints, including his own, of course, done in India ink. His body was so disfigured and eaten by fishes that he couldn't be recognized until, suspecting it might be he, we proved it by his own marks."

"I didn't know you ever had a partner."

"Oh, that was years ago, soon after Cly was born. His name was Ichabod Riley. That was a queer story, too. His wife was a regular Jezebel, Madge Riley was, and there's no doubt she poisoned her first two husbands. She was arrested and tried for the murder of the second, but the jury was hung, and she wasn't.

Ichabod was supposed to have been accidentally drowned off Black Point, but I have good reason to believe that he committed suicide on account of her. He was afraid of being poisoned as well. She is supposed to have killed her own baby, too.

"Well," Mr. Payson added, rising, "I've got to go up-stairs and get ready for dinner. You'll stay, won't you?"

"I'll wait till Cly gets home, at any rate, but I'll not promise to dine."

The old man went up-stairs, leaving Cayley alone beside the bookcase.

When he returned he found Cayley, cool and suave as ever. Clytie was with him, standing proudly erect on the other side of the room, a red, angry spot on either cheek. She held no dreamy, listless pose now; something had evidently fully awakened her, stinging her into an unaccustomed fervor. Her slender white hands were clasped in front of her, her bosom rose and fell. Her lips were tightly closed.

Mr. Payson, near-sighted and egoistic, was oblivious of these stormy signs, and remarked genially: "You're going to stay to dinner, aren't you, Blanchard?"

Blanchard Cayley drawled, "I think not, Mr. Payson; I'll be going on, if you'll excuse me," smiling, "and if Cly will."

"Don't let us keep you if you have another appointment," she said, without looking at him.

He left after a few more words with the old man, who began at last to smell something wrong.

"What's the matter, Cly?" he asked.

She had sat down and was pretending to read. Now she looked up casually:

"Oh, nothing much, father, except that he was impertinent enough to question me about something that didn't concern him."

"H'm!" Mr. Payson took a seat with a grunt and unfolded his newspaper. "I'm sorry you two don't get on any better."

"We'd get on well enough if he'd only believe that when I say 'no' I mean it."

He stared at her, suddenly possessed by a new thought. "Is there anybody else in the field, Cly?"

"There are many other men that I prefer to Blanchard Cayley."

"What is this about your being with this palmist chap?"

"Did Blanchard tell you that?" she asked with exquisite scorn.

"Have you seen much of this Granthope?"

"I've seen him four times."

"And you have invited him to my house?"

"He has been here."

Mr. Payson rose and shook his eye-glasses at her. "I must positively forbid

that!" he exclaimed. "I won't have you receiving that fellow here. From what I hear of him he's a fakir, and I won't encourage him in his attempts to get into society at my expense."

"Do you mean to say that you forbid him the house, father? Isn't that a bit melodramatic? I wouldn't make a scene about it. I am twenty-seven and I'm not absolutely a fool. I think you can trust me."

"Then what have you been doing with him? What does it all mean, anyway?"

"As soon as I know what it means, I'll tell you. At present, I think we had better not discuss Mr. Granthope."

He blustered for a while longer, iterating his reproaches, then simmered down into a morose condition, which lasted through dinner. Clytie knew better than to discuss the subject with him. Her calmness had returned, though she kept her color and did not talk. The two went into the library and read.

Shortly after eight o'clock the door-bell rang. As it was not answered promptly, Mr. Payson, still nervous, irascible and impatient, went out into the hall, growling at the servant's delay.

He opened the door, to see Francis Granthope, rather white-faced under his black hair, supporting himself on crutches.

"Is Miss Payson at home?" he asked, taking off his hat.

"Yes, she is. Won't you step in? What name shall I give her, please?" Mr. Payson spoke hospitably.

"Thank you. Mr. Granthope," was the answer.

The old man turned suddenly and returned his visitor's hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said sternly, "but Miss Payson is not at home—for you—and I don't intend that she ever shall be. I have heard enough about you, Mr. Granthope, and I desire to say that I can not consent to your being received in my house. You're a charlatan and a fakir, sir, and I do not consider you either my daughter's social equal nor one with a character respectable enough to associate with her. I must ask you to leave this house, sir, and not to come again."

Granthope's eyes glowed, and his jaws came together with determination. But he said only:

"Very well, Mr. Payson, I'm sure that I do not care to call if I'm not welcome. This is, of course, no place to discuss the subject, but I shall not come here again without your consent. As to my meeting her again, that lies wholly with her. You may be sure that I shall not annoy her with my attentions if she doesn't care to see me. But I ask you, as a matter of courtesy, to let Miss Payson know that I have called."

"See that you keep your word, sir—that's all I have to say," was Mr. Payson's reply, and he stood in the doorway to watch his visitor down the garden walk.

He remained there until Granthope had descended the steps, then walked down after him and watched him to the corner.

Mr. Payson returned to the library sullenly.

"That palmist of yours had the impertinence to come here and ask for you," he informed Clytie, "but I sent him about his business, and I expect he won't be back in a hurry."

Clytie looked up with a white face. "Mr. Granthope, father?" She rose proudly and faced him. "Do you mean to say that you were rude enough to turn him away? It's impossible!"

Mr. Payson walked up and down the room in a dudgeon.

"I certainly did send him away, and what's more, I told him not to come back."

Clytie, without another word, ran out into the hall. The front door was flung open and her footsteps could be heard on the gravel walk. Mr. Payson seated himself sulkily.

In five minutes more she had returned, slowly, her hair blown into a fine disorder, the color flaming in her cheeks, her eyes quickened.

"What in the world have you been doing?" her father demanded.

"I wanted to apologize for your rudeness," she answered, "but I was too late."

CHAPTER X

A LOOK INTO THE MIRROR

> "He gives exact and truthful revelations of all love affairs, settles lovers' quarrels, enables you to win the affection and esteem of any one you desire, causes speedy and happy marriages—"

Granthope put down the paper with a look of disgust. It was his own advertisement, and it had appeared daily for months. He took up his desk telephone with a jerk, and called up the *Chronicle* business office.

"This is Granthope, the palmist. Please take out my displayed ad., and insert only this: 'Francis Granthope, Palmist. 141 Geary St., Readings, Ten Dollars. Only by Appointment. Ten till Four.'"

There was now a red-headed office boy in the corner where Fancy Gray used to sit. Granthope missed her jaunty spirit and unfailing comradeship. Not even his endeavor to give his profession a scientific aspect amused him any longer. He had lost interest in his work. He was uneasy, dissatisfied, blue. He went into his studio listlessly, with a frown printed on his brow. Until his first client appeared he lay upon the big couch, his eyes fixed upon the light.

He had been there a few moments when his office boy knocked, and opening the door, injected his red head.

"Say, dere's a lady in here to see you, Mr. Granthope!"

"Who is she?"

The boy grinned. "By de name of Lucie. Says you know her."

"Tell her I can't see her."

Granthope turned away, and the boy left.

The room was as quiet as a padded cell, full of a soft, velvety blackness, except where the single drop-lamp lighted up the couch. Ordinarily the place was, in its strange dark emptiness, a restful, comforting retreat. Now it imprisoned him. Above his head the great ring of embroidered zodiacal signs shone with a golden luster. They were the symbols of the mysterious dignity of the past, of the dark ages of thought, of priestcraft and secret wisdom of the blind centuries that had gone. But, a modern, incongruously set about with such medieval relics, he felt for the first time, undignified. In their time these emblems had represented all that existed of knowledge. Now, to him they stood for all that was left of ignorance and superstition; and it was upon such instruments he played.

He read palms perfunctorily that Saturday. He seemed to hear his own voice all the while, and some dissociated function of his mind scoffed continually at his chicanery. It was the same old formula: "You are not understood by those about you. You crave sympathy, and it is refused. You are extraordinarily sensitive, but when you are most hurt you often say nothing. You have an intuitive knowledge of people. You have a wonderful power of appreciation and criticism. People confide in you. You are impulsive, but your instinct is usually sure"—the same professional, easy rigamarole, colored with what hints his quick eyes gave him or his flagging imagination suggested.

Women listened avidly, drinking in every word. How could he help telling them what they loved so to hear? They asked questions so suggestive that a child might have answered. They prolonged the discussion of themselves, obviously enjoying his apparent interest. He caught himself again and again playing with their credulity, their susceptibility, and hated himself for it. They lingered, smiling self-consciously, and he delayed them with a look. In very perversity, he began deliberately to flatter their vanity in order to see to what inordinate pitch of conceit their minds would rise. He affected indifference, and even scorn—they

followed after him still more eagerly. He grew, at last, almost savagely critical, an instinct of cruelty aroused by such complacent, egregious egoism. They fawned on him, like spaniels under the lash.

After a solitary dinner he returned to his rooms. For an hour or two he tried to lose himself in the study of a medical book. Medicine had long been his passion and his library was well equipped. Had he been reading to prepare himself for practice he could not have been more thorough. To-night, however, he found it hard to fix his attention, and in despair he took up a volume of Casanova's *Memoirs*. There was an indefatigable charlatan! The fascinating Chevalier had never wearied in ill-doing; he kept his zest to the last. He skipped to another volume to follow the pursuit of Henriette, of "C.V.," of Thérèse. The perusal amused him, and he got back something of his cynical indifference.

It was after eleven o'clock when he laid down the book and rose to look, abstractedly, out of the office window. He longed for an adventure that should reinstate him as his old careless self.

He left his rooms, went up to Powell Street and finally wandered into the noisy gaiety of the Techau Tavern. The place was running full with after-theater gatherings, and he had hard work to find a table. All about him was a confusion of excited talk, the clatter of dishes, the riotous music of an insistent orchestra. Parties were entering all the while, beckoned to places by the head waiter. The place was garish with lights and mirrors.

Granthope had sat there ten minutes or so, sipping his glass, noticing, here and there, clients whom he had served, when, between the heads of two women, far across the room, he recognized Mrs. Page. It was not long before she saw him, caught his eye, and signaled with vivacity. The diversion was agreeable; he rose and went over. A glance at her table showed him a company most of whose members he had met before, but with whom, only a few months since, he would have counted it a social success to be considered intimate. While not being quite of the elect, they held the key of admission to many high places in virtue of their wit and ingenious powers to please. They were such as insured amusement. Granthope himself was this evening desirous of being amused.

With Mrs. Page was Frankie Dean, the irrepressible, voluble, sarcastic, a devil in her black, snapping eyes, as cold-blooded as a snake. It was she who had so nearly embarrassed him at the Chinese supper at the Maxwells'. She eyed him now, dark, feline, whimsically watching her chance to make sport of him. With them was a young girl from Santa Rosa, newly come to San Francisco, an alien in such a company. She was slight and dewy, vivid with sudden color, with soft, fervent eyes that had not yet learned to face such audacity as her companions practised. Keith and Fernigan were there, also, like a vaudeville team, rollicking with fun, playing into each other's hands, charging the company with

abandon. Lastly, ”Sully” Maxwell sat, silent, happy, indulgent, with his pockets filled with twenty dollar gold-pieces, which he got rid of at every opportunity. He spoke about once every fifteen minutes, and then usually to the waiter. ”A good spender” was Sully—that quality and his unfailing good-nature carried him into the gayest circles and kept him there unnoticed, until the bills were to be paid.

To Granthope, tired with his day’s work, in conflict with himself, morbidly self-conscious, the scene was stimulating. There was an atmosphere of inconsequent mirth in the group, which dissolved his mood immediately. The women, smartly dressed, bubbling with spirit, quick with repartee—Keith and Fernigan, their sparkling dialogue interrupted, waiting for another auditor—even Sully, prosperous, good-natured, hospitably making him welcome—the group attracted him, rejuvenated him, enveloped him with their frivolity. The party was in the first effervescence of its enthusiasm. Mrs. Page was at her sprightly best, impellent, a gorgeous animal. Even Frankie Dean, whom he did not like, was temptingly piquant and brisk. The little girl had a novelty and virginal charm. He had been out of his element all day. Here, he could be himself. He could take things easily and jocosely, and have no thought of consequences. His mood disappeared like a shattered soap-bubble, and he was caught into their jubilant atmosphere.

He was introduced to the girl from Santa Rosa, who looked up at him timidly but with evident curiosity, as at a celebrity, and sat down between her and Mrs. Page. Sully Maxwell took advantage of the new arrival to order another round of drinks—club sandwiches, golden bucks—till he was stopped by Frankie Dean. Keith and Fernigan recommenced their wit. Mrs. Page looked at him with all kinds of messages in her eyes, as if she were quite sure that he could interpret them. The girl from Santa Rosa said nothing, but, from time to time, gave him a shy, curious glance from her big brown eyes. Granthope’s spirits rose steadily, but his excitement had in it something hectic. In a sudden pause he seemed to remember that he had been speaking rather too loudly.

After the party had refused, unanimously, further refreshment, Sully proposed that they should all drive out to the Cliff House, and they left the restaurant forthwith to set out on this absurd expedition. It was already long past midnight; the adventure was a characteristic San Francisco pastime for the giddier spirits of the town.

Sully was for hiring two hacks; Mrs. Page, giggling, vetoed the proposition, and Frankie Dean supported her. Decidedly that would be commonplace; why break up the party? The girl from Santa Rosa looked alarmed at the prospect. Granthope smiled at her ingenuousness, and liked her for it. The result of the sidewalk discussion was that Sully obligingly mounted beside the driver, and

the six others squeezed into the carriage, the door banged, and they proceeded on their hilarious way toward the ”Panhandle” of the Park. On the rear seat Granthope sat with Mrs. Page and Frankie Dean on either hand, protesting that they were perfectly comfortable. Opposite him the girl from Santa Rosa leaned forward on the edge of the cushion, shrinking away from the two men beside her.

Mrs. Page made an ineffectual search in the dark for Granthope’s hand. Not finding it, she began to sing, under her breath:

> ”It was not like this in the olden time,
> It was not like this, at all!”

and Frankie Dean, quick-witted enough to understand the situation, remarked, ”Oh, Mr. Granthope doesn’t read palms free, Violet; you ought to know that!” She darted a look at him.

So it went on frothily, with chattering, laughter, snatches of song, jests and stories, punctuated occasionally by the rapping of Sully’s cane on the window of the carriage, as he leaned over in a jovial attempt to participate in the fun. Granthope, for a while, led the spirit of gaiety that prevailed, told a story or two, ”jollied” Mrs. Page, laughed at Keith’s inconsequence, accepted Frankie Dean’s challenges. But the frank, bewildered eyes of the little girl from Santa Rosa, fixed upon him, disconcerted him more than once.

The carriage soon entered Golden Gate Park. The night was warm and still, the dusk pervaded with perfumes. Under the slope of Strawberry Hill Maxwell stopped the carriage and ordered them all out to invade the shadowy stillness with revelry. The night air was that of belated summer, full of a languor that comes seldom to San Francisco which has neither real summer nor real winter, and the wildness of the place, remote, unvisited, was exhilarating. A mock minuet was started, races run, even trees climbed by Frankie Dean the audacious, with shrieks and laughter, all childishly with the sheer joy of living. Granthope and the girl from Santa Rosa, after watching the sport with amusement for a while, left the rest and walked on past a turn of the road, to stand there, discussing the stars, while the cries of the two women came softened along the sluggish breeze. The girl took off her hat and breathed deeply of the night air. They walked on farther through the gloom, till only an occasional faint shout reached them from the party. Granthope put the girl at her ease, pointed out the planets and the constellations and explained the principles of ancient astrology. They had begun to forget the rest when they were overtaken and captured again and the crowded carriage took its way towards the sea.

Upon a high ledge of rock jutting out into the Pacific, at the very entrance

to the Bay of San Francisco, stands the Cliff House, a white, wooden, many-windowed monstrosity with glazed verandas, cupolas, frivolous dormers, cheap, garish, bulky, gay, seemingly almost toppling into the water. Here come not only such innocently holidaying folk as Fancy Gray and Gay P. Summer, not only jaded tourists and the Sunday-outing citizens who lie upon the warm beach below and doze away a morning in the sun and wind. It was patronized of old by the buggy-riding fraternity, the smokers, the spenders, with their lights-o'-love, as the most popular of road-houses. The cable-cars and the two "dummy" railroad lines have changed its character somewhat, but it is still a show-place of the town. There is good eating, a gorgeous view of the Pacific, and the sea-lions on the rocks below.

Here Mrs. Page's party alighted, near three o'clock in the morning. The bar only was open, its white-frocked attendant sleeping behind the counter. This they entered, yawning from their ride. The barkeeper was awakened, peremptorily, and was ordered to prepare what he had for refreshment. With hot beans from the heater, tamales, potato salad, cold cuts, crackers and cheese, he laid a table in a small dining-room. Sully Maxwell undertook all the arrangements, fraternized with the barkeeper, selected beverages, not forgetting ginger ale for the girl from Santa Rosa. Mrs. Page and Frankie Dean, somewhat disheveled, retired, to appear trig and trim and glossy in the gaslight, ready for more gaiety. Granthope, meanwhile, had wandered out upon the veranda to watch the surf dashing on the rocks, to note the yellow gleam from the Point Bonita light, and smell the salt air; to get his courage up, in short, for another round of animation. The instant he returned Mrs. Page went at him.

"Now, Frank," she said, "it won't do to sulk or to flirt with Santa Rosa. What's got into you, anyway? You must positively do something to amuse us."

"Office hours from ten till four," Keith murmured audibly.

Frankie Dean turned on him: "They never let you out of your cage at all!"

Fernigan, thereat, began an absurd pantomime that half terrified the girl from Santa Rosa. He pretended to be a monkey behind the bars of a cage, eating peanuts—and worse. It was shockingly funny. The company roared, all but Granthope. He was at the point of impatience, but replied with what sounded like ennui:

"I'm a bit stale, Violet; you'll have to excuse me if I'm stupid to-night. I came to be entertained."

Frankie Dean looked at him mischievously. "Never mind, Mr. Granthope, she'll come back."

It was obviously no more than a cant phrase, intended for a witticism. Mrs. Page, however, took it up with mock seriousness.

"Who's '*she*', now? *I'm* back in the chorus again! There *was* a time, Frank—" Her voice was sentimental; she tilted her head and looked at him, under half-

closed eyelids, across the table.

"I say, Granthope, you ought to publish an illustrated catalogue of 'em. There's nothing doing for amateurs, nowadays. When women pay five dollars to have their hands held what chance is there for us?" This from Keith, with burlesque emphasis.

Mrs. Page would not be diverted. "No, but really, Frank; who *is* she? I've quite lost track of your conquests."

"Oh, you know I'm wedded to my art," he said lightly.

"Yes, and it's the art of making love, isn't it?"

"'No further seek his merits to disclose,'" said Keith, and Fernigan added, "'Nor draw his frailties from their dread abode.'"

The girl from Santa Rosa looked suddenly bursting with intelligence, recognizing the quotation. She started to finish it, then stopped; her lips moved silently. Granthope smiled.

Frankie Dean had been watching her chance for another at his expense. Now she asked, with apparent frankness: "Mr. Granthope, can you tell character by the lines on the soles of the feet?"

"Science of Solistry," murmured Keith to the Santa Rosa girl.

"Let's try it!" Mrs. Page exclaimed. "I will, for one! Do you know my second toe's longer than my great toe? I'm awfully proud of it. I can prove it, too!"

"Go on!" Frankie Dean dared her.

The girl from Santa Rosa stared, her lips apart. "Why, every one's is, aren't they?"

"No such thing!" Mrs. Page stopped and almost blushed. A chorus of laughter.

"Oh, there are a good many better ways of telling character than that," said Granthope.

"Yes," Keith put in. "Indiscreet remarks, for instance."

Mrs. Page bit her lip and shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, if I were going in for indiscreet remarks I might make a few about *you*!"

Here Sully interposed. "Isn't this conversation getting rather personal? I move we discard all these low cards. This is no woman's club. The quiet life for mine."

The hint was taken by Keith, who began an English music-hall song, to the effect that "John was a nice good 'usband, 'e never cared to roam, 'e only wanted a quiet life, 'e only wanted a quiet wife; there 'e would sit by the fireside, such a chilly man was John—" where he was joined in the chorus by Fernigan—"Oh, I 'opes and trusts there's a nice 'ot fire, where my old man's gone!" Maxwell pounded in time upon the table. The girl from Santa Rosa hazarded a laugh.

Granthope looked on listlessly, ever more detached and introspective. This was what he had been used to, since he could remember, but now, in the stuffy little room, with its ghastly yellow gas-light, the smell of eatables and wine, the pallor of the women's faces, the flush of Maxwell's, the desperate frivolity, the artificiality of it all bored him. He wondered, whimsically, why he had ever looked forward to being the companion of such a society as this. It was all harmless enough, unconventional as it was, but he tasted the ashes in his mouth. Perhaps, after all, he was only not in the mood for it. He tried to smile again.

Fernigan seized a small Turkish rug from the floor and hung it in front of him, like a chasuble. Standing before the company he intoned a sacrilegious parody, like everything he did, funny, like everything he did, atrocious:

"*O, sanctissimus nabisco in colorado maduro domino te deum, e pluribus unum vice versa et circus hippocriticam, mephisto apollinaris nux vomica dolores intimidad mores; O rara avis per diem cum magnum vino et sappho modus vivendi felicitas,*" to the droned "*A—men.*"

Keith then enlivened the company with what quaint parlor tricks he knew, or dared, from making of a napkin a ballet dancer pirouetting upon one toe, to limericks that were suppressed by Sully Maxwell, Mrs. Page laughed prodigiously, showing all her teeth, staring with her great eyes, vivid in her every expression, flamboyant, sleek and glossy, abounding in temperament. Frankie Dean smiled maliciously and plied the performers with her acrid wit. The girl from Santa Rosa listened, her cheeks burning.

At six they went outside for fresh air and promenaded the glazed veranda until the sun rose. In front of them was the broad Pacific, stretching out to the Farralones, even to Japan. To the north, across the bar, yellowed with alluvium from the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers, a mountainous coast stretched to far, misty Bolinas. Southward ran the broad, wide beach exposed by the ebb tide. It was damp and cool; the last spasm of summer had given way to the brisk, stimulating weather that was San Francisco's usual habit. Granthope buttoned his light overcoat tightly over his rumpled evening dress and walked with the girl from Santa Rosa, enjoying the scene quietly, speaking in monosyllables. The others had a new burst of effervescence, still more desperate than ever; their hilarity was indefatigable. Keith walked along the tops of the tables, leading Mrs. Page. Frankie Dean and Fernigan two-stepped the length and breadth of the wide platform, joking incessantly.

A walk up the beach was then suggested, and, after a preliminary furbishing of faces and hair, they went down the steep rocky road to the wide strand, and proceeded along the shore.

Granthope, falling behind, saw that the girl from Santa Rosa alone had waited for him. She gazed at him steadily with grave eyes.

”Well,” he said kindly, ”what d’you think of San Francisco?”

She looked down at the sand and drew a circle with her toe before she answered.

”It’s pretty gay here, isn’t it?”

”Oh, well, if you call this sort of thing gay!”

The girl looked immensely relieved, gave him a quick, searching glance, and said shyly: ”Do you know, Mr. Granthope, I have an idea that you didn’t enjoy it any more than I did!”

He smiled at her, then silently grasped her hand. She blushed and turned away.

”I thought it was going to be great fun,” she said, as they walked on. ”I never was up all night before. It’s awfully exciting. But people do look awful in the morning, don’t they?”

She herself was like a blossom wet with dew, but Granthope knew what she meant, well enough. He had watched the lines come into Mrs. Page’s face and her mouth droop at the corners; he had noticed the glitter fade from Frankie Dean’s black eyes, and her lids grow heavy.

”You ought never to have come,” he said. ”I think you’d better go home and get to bed. Suppose we leave them and walk across to the almshouse and take the Haight Street cars?”

”Oh, d’you think they’d mind, if we did?”

”They’d never notice that we were gone, I’m sure.”

”I’m afraid you’ll find me awfully stupid. Miss Dean is very witty, isn’t she?”

”I’d rather be stupid.”

”You’re sure I won’t bore you?”

”I don’t feel much like talking, myself. I have plenty to think about. Suppose we don’t say anything, unless we have something to say.”

”Oh, I didn’t know you could do that—in San Francisco!”

He laughed sincerely for the first time that night.

As they came to the place where the beach road turned off for Ingleside, the rest of the party was some distance ahead. They were sitting upon some rocks, and, as Granthope looked, he saw Mrs. Page rise, lift her skirts and walk barefooted across the sands, down to the water’s edge. She turned and waved her hand to him. He took off his hat to her and pointed inland in reply. Then he climbed the low sand-hills with his companion and struck off southward, along the road. The girl had colored again.

Her confidence in him was soothing. She was so serious and innocent, so quick with a country girl’s delicate observation of nature, that he fell into a more placid state of mind. She became more friendly all the while, till, despite her

confession of shyness, she fairly prattled. He let her run on, scarcely listening, busy with his own thoughts. And so, up the long road to the almshouse, resting in the pale sunshine occasionally, through the Park to the end of the Haight Street cable-line they walked, and talked ingenuously.

She lived in "The Mission," and there, having nothing better to do, he escorted her, and at last, in that jumble of wooden buildings so multitudinously prosaic, between the Twin Peaks and the Old Mission, he left her. She bade him good-by apparently with regret. Widely different as they were in mind and temperament, they had, for their hour, come closely together. Now they were to recede, never again, perhaps, to meet.

He walked in town along Valencia Street, through that curious "hot belt" which defies the town's normal state of weather, turned up Van Ness Avenue, still too busy with his reflections to shut himself up in his studio. It was Sunday morning—he had almost forgotten the day—and he turned up his collar, to conceal what he could of his evening attire and its wilted, rumpled linen, somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of the church-going throngs which pervaded the avenue.

He had reached the top of the long slope leading to the Black Point military reservation, and was pausing upon the corner of Lombard Street, when, looking up the hill, he saw Clytie Payson coming down the steep, irregular pathway that did service for a sidewalk. He stepped behind a lamp-post and watched her, uncertain whether or not to let her see him.

She came tripping down, picking her way along the cleated double plank, too intent upon her footsteps to look far ahead. The sight of her made him a little trepid with excitement; it focused his dissatisfaction with himself. He knew, now, what had disturbed him. It was the thought of her. She had forced him to look at himself from a new point of view, with a new, critical vision. He longed for her approval. Her gentle coercion was drawing him into new channels of life, and he felt a sudden need for her help. He was losing his whilom comrades, his old familiar associations repelled him. He had nothing to sustain him now, but the thought of her friendship.

But, in his present state, he had not the courage to address her. As a child plays with circumstances and makes his own omens, he left the decision to chance. If she turned and saw him, he would greet her and throw himself on her grace. If not, he would pass on without speaking, much as he longed to speak.

She came down to the corner diagonally opposite and paused for a moment, looking off at the mountains and the waters of the Golden Gate. He saw her make a sudden movement, as if waking from her abstraction, then she walked over in his direction. He came out from his cover and went to meet her.

"Good morning, Mr. Granthope!" She was smiling, holding out her hand. "I

thought I recognized you! Something told me to stop a moment, and wait. Then suddenly I saw you. You see, you can't escape me!"

He was visibly embarrassed, conscious of his significantly unkempt appearance. She, however, did not show that she noticed it.

"How is your ankle?" was her first inquiry. He assured her that it had given him no trouble for a week, and he expressed his thanks to her for her help.

"I've been hoping I might see you," she said, "to apologize for the reception you received the last time you called. I can't tell you how unhappy it made me, nor how I regret it."

"Mayn't I see you a while now?" He felt at such a disadvantage in his present condition that it was embarrassing to be with her, and yet he longed for another hour of companionship.

"Let's walk down to the Point," she said. "I can get in the reservation, and it will be beautiful."

As they walked down across the empty space at the foot of the avenue and along the board-walk over the sand, she talked inconsequently of the day and the scene, evidently attempting to put him at his ease. The little girl from Santa Rosa had given him a passive comfort. Clytie's companionship was an active and inspiring joy. His depression ceased; a sane, wholesome content filled him. He watched her graceful, leopard-like swing and the evidences of vitality that impelled her movements.

They passed the sentry who nodded to her at the gate, went past the officers' quarters, down a little path lined with piled cannon-balls, out to a small promontory that overlooked the harbor. Here there was an old Spanish brass cannon in its wooden mortar-carriage, and a seat on the very edge of the bluff. The harbor extended wide to the southeast. Inshore was a covey of white-sailed yachts in regatta, just tacking, to beat across to Lime Point, opposite.

As they sat down, Clytie said, "Now do tell me about Miss Gray. How is she?"

"She's not with me any more."

She lifted her brows. "Where is she?"

"I don't know, quite."

"You haven't seen her since she left?"

"No, not for two weeks."

Clytie frowned and bit her lip, then shook her head silently. Then she remarked, as if to herself, "I like her. I'm sure she's fine."

"She likes you, too."

"I wish I might see her," she went on, her eyes fixed on the mountains. "I'd like to do something for her. I might get her a position in my father's office, I'm sure, if she'd take it. I have a curious feeling, though, that it is she who will be

more likely to do something for me."

"If she ever can, you may be sure she will. Fancy is true blue."

"You didn't—have any misunderstanding with her, did you?"

"Oh, no."

She seemed to notice his reluctance to explain, and did not pursue the subject.

She turned and her eyes fell upon his hand, which lay carelessly upon his knee. "Let me see your palm," she said impulsively. "I've never looked at it carefully. I suppose you've told your own fortune often enough."

He gave his left hand to her. She barely touched it, holding it lightly, but he felt the magnetism of the contact almost as a caress. "You'll find my line of fate shows that I'm to change my career," he remarked. "It's broken at the head line, you see, and begins over again."

"Now, let me look at your right hand."

She looked at it, and her expression changed subtly. It was as if she had found some secret satisfaction in his palm, some answer to her desires.

"What d'you see?"

"The heart line."

In his left hand it began near the root of the second finger, at the mount of Saturn, not, as he would have preferred, farther toward the index finger, at the mount of Jupiter. He wondered if that meant to her what it did, in his professional capacity, to him—an indication of more sensual tastes. Half its length was cobwebbed with tiny branches, and punctuated with islands; then it ran, deep and clear to the edge of the palm, almost straight. In his right palm the line was cleaner, simpler, undivided.

She had begun to color, faintly; she had turned her eyes from him. Into her loveliness had come a new element of charm. There was something special in it, something for him alone; it was as if she had been signaling to him, and he had not, till now, understood. Instantly every line in her body seemed to be imbued with a new grace, a new meaning, translating her spirit. He was too full of the inspiration to speak; he could only look at her, irradiated, as if he had never seen her before. To his admiration for her beauty, his respect for her character, his interest in her mind, there was added something more; the total was not to be accounted for by the sum of these. And the wonderful whole satisfied the divine fastidiousness of his nature. She was for him the supreme choice. Her mind worked like his. Her very size pleased him. He seemed to know her for the first time. He had desired her, before, for her beauty and her intelligence; he had thought calmly of love and marriage. But now he felt the supreme demand for possession, because——only because he *must* have her—because nothing else in his life mattered.

A secret ray of thought seemed to carry the message back to her, for, apparently embarrassed by the intensity of his silence, she rose and walked a few paces, with her hands behind her back, gazing off at the harbor. It was not thought that he sent, however, for he could not think; it was a new function of his soul aroused, excited, thrilling him with the power of its vibration.

When that wave broke, he was at a loss for words. How could he say how much he wanted her? How could he ask if she, too, felt that same thrill, while he winced under this new, mortifying sense of the cheapness and falsity of his life? He could not yet bring himself to confess the miserable truths; it was not the larger, more obvious things he was afraid of, for she knew well enough of these—but one or two shameful details came into his mind and made him shrink from himself.

She turned to him again, composed, though still she showed elation.

"I'm sorry Fancy had to go," she said earnestly. Her eyes were steady, though her lips were still quivering.

"It was too bad. But it was necessary."

She gave him a swift, searching look.

"Oh! Then you are—finding out?"

"I'm being pushed on, somehow. It's really queer, as if the force came from outside of myself—"

"Oh, no! I'm sure not!"

"Something is working out in me—"

Clytie smiled rarely, her face illuminated. "Oh, fate deals the cards, but we have to play them ourselves. And—I think—you've taken several tricks already."

"You mean—about Fancy Gray?"

"No—that I can't judge—I never have judged. Your advertisement in the papers."

He was immensely surprised, pleased. "You have noticed that already? Why, this is only the very first day—"

"I have watched for it every day."

There was another pause. Her remark was revealing—yet he dared not hope too far. He felt so near to her, so intimate in that revelation that he feared to deceive himself. Oh, he was for her, now! His heart clamored for possession, yet he could not declare himself. They were upon different spiritual altitudes. Women, before, had come at his whistle. Now he was awkward, timid, excited with expectancy, his heart going hard.

"There is a reason why I was glad to see that change, Mr. Granthope," she continued. He waited for her words eagerly. She looked away, her eyes following the sails in mid-channel. "I'm thinking of leaving town."

The announcement fell upon him like a blow. "You are going away!" he

exclaimed, his voice betraying him.

"Not for a week or two, perhaps."

"A week!" The words stung him. "Don't go—yet!" he exclaimed faintly.

"I don't want to go—yet. My aunt in the East has invited me to visit her for six months." She spoke calmly, but did not look at him.

"I'll have to hurry, won't I?" he said with a desperate, whimsical inflection.

"Yes. You'll have to hurry."

For a while he was too agitated to speak. If there had needed anything more to convince him of his state of mind, this sufficed. He was aware, by the sense of shock, how much he cared.

"Before I go, I'd like to ask a favor of you, Mr. Granthope."

It almost comforted him. "What is it—of course, I'll do anything."

"Will you see if you can find out something about that little boy who lived with Madam Grant?"

There it was again! This blow turned his mind black. She was gazing at him earnestly—he could hardly bear her look, so placid, so sincere. "You mean—clairvoyantly?" he stammered.

"Yes. I think we might do it, together."

He rose to walk up and down the top of the bank for a few minutes. Once he stopped and gazed at her fiercely, under tensely set brows. Finally he returned hopelessly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that."

"Why not?"

He hesitated. "I know I couldn't get anything."

"But you did before?"

He longed desperately to confess everything, but he could not speak. He felt her recede from him; their delightful intimacy was broken. She did not insist further, and self-contempt kept him silent, till he broke out, "Oh, it's you who must help *me*!"

"I've done all I can for you. You must find out the rest for yourself."

"I don't dare to think how much you have to find out about me."

"Tell me!"

"I haven't the courage."

She let her hand fall lightly upon his for an instant. "Well, that only proves, doesn't it, that, so long as there's anything insurmountable in the way of directness and simplicity, you haven't gone all the way. I'll wait."

"I'm so afraid of losing your sympathy and your respect."

"But you can't stop still!"

"I'm afraid of losing *you*!"

He saw the tears come into her eyes. "Ah, there's only one way you can

lose me," she said deliberately.

"How?" He was eager.

She did not answer, but arose slowly. "I think I must be going."

He followed her, thoroughly dissatisfied with himself at having let his moment pass. He understood her well enough. It was only by stopping still, as she had said, that he could lose her. She had started a change in him, and it must go on. Something which tied his hands, his mind, must be cut; he must be free of that before he could speak.

They retraced their steps, she talking, as when they had come, inconsequently; he, moody, troubled inwardly, self-conscious. She was to give him one more hope, however. As she left him, on the avenue, she offered her hand, and smiled.

"Don't give it up," she said, and turned away, leaving him standing alone, still fighting his battle with himself.

He had enough to think of, as he strode home, ill-satisfied with himself and in a turmoil of thought in regard to her. There was no question of mastery, now; she had beaten him at his own game. It was only a question of surrender.

He went up into his office and stood, looking about. The row of plaster casts confronted him. He took one from the row and examined it. There, too, was a heart line split up with divergent branches, punctuated with little islands, beginning at the Mount of Saturn, herring-boned to the end, at the double crease which signified two marriages. The fingers were short and fat, the thumb being far too small. Small joints, broad lines, deep cushions at the Mounts of Venus and Mercury, deep bracelets at the wrist—Granthope's eyes read the signs as if the hand were a face, or a whole body.

As he turned the cast over thoughtfully, to look at the back, it dropped from his grasp and fell to the floor, breaking into a dozen pieces. Bits of wire projected humorously from the stump. He smiled.

"Kismet!" he said to himself. "Adieu, Violet!"

He was stooping to clear away the fragments when he heard a knock upon the door. Going to answer it, he found Professor Vixley waiting.

"Hello, Frank," said the slate-writer. "Can I see you for a few minutes?"

"Come in." Granthope drew up a chair, but stood himself with his hands in his pockets while his visitor made himself comfortable.

Vixley's shrewd eyes roved about the room and rested upon the broken cast. "Hello," he said, "cat got into the statuary?"

"Accident," said the palmist.

"Plenty more where they come from, I s'pose. Say, Frank, let's see the Payson girl's hand, will you?"

"I haven't it."

”You mean a cast, of course, eh? I expect you’ve pretty near got the original, ain’t you?”

”Not yet.” Granthope frowned.

”But soon—”

Granthope shrugged his shoulders.

”It was about Payson I wanted to see you,” the Professor went on. ”Seems to me you ain’t standin’ in like you agreed to. Gert claims you got cold feet on the proposition. I thought I’d drop in and chew it over.”

Granthope did not answer, and the frown on his forehead persisted. Vixley took out a cigar and lighted it, threw his match on to the desk, looked about again, and grinned. ”Then you *have* got cold feet, eh?” he remarked, crossing his legs.

Granthope looked the Professor squarely in the eye for a moment. Then he said deliberately: ”Vixley, what will you take to leave town?”

Vixley showed his astonishment in the stare with which he replied. His lip drew away from his yellow fangs, and a keen light came into his black eyes. ”Oho! That’s the game, is it? Somethin’ doin’, after all, eh? Well, well!” He mouthed his cigar meditatively and twirled his thumbs in his lap.

”Come, name your price,” said Granthope sharply.

”I’d like a few details first.”

”What’s the figure?”

Vixley was in no hurry, and enjoyed his advantage. ”I thought you was up to something, Frank. Gert’s pretty sharp, but Lord, she’s only a woman. You fooled *her* a bunch. She really thought you’d got a change of heart. So you want to cut up the money all by your lonely, eh? Well, now, what’ll you give to have me pull out of it?”

”I’ll give you five hundred dollars,” said Granthope.

”Nothin’ doin’,” said Vixley decidedly. ”Why, it’s worth more than that to me just as it stands, and I ain’t but just begun. If you can’t do better than that, why, it’s no use talkin’.”

”I asked you what you wanted. Let’s have it, and I’ll talk business.”

”Payson’s pretty well fixed,” said Vixley. ”I s’pose if you marry the girl you’ll get a good wad of his money.”

”Never mind the girl. I want to buy you out.”

”Well, I’d have to think it over. You know we got a great scheme, and if it works it’ll mean a steady income. But I don’t mind turnin’ over money quick. You make it a thousand dollars and I’ll agree to leave you alone, and pull off Gert into the bargain. You’ll have to fix Masterson yourself. I don’t trust him.”

Granthope began to walk the room again, thinking. He returned finally, to say: ”It won’t do merely for you to agree to keep out of it. I know you too

well. This is a business agreement. If I give you a thousand, will you leave town? That's my offer."

Vixley reflected. "That ain't so much. I dunno as I could afford to spoil my whole business for that."

"Pshaw. You don't make that in a year!"

"Not last year, perhaps, but I expect to this."

"Then you refuse?"

"Wait a minute. Have you got the money on hand?"

"No, I haven't." Granthope's face clouded. "But I have an idea I might raise it. I could pay you in instalments. But you'd have to be outside of California to get it. That's understood."

Vixley rose. "Well, when you've got the money you can begin to talk. If you can raise it, as you say, I may agree. After all, I could use a thou' just at present, and I s'pose I could operate in Chicago till you let me come back. Say I accept."

"All right. As soon as I can raise five hundred, I'll see you, and buy your ticket. Until then, I expect you to leave Payson alone."

"Will *you* leave him alone? That's the question! I don't propose to have no interference until you make good with the money."

"I'll make good, all right," said Granthope.

"Very well, then." Vixley rose and buttoned what buttons were left on his coat. "When you're ready to do business, I'm ready. But you see here!" He shook a long, bony finger at the palmist. "If you go to work and try any gum-games with the old man before then, Frank, I'll break you—like that there hand." He pointed down to the cast on the floor. Then he added easily: "Not that it would do you any good if you did, though. I'll attend to *that*. I got to protect myself. It'll be easy enough to fix it so the old man won't take much stock in what you tell him."

"I expect that's so," Granthope shrugged his shoulders. "I don't mind saying that if I thought I could do anything that way, I would."

"So long, then. The sooner you make your bid, the cheaper it'll be." He turned from the door and looked the palmist over. "You're a good one, Frank. I don't deny you got brains. I wouldn't mind knowin' just what you was up to. It must be something elegant." He came up to Granthope and gestured with both hands. "Say—why don't you let me in? We could work it together, and I'll lose Gertie. I ain't no fool, myself, when it comes right down to business."

Granthope laughed sarcastically. "I hardly think you can help much in this. It's a rather delicate proposition, and I'll have to go it alone. Just as soon as I get the cash I'll let you know."

For an hour after that Granthope sat in his office thinking it over. His offer

to Vixley had come on the spur of the moment, and, although he did not regret it, he was at a loss to know how he could make it good. He went over his accounts carefully, inspected his bank-book, made a valuation of his property. He could see no way, at present, to raise sufficient money to buy Vixley off, and yet to sit still and let him go on with Clytie's father was intolerable. He had seen men ruined by such wiles, and his own conscience was not clean in this matter. There seemed no way of escape.

Late that afternoon he decided to call on Fancy Gray. He had hardly seen her since the night she left, and he was troubled in her regard, also. He. dreaded to know just what she was doing, and how she stood it. He had long attempted to deny to himself that she cared too much for him, and always their fiction had been maintained—that fiction which, during their pretty idyl at Alma, so long ago, had crystallized itself into their whimsical motto: "No fair falling in love!" He had kept their pact well enough. He dared not answer for her.

Fancy lived in a three-story house on O'Farrell, Street, near Jones Street, a place back from the sidewalk, with a garden in front and on one side. Fancy had a room on the attic floor, with two dormer windows giving upon the front yard. As Granthope turned in the gate and looked up at her windows, he was surprised to see one of them raised. Fancy's arm appeared, a straw hat in her hand. The next instant the hat sailed gracefully out into the air, curving like an aeroplane. It dropped nearly at his feet. He picked it up, thinking that she would look out after it, but instead, the sash was lowered.

A minute afterward a young man, bareheaded, and apparently violently enraged, appeared at the front door. Granthope walked up and presented the hat to Mr. Gay P. Summer, who took it, staring, without a word of thanks, and stalked sulkily away.

The door being left open, Granthope walked up three flights of stairs and knocked at Fancy's room. There was no reply. He called to her. The door was instantly flung open.

"Why, hello, Frank! Excuse me. I thought it was my meal-ticket coming back to bore me to death again." Fancy began to laugh. "You ought to have seen him. He simply wouldn't go, after I'd given him twenty-three gilt-edged tips, and so I had to throw his hat out of the window to get rid of him."

"I saw him. I think he won't come back. He looked rather uncomfortable."

Fancy sat down on the bed unconcernedly, clasping her hands on her crossed knees, while Granthope took a seat upon a trunk.

"Say, Frank, these people who expect to annex all your time and pay for it in fifty cent *table d'hotes* are beginning to make me tired. There's nothing so

expensive as free dinners, I've found! The minute you let a man buy you a couple of eggs, he thinks he's in a position to dictate to you for the rest of eternity. Why, one dinner means he's hired you till eleven o'clock, and I run out of excuses long before that. No, you don't get anything free in this world, and many a girl's found *that* out!"

Granthope smiled. Fancy was at her prettiest, with a whimsical animation that he knew of old. Nothing delighted him so much as Fancy in her semi-philosophic vein.

She ran on: "Gay has just proposed to me again—I've lost tally, now. The one good thing about him is that he's always ready to make good with the ring whenever I say the word. He takes me seriously just because I never explain. But all the encouragement I've ever given him is to accept. Gay's the kind that always calls you 'Little girl,' no matter how high you are, and tells you you're 'brave'! There's no one quite like you, Frank—"

As she spoke, her gaiety slowly oozed away, till she sat almost plaintively watching him. Then she smiled and shook her head slowly. "Don't get frightened, I won't do anything foolish." She sprang up and tossed her head. Then, turning to him, she said: "Say, Frank, do you know Blanchard Cayley?"

"Why, I've just heard of him, that's all. He's a friend of Miss Payson's."

"She isn't—fond of him, is she?" Fancy demanded.

"Oh, I hope not! Why?"

"Nothing. Only, I met him, one night, at Carminetti's. Gay had just thrown me down hard. He came round, afterward, and apologized." Fancy looked across the room abstractedly as she talked. Upon the wall were strung a collection of empty chianti bottles in their basket-work shells, a caricature by Maxim, a circus poster and other evidence of her recent conversion to the artistic life. She spoke with a queer introspective manner. "I had a queer feeling about Mr. Cayley. You know, for all I'm such a scatterbrain, I do like a man with a mind. I like to look up to a man. He's awfully well-read. Of course, he isn't as clever as you, but he sort of fascinates me—I don't know why. He interests me, although I can't understand half he says. I suppose he makes me forget. There's nothing like knowing how to forget. But you're sure Miss Payson isn't too fond of him?"

"I'd like to be surer," said Granthope. He, too, was looking fixedly across the room—at the mottoes and texts upon the wall, on the mantel, and over her bed—"Do it Now!" "Nothing Succeeds like Success"—and such platitudes as, printed in red and black, are sold at bookshops for the moral education of those unable to think for themselves.

Fancy slid gently off the bed, and dropped to the floor in front of him. Her hand stole fondly for his, and clasped it, petting it.

"How is she, Frank?"

He put his hand on her hair and smoothed it affectionately. ”Fine, Fancy, fine.”

”Oh—I hope it’s all right, Frank.”

”I don’t know, Fancy. You’d hardly recognize me, these days. I’m losing my sense of humor. I’m becoming a prig, I think.”

Fancy laughed. ”Well, there’s plenty of room in that direction. But I don’t think she’d mind your being a devil occasionally. Women don’t have to be saints to be thoroughbreds. And there’s many a saint that would like to take a day off, once in a while!”

”Have you seen Vixley, lately?”

Fancy grew serious. ”No. Is he still working the old man?”

”Yes, I suppose so. I saw him to-day. I offered him a thousand dollars to leave town, Fancy.”

Fancy looked up at him with wonder in her eyes. ”Why, Frank! What do you mean? A thousand dollars? Why, you haven’t got that much, have you?”

”No. Not yet. But I’ll get it, somehow.”

”You mean—that you’re trying—to save Payson—on her account, Frank?”

He avoided her glance. ”On her account—and perhaps my own.”

Fancy rose impulsively and put her arms about him. ”Do let me hug you, Frank, just once!”

He saw her eyes grow soft. She released herself quickly, as if the embrace, simple as it was, hurt her. She stood in front of him and watched him soberly.

”Frank, *I* never could make you—” She stopped, the tears welling in her eyes. Then she turned and ran out of the room.

He rose, too, and paced up and down, wondering at her mood. His track was short, for the roof sloped on one side, and the place was encumbered with Fancy’s paraphernalia and furniture. His eyes fell, after a while, upon a cigar box on her bureau. It stood upright, under the mirror, and had little doors, glued on with paper hinges, so that the two opened, like the front of a Japanese shrine of Buddha. He went to it and looked at it. Thoughtlessly, with no idea of committing an indiscretion, little suspecting that it could hold anything private or sacred, he swung the little doors open. Then he shut them hastily and walked to the window with a clutch at his heart. Inside he had seen his own photograph. Before it was a little glass jar with a few violets. They were fresh, fragrant. Lettered upon a strip of paper pasted on the inside was the inscription:

No Fair Falling In Love.

He walked away hurriedly to stare hard out of the window.

She came into the room again as he composed himself, and her face, newly washed, was radiant. She reseated herself upon the bed, and, taking up a pair of stockings, proceeded to darn a small hole in the heel.

”Have you got a position, Fancy?”

She laughed. ”Vixley wrote me a note and told me he had a job for me if I wanted it, but I turned him down. You couldn’t guess what I *am* doing, Frank.”

”What?”

”Detective.” She looked up innocently.

”You don’t mean—”

”No! Just little jobs for the chief of police, that’s all. I’m investigating doctors who practise without a license, that’s all. I say, Masterson had better look out or he’ll get pulled.”

”I’m sorry you haven’t anything better, Fancy. Miss Payson said she’d get you a place in her father’s office if you’d go. Would you?”

”No.” Fancy’s eyes were upon her needle.

”Why not?”

”Frank,” she said, ”do you remember asking me to inquire about that soldier the little girl with freckles wanted to find?”

”Yes. I thought you said that the ticket agent at the ferry had left, and so you couldn’t get anything.”

”He was only off on a vacation. He’s come back, and I saw him yesterday. He remembered that soldier perfectly—I don’t see how anybody could fail to—he must look awful. He said he bought a ticket for Santa Barbara.”

”That’s good. I hope she’ll come in again,” said Granthope. ”She was a nice little thing.”

”She was real, Frank, and that’s what few people are, nowadays.”

He looked at her for a minute. ”There’s no doubt that you are, Fancy.”

”I wish I were. I’m only a drifter, Frank.” She kept on with her darning, not looking up.

”Fancy, I want to do something for you. Won’t you let me help you?”

”I’m all right, Frank. I told you I wanted to have some fun before I settled down again. But if I ever do need anything, I’ll let you know.”

”Promise me that—that whenever you want me, you’ll send for me, or come to me, Fancy!”

She looked up into his eyes frankly. ”I promise, Frank. When I need you, I’ll come.”

She was a blither spirit after that, till he took his leave. It had been an eventful day for Francis Granthope. He had swung round almost the whole circle

of emotions. But not quite.

CHAPTER XI
THE FIRST TURNING TO THE LEFT

At five o'clock the next afternoon Blanchard Cayley sitting at a window of his club, opening the letters which he had just taken from his box in the office. He had his hat on, a trait which always aroused the ire of the older members. Beside him, upon a small table, was a glass of "orange squeeze," which he sipped at intervals.

At this hour there were some twenty members in the large room reading, talking or playing dominoes. Others came in and went out occasionally, and of these more than half approached Cayley to say effusively: "Hello, old man, how goes it?" or some such similarly luminous remark. This was as offensive to Cayley as the wearing of his hat in the club was to the old men. Nothing annoyed him so much as to be interrupted while reading his letters. Yet he always looked up with a smile, and replied:

"Oh, so-so—what's the news?"

To be sure, Cayley's mail to-day was not so important that these hindrances much mattered. The study of Esperanto was his latest fad. With several Misses, Frauleins and Mademoiselles on the official list of the "Esperantistoj," and whom he suspected of being young and beautiful, he had begun a systematic correspondence. The greater part of the answers he received were dull and innocuous, written on picture post-cards. From Odessa, from Siberia, Rio de Janeiro, Cambodia, Moldavia and New Zealand such missives came. Those which were merely perfunctory, or showed but a desire to obtain a San Francisco post-card for a growing collection, he threw into the waste-basket. Others, whose originality promised a flirtation more affording, he answered ingeniously.

A man suddenly slapped him on the shoulder.

"Hello, Blanchard, have a game of dominoes?"

"No, thanks."

"Come and have a drink, then."

"No, thanks, I'm on the wagon now."

"Go to the devil."

"Same to you."

The man grinned and dropped into a big chair opposite Cayley and lighted a cigar. Then his glance wandered out of the window. Cayley put the bunch of letters in his pocket and yawned.

"By Jove, there's a peach over there," said the man. Cayley turned and looked.

"In front of the shoe store. See?"

She was standing, looking idly into the show window—a figure in gray and red. Scarlet cuffs, scarlet collar, scarlet silk gloves. Her form was trim and her carriage jaunty.

It was Fancy Gray—drifting. She stood, hesitating, and shot a glance up to the second story of the club house where the men sat. She caught Cayley's eye and smiled, showing her white teeth. Her eyebrows went up. Then she turned down the street and walked slowly away.

"Say," said the man, "was that for you or for me, Blan?"

"I expect it must have been for me. Good day."

"Something doing? Well, good luck!"

Cayley walked briskly out of the room, got his hat, and ran down the front steps. Fancy was already half a block ahead of him, nearing Kearney Street. He caught up with her before she turned the corner.

"I've been looking for you for three weeks," he began.

She paused and gave him a saucy smile. "You ought to be treated for it," was her somewhat elliptical reply.

"I'm afraid I am pretty slow, but I've got you now. It seems to me you're looking pretty nimble."

"Really? I hope I'll do."

"Fancy Gray, you'll indubitably do. Won't you come to dinner with me somewhere, where we can talk?"

"I accept," said Fancy Gray.

"Are you still with Granthope?"

She hesitated for a second before replying. "No, I left last week."

"What's the row?"

"Oh, nothing, I got tired of it."

"That's not true," he said, looking into her eyes, which had dimmed.

"Cut it out then, I don't care to talk about it."

"I bet he didn't treat you square. He's too much of a bounder."

At this her face flamed and she stopped suddenly on the sidewalk, drawing herself away from him. "Don't," she pleaded, "don't, please, or I can't go with you—"

He saw now what was in her eyes and put his hand into her arm again. "Come along, little girl, I won't worry you," he said gently. And they walked on.

She recovered her spirits in a few moments, but the sparkling of her talk was like the waves on the surface of an invisible current sweeping her toward him. It was too evident for him, used as he was to women, not to notice it. She was a little embarrassed, and such self-consciousness sat strangely on her face. Behind that flashing smile and the quick glances of her eye something slumbered, an emotion alien to such debonair moods as was her wont to express, and as foreign to the deeper secret feelings she concealed. Her eyes had darkened to a deeper brown, the iris almost as dark as the pupils. Cayley did, as she had said, fascinate her. Whether the charm was most physical or mental it would be hard to say, but her demeanor showed that it partook of both elements. She gave herself up to it.

He began to play upon her. He took her arm affectionately, and the tips of his fingers rested upon the little, cool circle of her wrist above her gloves. She did not remove his hand. His eyes sought hers again and again, vanquishing them with his meaning glances. Her pulse beat faster. She talked excitedly. A soft wave of color swept up from her neck.

"Suppose we dine at the 'Poodle Dog'?" he suggested.

"I'm game," she replied; "I like a quiet place where there's no music."

"We can get a room up-stairs where we won't be interrupted."

"Anywhere for mine. I've got a blue bean and I'd like to be cheered up."

She was cheered up to an unwonted pitch by the time the dinner was over. As she sat, flushed, mettlesome with wine, thrilling to his advances, he plied her artfully, and she responded with less and less discretion. She could not conceal her impulse towards him.

"Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked, her eyes burning.

"Indeed you are—you're beautiful!" he said, his hand resting on hers.

"But I don't want to be beautiful—that's what you are when you're queer and woozly—like the girls Maxim paints," she pouted. "They're awful frights—they're never pretty. I want to be just pretty, not handsome or good-looking or anything apologetic like that—that's what men call a girl when she can't make good with her profile. You've got to tell me I'm pretty, Blan, or I won't be satisfied."

"You certainly are pretty," he laughed, as he filled her glass.

"That makes me almost happy again," she mused. "Let's forget everything and everybody else in the world. It's funny how I've been thinking about you and wondering if I'd ever see you again. I had a good mind to put a personal in the *Chronicle*. It seemed to me as if I simply had to see you, all this week. Wasn't it funny at Carminetti's? I guess I was struck by lightning that time. You certainly did wireless me. It's fierce to own up to it, Blan, but I like you. I've stood men off ever since I was old enough to know what they wanted, but you've got me

hypnotized. How did you do it?" She laughed restlessly.

"Why, if I hadn't thought you were a little too thick with Granthope, I would have looked you up before."

"I haven't been there for a week. The wide, wide world for mine, now."

"That's pretty tough, to fire you after you'd been with him for two years, isn't it?"

"I don't want to talk about that, really, Blan; it's all right."

He poured out another glass of champagne for her and she drank it excitedly. Cayley still caressed her free hand, but his eyes were not upon her; he was thinking intently. She took his head in her two hands and turned it gently in her direction.

"There! *That's* where you want to look. Here is Fancy, Blan, right here."

"I see you. I was only thinking—do you know, you look like the pictures of Cleopatra?" he suggested. "Did you ever hear of Cleopatra, Fancy?"

She laughed. "I guess I ought to—I played Cleopatra once."

"Did you really—where?—comic opera or vaudeville?"

"Oh, never mind where—I made a hit all right." She leaned back in her chair, clasping her hands behind her head, smiling to herself. A tress of hair had fallen across her ear; it did not mar her beauty.

"I'll bet you got every hand in the house, too."

Fancy became suddenly convulsed with giggles. She sipped her glass and choked as she tried to swallow the wine.

Cayley passed this mysterious mirth without comment. "Granthope looks as if he had been an actor, too."

"Oh, yes, we played together—but only as amateurs." She smiled mischievously.

Cayley followed her up. "He has a fine presence; I should think he'd be good at it. He has lots of women running after him, hasn't he?"

"Oh, he did have—women to throw at the birds—women to warm up for supper—women to burn, and he burned 'em, too. But he won't stand for them now," said Fancy.

"What's the matter? Is he stung?" He filled her glass again.

"Yep. He's cut 'em all out—even me. That's why I'm here."

"But he works them, though?"

"Oh, no, Blan, Frank's straight, sure he is. He doesn't graft any more. He hasn't for—some time."

"I don't believe that," said Cayley.

"Oh, of course, he investigates cases sometimes, but he don't work with cappers the way he did. He's going in for high society now, and he doesn't need to do anything but wear a swallow-tail and get up on his hind legs and drink tea."

Blanchard took a chance shot. ”I hear he’s trying to marry a rich girl.”

Fancy, for the first time, seemed to come to herself. She looked hard at Cayley.’ ”What are you driving at, Blan? What do you want to talk about that for? It’s all off between me and Frank, but I’m not going to knock him. He’s all right, Frank is. I’d rather talk about Me, please! Talk about Fancy, Blan, won’t you? Fancy’s so tired of talking shop.”

Her elbow was upon the table and her little round chin in her palm, as she looked at him under drooping, languorous lids. ”How pretty am I, Blan? Tell me! There’s nothing quite so satisfactory, after a good dinner, as to hear how pretty you are.”

He looked quizzically at her, and quoted: ”’*Tout repas est exquis qui a un baiser pour dessert.*’”

”What does that mean, Blan? I don’t understand Dago talk.”

”It means that you’re pretty enough to eat, and I’m going to eat you,” he replied, making a motion toward her.

She put him off gaily, but only as if to delay the situation. ”Oh, pshaw! haven’t you had enough to eat yet? That won’t go with me, Blan; I’ve got to have real eighteen carat flattery put on with a knife. I can stand any amount of it. I love it! Whether you mean it or not—I don’t care, so long as it sounds nice, I’ll believe it. I’ll believe anything to-night. Now, how do you like my eyes, Blan?”

He took a long, close look at them, then with an amused smile he said: ”Mountain lakes at sunset shot with refracted fires. Or, electric light on champagne—will that do?”

Fancy pouted. ”I knew a fellow once who told me they were just like the color of stones in the bed of the brook ... When I was up at Piedra Pinta, I looked in a shallow part of the creek—where I could see my reflection and the bottom at the same time...” Her voice died off in a dreamy monotone; then she looked up at him again sleepily.

”How about my nose?”

”*Thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus*,” he quoted.

”Whatever does that mean?” She opened her eyes as wide as she could. ”Is my poor old nose as big as that?” She felt of it solemnly.

”It is straight and strong and full of character. And *Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, ... thy teeth are like a flock of sheep ... which come up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins.*”

”That’s *very* swell, indeed,” said Fancy, ”is it original?”

He laughed. ”No. It’s from one of the oldest poems in the world.”

”I’d like to read that book.” Fancy was getting drowsy. ”Tell me some more.”

"*Thine head upon thee is like Carmel...*"

"I'm glad we're getting into California at last."

"*And the hair of thine head like purple;—*"

She shook her head, "Oh, no, don't call it purple, please. Frank says it's Romanesque."

"*Thy neck is as a tower of ivory.*"

"That's the *second* tower," said Fancy, closing her eyes, "I guess that'll be about all for the towers. I think I'd rather have you make it up as you go along. It's more complimentary." She laid her head upon her arms on the table. "My ears are really something fierce, aren't they?"

Cayley touched them in investigation. "They're a bit too small, of course, and they're very pink, but they're like rosy sea-shells touched by the dawn."

Fancy murmured softly: "'She sells sea-shells. She shells sea-shells—She shells she shells'—say, I'm getting woozly."

She roused herself to laugh softly; her head drooped again.

"Then I'll let you kiss them—once!" she whispered.

"I'm afraid I talked too much last night," she said to him the next evening. "I hope I didn't say anything, did if I didn't quite know what I was doing. Funny how the red stuff throws you down!"

"Oh, no, you didn't give anything away. You're pretty safe, for a woman."

"Coffee's what makes *me* talk," she said, "if you ever want to make me loosen up, try about four small blacks and I'll use up the dictionary."

He saw her nearly every day after that, but, even with the aid of coffee, he was unsuccessful in his attempts to make her more communicative. At the mention of Granthope's name she froze into silence or changed the subject.

A few days after the dinner he invited her across the bay to Tiburon where Sully Maxwell had given him the use of one of the dozen or more house-boats anchored in the little harbor. Fancy was delighted at the prospect of a day with him, and early on Sunday morning she was ready at the ferry. As she waited with her basket of provisions, saucily and picturesquely dressed in a cheap outing costume of linen, Dougal and Elsie came up to her.

"Hello, Queen," Dougal cried, and he shook both her hands heartily, his round gargoyle face illuminated with cordiality. "Where have you been all this time? We'll have to try you for desertion. You haven't abdicated, have you? We've been wanting to find you and have you go up to Piedra Pinta with us. The bunch is all up there now; Elsie and I were only just able to get off. Can't you come along with us?"

"Oh, do!" Elsie pleaded, putting her arm about Fancy's slender waist.

"No, I'm sorry, but I can't, really; I'm going to Tiburon with Blanchard Cayley."

Dougal's face clouded. "Say, what do you want to run with that lobster for? You're altogether too good for him."

"I guess I'm in love with him," said Fancy, still holding Dougal's hand and looking up into his face with a quaint expression.

"You *aren't*!" they chorused.

"Oh, I am, I am; I'm sure I am!" she repeated insistently. "I've liked him ever since the first time I saw him. What's the use of pretending? Don't say anything against him, please. I'm so happy—I'm *perfectly* happy, Dougal." The tears came to her eyes.

"I know what'll happen," Dougal said, his pale eyebrows drawn together. "He'll play with you for a while, and then he'll throw you down hard as soon as he's through with you, or another girl comes along."

"Then I hope she won't show up for a good while," said Fancy cavalierly.

"And when it's over?" said Elsie.

Fancy dropped her eyes. "When it's over—I don't know." She looked up. "When it's over I suppose I'll sell apples on Market Street. What else will there be for me to do?"

"Oh, don't; you frighten me," Elsie cried; "we're all so fond of you, Fancy. Remember, we're your friends, and we'd do anything to help you."

Fancy stooped down and kissed her. "Don't worry. Elsie, I'm pretty lively yet. Only you know I don't do things by halves. I suppose I take it rather seriously."

Elsie stared at her. "You're so different."

"Oh, Fancy'll get over this. She got over Granthope all right, and she got over Gay Summer."

The tears surged into Fancy's eyes again. "Don't say that, Dougal. I'm no quitter. I don't get over things. I may bury them and cake-walk over their graves, but I don't forget my friends."

He grinned jovially and wrung her hand till she winced, then he slapped her on the back. "Well, you know where we are when you want us. We're with you for keeps; you can't lose us, Fancy, remember that."

Fancy squeezed his big hairy hand.

Elsie added, "But you'll be awfully talked about. Fancy, do be careful."

"Will I?" said Fancy. "I don't care. If I like Blan and he likes me, I don't care who knows it."

"Are you going to marry him?" Elsie ventured.

"He hasn't said anything about it—yet—but I'm not thinking of that. All I want is for somebody to love me. I'll be satisfied with that."

"You're all right, Fancy; only I hope you're not in for a broken heart," said Dougal.

”Just imagine Fancy with a broken heart!” Elsie laughed.

”Oh, you don’t believe me, but you will sometime.”

Fancy’s eyes were not for them all this while. She was watching the passengers approaching the ferry, her glance darting from one to the other, scanning the cable-cars which drew up at the terminus, questing up toward Market Street, and along the sidewalks and crossings.

”Have you left Granthope?” Dougal inquired.

”Yep.” Fancy, as usual, did not explain.

”Why didn’t you let us know where you were, then?” he complained. ”I was up to the place the other day looking for you, and no one seemed to know where you were.”

Fancy, still watching for Cayley, did not answer.

”Have you got any money, Fancy?”

”Sure!” she answered eagerly. ”I have two dollars here—do you want it?”

”Oh, no!” he laughed. ”I was going to offer you some. If you’re out of a job you must need it. I can let you have twenty or so easy.” He put his hand into his pocket.

She hesitated for a moment, then she said:

”I don’t know but I could use it, Dougal, if you can spare it as well as not.”

”I’m flush this week.” He handed her a gold double eagle.

”Granthope will lend me all I want, or I could get it from Blanchard, but somehow I hate to take it from them. Of course, it’s all right, and they have plenty, but I’d feel better borrowing of you, you know.”

”That’s the best thing you’ve said yet,” he said, beaming on her.

”Oh, Dougal, tell her about the séance,” said Elsie, as Fancy put the money in her purse.

”Oh, yes! I wanted to see you about a materializing séance, Fancy. Do you know of a good one? We want to go some night and see the spooks. The bunch is going to have some fun with them.”

”You want to look out for yourself, then. They always have two or three bouncers, and they’ll throw you out if there’s any row, you know.”

Dougal grinned happily. ”That’s just what we want. I haven’t had a good scrap for months. Maxim can handle three or four of them alone, while Benton, Starr and I raise a rough house. We’re going to go early and get front seats.”

It was Fancy’s turn to laugh. ”You can’t do it, Dougal. You don’t know the first rules of the game. They always have their own crowd on the first two rows, and they won’t let you get near the spirits. They only want believers, anyway. If you aren’t careful, they won’t let you in at all; they’ll say all the seats are taken. You’d better go separately and sit in different parts of the room, and spot the bouncers if you can.”

”Oh, we’ll handle them all right. Where’s a good one?”

Fancy reflected a minute. ”I think, perhaps, Flora Flint is the best. She’s a clever actress, and she always has a crowd. It’s fifty cents. Her place is on Van Ness Avenue—I think her séances are on Wednesday evenings—you’ll find the notice in the papers. But they’re pretty smooth; they’ve had people try to break up the show before. If you try to turn on the light or grab any ghost, look out you don’t get beaten up.”

”Oh, you can trust us; we’ve got a new game,” he answered.

Then, as the Sausalito boat was about to leave, they bade Fancy a hurried farewell and ran for the entrance to the slip. A few minutes after this Blanchard Cayley appeared, put his arm through hers, and they went on board the ferry.

The harbor of Tiburon, in the northern part of San Francisco Bay, is sheltered on the west by the promontory of Belvedere, where pretty cottages climb the wooded slopes, and on the south by Angel Island, with its army barracks, hospital and prison. Here was huddled a little fleet of house-boats or ”arks,” the farthest outshore of which belonged to Sully Maxwell.

It was a queer collection of architectural amphibia, these nautical houses floating in the bay. They were of all sizes, some seemingly too small to stretch one’s legs in without kicking down a wall, others more ambitious in size, with double decks and roof-gardens. There were all grades and quality as well; some even had electric lights and telephone wires laid to the shore. Here, free from rent, taxes or insurance, the little summer colony dwelt, and the rowboats of butcher, baker and grocer plied from one to another. It was late in the season now, however, and only a few were occupied. A little later, when the rains had set in, they would all be towed into their winter quarters to hibernate till spring.

Cayley conducted Fancy Gray down to the end of a wharf where the skiff was moored, in the care of a boatman, and after loading the provisions and supplies he had purchased at the little French restaurant by the station, he rowed her out to the *Edyth*.

The bay was cloudless and without fog. The September sun poured over the water and sparkled from every tiny wave-top, the breeze was a gentle, easterly zephyr. Cayley seemed younger in the open air, and all that was best in him came to the surface. He was almost enthusiastic. Fancy was in high feather. As she sat in the stern of the skiff and trailed her hand in the salt water, he watched her with almost as much pride as had Gay P. Summer.

She climbed rapturously aboard, unlocked the front room and filled it with her gleeful exclamations of delight. Then she popped into the tiny kitchen and gazed curiously at the neat, shining collection of cooking-utensils and the gasoline stove. She danced out again, to circle round the narrow railed deck. Finally she pulled a steamer chair to the front porch and flopped into it.

”I’m never going to leave this place,” she cried. ”It’s just like having a deserted island all to yourself. I feel like a new-laid bride. Let’s hoist a white flag.”

Cayley, meanwhile, put the provisions on the kitchen table and came out to be deliciously idle with her—but she could not rest. She was up and about like a bee, humming a gay tune. She went into the square, white sitting-room to inspect everything that was there, commenting on each object. She sat in every chair and upon the table as well. She tried a little wheezy melodeon with a snatch of ragtime. She criticized every picture, she cleaned the mirror with her handkerchief, then went out to wash it in salt water and hang it on a line to dry. She read aloud the titles of all the books, she opened and shut drawers, and peeped into a little state-room with bunks and was lost there for five minutes. When she came out again, her copper hair was braided down her back and she had on a white ruffled apron.

”I’m going to cook dinner,” she announced.

Cayley smiled at her enthusiasm. ”I don’t believe you can do it.”

She insisted, and he followed her into the kitchen to watch her struggles. She succeeded in setting the table without breaking more than one plate, and then she filled the tea-kettle with fresh water from the demi-john. After that she looked helplessly at Cayley.

”How do you shell these tins?”

”With a can-opener.”

She tried for a few moments, biting her lip and pinching her finger in the attempt. Then she turned to him coaxingly.

”You do it, Blan, please.”

He had it open in a minute. She unwrapped the steak, put it into a frying-pan, unbuttered, and began to struggle with the stove. After she had lighted a match timidly, she said:

”I’m awfully afraid it’ll explode.”

He took her in his arms and lifted her to the table, where she sat swinging her legs, her hands in her apron pockets.

”Confess you don’t know a blessed thing about housework or cooking!”

”Of course I don’t. What do you take me for? I’ve lived in restaurants and boarding-houses all my life—how should I know? But I thought it was easier than it seems to be. I suppose you have to have a knack for it.”

”I’ll show you.” He took the apron from her, tying it about his own waist. With the grace of a chef he set about the preparations for dinner. He lighted the stove, he put potatoes in the oven to roast, he heated a tin of soup, washed the lettuce, broiled the steak, cut the cranberry pie and made a pot full of coffee.

They sat down at the table with gusto and made short work of the refreshments. Fancy was a little disappointed that they couldn’t drop a line over the

side of the boat and fry fish while they were fresh and wriggling, but she ate her share, nevertheless. She drank cup after cup of coffee and took a cigarette or two, sitting in blissful content, listening to the *cluck-cluck* of water plashing lazily against the sides of the boat. While they were there still lingering at the table, the ferry-boat passed them. The ark careened on the swell of the wake, rising and falling, till the water was spilled from the glasses, and the dishes lurched this way and that. Fancy screamed with delight at the motion. For some minutes the hanging lamp above their heads swung slowly to and fro.

All that sunny, breezy afternoon she sat happily, chattering on the front platform, watching the yachts that passed out into the lower bay, the heavily laden ferry-boat that rocked them deliciously in its heaving wake, and the row-boats full of Sunday excursionists, who hailed them with slangy banter. She watched the little red-tiled cottages at Belvedere. She watched the holiday couples walk the Tiburon beach, past the wreck of the *Tropic Bird*, now transformed into a summer home. She watched the mauve shadow deepen over Mount Tamalpais and the gray city of San Francisco looming to the south in a pearly haze. She was drenched by the salt air and burned by the sunshine; a permanent glow came to her cheeks, her brown eyes grew wistful. She talked incessantly.

Cayley amused her all day with his jests and stories. That he was too subtle for her did not matter. She listened as attentively to his explanations of the set forms of Japanese verse as she did to his mechanical love-making. Cayley was not of the impetuous, hot-blooded type—he preferred the snare to the arrow—his was the wile of the serpent that charms the bird and makes it approach, falteringly, step by step, to fall into his power; but his system, if mathematically accurate, was also artistic. Fancy's devotion to him was undisguised—he did not need his art. It was she who was spontaneous, frank and affectionate. He only added a few flourishes.

"Do you love me, Blan?" she asked, warming to him as the sun went down.

"Why, of course I do; haven't I been apodictically adoring you?"

She looked at him, bewildered. "I thought there was something queer about it; perhaps that's it. But you haven't called me 'dear' once."

"But I've called you 'Nepenthe' and 'Chloe'." He looked down at her patronizingly.

"'Darling' is good enough for me—I guess I like the old-fashioned words best, dear," she whispered shyly.

He quoted:

"Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment hoodwinked,"

and laughed to himself at the appositeness of Cowper's lines.

"Oh, yes, you know some lovely poetry, Blan, but I'm afraid I'm not poetical. I like the things they say in songs,—things I can understand. I'd rather hear slang—"

"'The illegitimate sister of poetry—'"

She looked up at him blankly. Then she sighed and turned her eyes off to the darkling water.

"No one ever made love to suit me, somehow—men are queer—they're so blind—they seem to know so little about the things that mean a lot to a woman." She shivered. "It's getting chilly, isn't it. I'm cold."

"Shall I get you a wrap?"

She took his arm and placed it about her shoulder. "That'll do," she said.

"Fancy, you are adorable—you're absolutely complete. You're unique—you're a nonpareille!"

"I'd rather be a peach," she confessed, snuggling closer.

"You are, Fancy—a clingstone! I'd like to kiss you to death."

"Now, *that's* the stuff!"

"I'm sorry you don't appreciate my compliments," he remarked, after this little episode.

"I'm afraid I don't. I'm sorry I'm not intellectual, Blan, but I'd rather have you call me a 'damn fool' if you said it lovingly, than have you say pretty things I can't understand."

"All right, then, you're a damn fool!"

She laughed happily. "Thank you, Blan, dear, that was nice! I believe you're improving."

"Oh, if you prefer Anglo-Saxon, I'll call you a piece, a jade, baggage, harridan, hussy, minx—"

"Yes, but you must put 'dear' at the end, you know, to show that you're not in earnest."

"I'll try to remember."

Fancy went on:

"It's wonderful to be out here, all alone with you on the water, cut off from everything. It satisfies me gorgeously—it's like the taste of ice-cream to a hungry little kid. I remember how I used to long for it. I was awfully poor and lonely once. I believe I'm happy now. What do you think it is, Blan, you or the coffee? Don't you want to hold my hand? Let's just sit here and forget things—but I haven't very much to forget, have I? I'd like to read books and know some of the things you do—but it's too late now—I guess I'll always be ign'ant."

"Oh, I'll teach you all the things you want to know," he said condescendingly. "You're good material and you'd learn quickly. I could make a wonder out

of you with a little training. I'll give you lessons if you like."

"I accept," said Fancy Gray.

Then she added:

"I don't expect you'll love me very long, Blan, but you must make up for it by loving me as much as you can. That's where I can teach you. Men aren't faithful like women are—I'm glad I'm a woman, Blan."

"I'm glad you are," he echoed.

The night fell, and they began reluctantly to make preparations for their departure. While Cayley was busy in the kitchen, packing up a basket to be returned, Fancy went into the little white state-room to do her hair and put on her wrap.

As she came out she noticed a little card-tray in the corner of the living-room, and idly turned the names over, one by one. Of a sudden her hand fell, and her eyes were fixed intently upon a card that had just come into sight. It bore the legend:

MR. FRANCIS GRANTHOPE

She threw herself upon the couch by the window and broke into sobs.

"Say, Fancy! It's after seven o'clock," Cayley called to her from the kitchen.

She stumbled to her feet and went out on deck, dipped her handkerchief in the salt water and bathed her eyes. Cayley came out just as she finished. It was too dark, now, to notice her expression.

They took the rowboat which had been nuzzling alongside the flank of the ark all day, made for the shore and went aboard the steamer.

It was crowded with Sunday picnickers, who came trooping on in groups, singing, the girls flushed and sunburned with hair distraught and dusty shoes; the men in jovial, uncouth disarray in canvas and in corduroy, like tramps and vagabonds, laden with ferns and flowers. Hunters, with guns and dogs, tramped aboard; fishermen, with rods and baskets; tired families, lagging, whining, came in weary procession. Both decks of the boat were crowded. A brass band struck up a popular air. The restaurant, the bar and the bootblack stand all did a great business.

Cayley and Fancy Gray went to the upper deck for a last draft of the summer breeze. As they sat there, talking little, watching the throng of uneasy passengers, Fancy called his attention to a couple sitting opposite.

It was a strangely assorted pair, the girl and the man. She was about twenty years of age, with a pretty, earnest, freckled face and a modest air. She was talking happily, with undisguised fondness, to the young man beside her. His face was

hideous, without a nose. In its place was a livid scar and a depression perforated by nostrils that made his appearance malign. He wore nothing to conceal the mutilation, shocking as it was. His manner toward the girl was that of a lover, devoted and tender.

"Did you ever see anything so awful?" said Fancy. "And isn't she terribly in love with him though! I know who she is; her name is Fleurette Heller. She came into Granthope's studio once and I took a great liking to her. Frank told her that her love affair would come out all right, and she'd be happier than she ever was in her life before."

"I don't see how she can endure that object," said Cayley.

"Don't you?" said Fancy, "that's because you don't know women. She's in love with him. I understand it perfectly. I wouldn't care a bit how he looked."

She nodded, as she spoke, to a man who passed just then. He was dark-skinned, with a pointed beard. He gave her a quick jerk of the head and grinned, showing a line of yellow teeth, and his glance jumped with the rapidity of machinery from her face to Cayley's, and away again. He walked on, his hands behind his back against a coat so faded and shiny as to glow purple as a plum.

Fancy's eyes followed him. "That's Vixley," she said.

Cayley's look turned from a pretty blonde across the way and he became immediately attentive. "Who's Vixley?"

"Why, Professor Vixley, the slate-writer, you know."

"Oh, yes—he's a medium, is he? What sort is he?"

She shook her head. "Wolf! He makes me sick. I'm afraid of him, too. He's out after Granthope with a knife, and I'm afraid he'll do for him some day. Frank ought never to have stood in with him, but you know he used to live with a friend of this man's when he was little, and they've got a hold on him he can't break very well."

"They know things about him?"

"Yes, in a way. Before he braced up. He's square now, and he's trying to shake that bunch. Poor old Frank!"

Cayley pulled at his mustache. "I wish I had noticed Vixley."

"Why?"

"Oh, I'd like to see him, that's all. He must be a pretty clever fakir. Of course he isn't straight?"

"As a bow-knot," said Fancy, "but if he amuses you, I'll introduce you to him. I've got a pretty good stand-in with him, yet." She smiled sadly.

"Suppose you do. I'd like to hear him talk."

"All right," said Fancy. They rose and walked in the medium's direction, encountering him on the foreward deck. He was holding his hat against the fresh breeze and gazing at the approaching lights of the city. The meeting was

somewhat constrained at first. Vixley seemed to be embarrassed at Cayley's aristocratic appearance, and evidently wondered what his motive was in being introduced. Cayley, however, was sufficiently a man of the world to be able to put the medium at his ease. He told stories, he made jokes, and gradually drew Vixley out. The wolf talked gingerly, making sure of his ground, his little black eyes shifting from one to the other, whether he spoke or listened. Cayley held him cleverly until the crowd began to descend, making ready for the disembarkation. They went down to the lower deck. Here the crowd had begun to pack together into a close mass, jostling, joking, singing—all sorts and conditions of men in a common holiday mood.

Cayley managed so that Fancy went ahead, and, with some dexterous manoeuvering, allowed two or three persons to pass between himself and her. Vixley was just behind him, when Cayley turned and said quickly:

"Can you meet me at the Hospital Saloon at ten o'clock to-night?"

"What for?" the Professor demanded.

"Important—something about Payson. It is decidedly to your advantage to see me."

"I'll be there!" A light gleamed behind Vixley's shrewd black eyes.

The two squirmed their way to where Fancy was standing, and accompanied her off the boat. At the entrance to the ferry building the medium took his leave. Cayley and Fancy had dinner together, after which, urging an engagement, he put her aboard her car and walked down Market Street to the "Hospital."

Vixley was there, waiting for him, sitting at a side table, regarding an enormous painting of a nude over the bar. His quick eye caught Cayley as he entered and drew him on. For the rest of the interview they did not leave the young man's face.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST TURNING TO THE RIGHT

"All I got to say is this," said Madam Spoll, "if you know what's best for yourself, you won't make no enemies."

"I scarcely think you can hurt me much," said Granthope, losing interest in the discussion, as he saw he could make no way with her.

"We can't, can't we? We know a whole lot more about you than you'd care

to have told, Frank Granthope. Since I seen you last, things have developed with Payson, and now we're in a position to say to you, look out for yourself. Payson's stock has went up some. We've got inside information that's valuable."

"Then you don't need me, surely."

"We need you to keep your mouth shut, if nothing else."

"You mean not to tell Mr. Payson anything? I would if I thought I could make him listen."

"Tell *him*? Lord, you can tell him till you're black in the face, and he wouldn't believe it—not till you tell him where we got our information. Why, if he caught me at the keyhole of his room, he wouldn't suspect anything. We've got the goods to deliver this time, don't you fool yourself. Payson's a ten-to-one shot all right. All we want to be sure of now is the girl you're trying to marry."

"I'm not trying to marry her," said Granthope bitterly.

"That's lucky for you!"

"Why?" he demanded suspiciously.

Madam Spoll spoke very slowly and deliberately without asperity, "Because if you *should* be fool enough to try it on your own hook without helping us out in our game, why, we'd have to show you up to her. I know a little too much about you, Frank Granthope, for you to throw me down as easy as that. You can't exactly set yourself up for a saint, you know; there's the Bennett affair and one or two more like it. Then, again, there's Fancy Gray and several others like *that*. It'll add up to a pretty tidy scandal, if the Payson girl should happen to hear about it all; and if not her, there's others that it won't do you any good to have know."

Granthope shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly, looking calmly at the medium. Her face was as placid and unwrinkled as his. She showed not the slightest trace of vindictiveness, talking as though discussing some impersonal business arrangement.

"Then I am to understand that you threaten me with blackmail?"

"Black, white or yellow, any color you like." She made a deprecatory gesture, "But I don't put it that way myself; all I do say is, that it's for your interest to leave us alone. You know as well as I do that we can put the kibosh on your business, if we want to. We've got a pretty good gang to work with, and when we pass the word round and hand you the double-cross, you won't read many more palms at five per, not in this town you won't."

He smiled. "That's all a bluff. You can't expose me without giving yourself away as well."

"What have we got to lose? We could get the old man back any time we gave him a jolly. You can't bust up our business—too many suckers in town for that. Lord, I've been exposed till I grew fat on it. But we can break *you*, Frank

Granthope; we can bust your business and queer you with this swell push, easy, not to speak of Clytie Payson."

"Well, then," said Granthope, rising and taking his hat, "go ahead and do it! We might just as well settle this thing now. Smash my business—I don't care; I wish you would! Ruin any social ambition I may be fool enough to have—it'll serve me right for caring for such nonsense. Tell Miss Payson all you know—it'll save me the shame of telling her myself. God knows I wish she did know it! I'm getting sick of the whole dirty game."

Madam Spoll, completely taken aback by his unexpected change of base, stood with a sneer on her face, watching him. "You ought to go on the stage, Frank Granthope—you almost fooled me for a minute," she said with an ironic smile. "I fully expected you to say you had joined the Salvation Army next, and had come around here to save me from hell. So you've got religion, have you? You'd look well in a white necktie, you would! And your inside pocket full of mash notes!"

"Well," he said, walking to the door, "you've had your say and I've had mine. You can believe what you please, but when you do think it over, you may recall the fact that I usually mean what I say."

This was the end of the interview. Madam Spoll, at Vixley's instigation, had sent for Granthope and had "put on the screws." Granthope walked back to his rooms in a brown study. He was at bay now, and there seemed to be no escape for him.

The red-headed office boy was whistling and whittling a pencil lazily at Fancy's desk as the palmist entered. There was no one else in the room.

"Has anybody been here, Jim?" Granthope asked.

Jim looked up carelessly and replied, "Dere was a lady what blew in about a half an hour ago and she told me she might float back."

"Who was she?"

"She wouldn't leave no name, but she was a kissamaroot from Peachville Center all right. She looked like she was just graduated from a French laundry. She left dese gloves here."

He handed over a pair of long, immaculately white gloves, which were lying on a chair. Granthope looked at them carefully, blew one out till it took the form of a hand and then inspected the wrinkles.

"Oh," he said. "Tell Miss Payson to come into my studio when she comes back."

"Say, Mr. Granthope, who's Miss Gray? De lady wanted to know where was Miss Gray, and I told her she could search me, for I wasn't on. She looked like she took me for a shine to be holdin' down de desk here; dat's right."

Granthope walked quickly into his studio without answering.

He seated himself thoughtfully and looked about him, still holding the white glove caressingly in his hand. His eye traveled from the electric-lighted table, round the black velvet arras, to the panel where the signs of the zodiac were embroidered in gold: then his eyes closed. He sat silent for ten minutes or so, then he drew his hand through his heavy black hair and across his brow. His eyes opened; he arose; a faint whimsical smile shone on his face.

Then, still smiling, he strode deliberately across the room, grasped the black velvet hanging and gave it a violent tug, wrenching it from the cornice. It fell in a soft, dark mass upon the floor. He seized the next breadth of drapery, and the next, tearing them from the wall. So he went calmly round the room in his work of destruction, disclosing a widening space of horribly-patterned wall-paper—pink and yellow roses writhing up a violently blue background. On the last side of the room two windows appeared, the glass almost opaque with dust.

He threw up a sash; a shaft of sunshine shot in, and, falling upon the velvet waves upon the floor, changed them to dull purple. In that ray a universe of tiny motes danced radiantly. A current of air set them in motion and swept them from the room through the window into the world outside.

And, as he stood there, his face like that of a child who had released a toy balloon, watching that beam of yellow light, Clytie Payson opened the door of the studio and looked in at him. She appeared suddenly, like a picture thrown vividly upon a screen. She saw Granthope before he saw her, and, for a moment, she stood gazing. His pose was eloquent; he was, in his setting, almost symbolistic—she needed no explanation of what had happened. Then, it was as if some tense cord snapped in her mind, and she threw herself forward, no longer the dreamer, but the actor, giving free rein to her emotion.

[image]

His pose was eloquent

He turned and caught sight of her. Her hands were outstretched, her eyes were burning with a new fire, as if her smoldering had burst into flame.

”Oh! You have done it! I knew you would!”

He gave her his two hands in hers, nodding his head slowly; his smile was that of one who viewed himself impersonally, looking on at his own actions. He did not speak. A quaint humor struggled in his mind with the intensity of the situation. Something in him, also, had snapped, and he was self-conscious in his new rôle.

She clutched his hands excitedly, and lifted her eyes up to his, with a new,

unabashed fondness burning in them. She had thrown away all her reserves.

"It's magnificent!" she said. "Oh, how I have longed for this! How I have waited for it! And now, how I admire—and love you for it!"

Her face was so near his that, like an electric spark, the flash of eagerness darted from one to the other. He felt the shock of emotion tingling his blood. It swept his mind from control and flooded his will with an irresistible desire for her. He saw that she was ready for him, willing to be won. He took her in his arms and kissed her softly, but gripping her almost savagely in his embrace.

"Do you mean it?" he cried. "Do you love me, really? I can't believe it! It's too much for me. Tell me!"

She released herself gently, still looking up at him and smiling frankly. "Didn't you know? You, who know so much of women? I thought you understood me as I have understood you."

He still held her, as if he feared he could never get her again so close, and she went on:

"Oh, I would never have told you, if you had gone on as you were going, though I should always have loved you—I could never have helped that. But now, after this crisis, this victory—I know what it all means—I *must* tell you! Why shouldn't I? It is true, and I am not ashamed to be the first to speak. Yes, I love you!"

The reaction came, his sight grew dark at the thought of his unworthiness, and he freed her, putting her away slowly. Then, as if to resist any temptation, he clasped his hands behind his back.

"I can't stand it!" he exclaimed. "It isn't fair for me to let you say that. Don't say it yet. Wait till I have told you what I am. Then you will despise me, and hate me."

"Never!" she said firmly. "Do you think I don't know you? I am sure. It is impossible for you to surprise me. Whatever you have been or done, it will make no difference—for better or for worse. Of course, I can't know all the circumstances of your life, but I feel that I am sure of your motives—I may know an ideal 'you,' but, if that is not what you are now, it is what you are to be. It is that 'you' that I love—all the rest is dead, I hope." She swept her eyes about the barren room, and her hand went out in comprehensive gesture. "Surely all this can't mean anything less than that? You are not one for compromise or half-measures. You have burned your bridges, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "I don't intend to do things half-way. But it's not a pretty story I have to tell. It's selfish, sordid, vulgar."

"Oh, I know something of it, already. Mr. Cayley has told me about that Bennett affair, for he suspected, somehow, that you were implicated in it. And I have guessed more. You needn't be afraid. But you had better tell me as much as

you can—not for my sake, but for your own. Then it will all be over, and we can begin fresh."

She dropped to a seat on the couch and leaned languidly against the cushions, clasping her hands in her lap. He scarcely dared look at her, and walked nervously up and down the room, dreading the inevitable ordeal. For a while he did not speak, then he turned swiftly to say:

"Positively, I don't know where to begin!"

"You would better begin at the beginning, then—with Madam Grant."

"You suspected that, then?"

"It was that suspicion that has drawn me to you. I should never have begun to love you without that, perhaps. It seemed to justify my growing feeling for you. Haven't I hinted at that often enough? I mean that in some way we had been connected before. You *were* the little boy who disappeared when she died, weren't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"But I can't make it out! There was never any child there when I went, though I was conscious of some secret presence—some one invisible."

"I was locked in the closet—I watched you through a crack in the door."

"Oh!" Her eyes widened with a full direct stare; her breath came quickly at the revelation. He watched her, as her expression was transmuted from bewilderment to the beginning of an agonized disillusion. He could not bear it, as he saw that her mind was hastening to the explanation, and he forestalled her next question by his ruthless confession.

"Of course, that's the way I was able to give you that very wonderful clairvoyant reading—the picture of you in Madam Grant's room."

She took the blow bravely, but it was evident that she had not been quite ready for it. "Then you are really not clairvoyant at all? You were simply imposing on my credulity? I want to know the exact truth, so that we can straighten matters out." She spoke slowly, hesitatingly.

"I told you it was a ghastly story—this is the least of it," he said, wincing.

The smile fluttered back to her quivering lips, and with a quick impulse she rose, went to him again and clasped his hand.

"Oh, I'm not making it easy for you!" she cried. "Forgive me, please. I can bear anything you say—be sure of that, won't you? Come here!"

She drew him down to the couch beside her, still keeping his hand in hers. "This is better," she said softly. "Don't think of me as an inquisitor, but as a friend. What you have been can not matter any longer. But let us have no more deceit or reserve between us. You see, I don't quite understand yet about that day. How did you know who I was? How did you get my name?"

He summoned his courage as for an operation desperately necessary, and

looked her straight in the eye.

”That was a trick. I read ’Clytie’ inside your ring.”

She took it without flinching. ”But my last name—that wasn’t there!”

”Oh, that was inspiration; I can’t explain it. You see, I had happened to hear the name ’Payson’ that morning, and it recalled the fact that I had seen it before upon a picture in Madam Grant’s bedroom. Your father’s name, ’Oliver Payson,’ it was.”

”In Madam Grant’s room? How strange! I don’t understand that.”

”Nor I, either. Yet you say he knew her?” queried Granthope.

”Only slightly, so he gave me to understand, at least—still, that may not be true. He may have his reasons for not telling more.” She turned to him with a strange, deliberate, questing expression, and said, ”Who *are* you, anyway?” Then, ”Was Madam Grant your mother?”

”I don’t know. I’ve often suspected that it might be so, but somehow I don’t quite believe it. I don’t, at least, *feel* it.”

”Why did you run away?”

”Just before she died she asked me to take some money she had and to keep it safe. I hid it and ran away because I was afraid that they’d find it and take it away from me. I went to Stockton and carried the package to a bank, but they frightened me with their questions and I ran away without any explanations. Of course it’s lost, and it was, as I remember it, a big sum, some thousands. I could never prove that I left it there, for my name wasn’t on the package of bills. I had written some false name—I forget what. I never let any one know that I had lived with Madam Grant, after that, for fear that I should be accused of having stolen the money. My story would never have been believed, of course.”

”I see.” Clytie’s eyes half closed in thought. ”I’m sure it was meant for you, Francis.”

The sound of his name stirred him and his hand tightened on hers.

”Perhaps so. But I’ve always thought that she intended it for some of her kin. It has been impossible for me to trace any of her family, though. All I know about her is that she was at Vassar College, but I can’t possibly identify her, because Grant was undoubtedly a name she assumed here.”

”We must try to see what we can do, you and I. Perhaps I may be able to help you, somehow. What happened after that?”

”I worked at odd jobs in the country for a number of years, then came back to San Francisco. There I did anything I could get to do till I met Madam Spoll. She was a medium, and is yet. I lived with her several years.”

As he had torn down the draperies of that dark, mysterious room, he went on, now, to tear down the curtain of shams and hypocrisies that had hidden his true self from her and from her kind.

”That was the beginning of a long education in trickery. I was surrounded by charlatans and impostors, I was taught that the public was gullible and that it liked to be fooled—that it would be fooled, whether we did it or not; and that we might benefit by its credulity as well as any one else. There was sophistry enough, God knows, in their miserable philosophy, but I was young and was for a while taken in by it. I had no other teachers; I had only the example of the colony of fakirs about me. I saw our victims comforted and encouraged by the mental bread-pills we fed them. So we played on their weakness and vanity without scruple. I learned rapidly. I was cleverer than my teachers; I went far ahead of them. I invented new tricks and methods. But it was too easy. There was scarcely any need of subtlety or finesse. The most primitive methods sufficed. You have no idea how easily seemingly intelligent persons can be led once they are past the first turning. That was finally why I got out of it and went into palmistry. That had, at least, a basis of science, and a dignified history.”

He arose again and walked to the open window. His self-consciousness was a little relieved by his interest in the analysis. He looked out, and turned back to her with a grim smile.

”It’s in the air, here—the gambling instinct is paramount!” he said. ”Almost everybody gambles in San Francisco. You know that well enough. You can almost hear the rattle of the slot-machines on the cigar-stand at the corner, down there. It’s that way all over town. The gold-fever has never died out. Every one speculates or plays the races or bets on ball games or on the prize-fights, or plays faro or poker or bridge—or, at least, makes love. They’re all superstitious, all credulous, all willing to take risks and chances, and so the mediums thrive. Tips are sought for and paid for. Every one wants to get rich quickly and not always scrupulously. It’s not a city of healthy growth; it’s a town of surprises, of magic and madness and rank enthusiasms. We pretended to show them the short cuts to success, that’s all. You know, perhaps, how the money-getting ability can eclipse all other faculties, and you won’t be surprised when I tell you that we made large sums from men of wealth and prominence—they were the easiest of the lot, usually.”

She brought him back to his story. ”Of course I understood from what I heard, that you had been an accomplice of these mediums. I don’t think you need to go into that.”

”Oh, you don’t know all! It will sicken you to have me go into the actual details, but I want you to know the worst. I think I must tell you, lest others may. One picture will be enough to make you see how vulgar and despicable I had become in that epoch. You’d never get to the sordidness of it unless I told you in so many words. Do you think you can stand it? You may not want ever to know me again. God! I don’t know whether I *can* tell you or not! It’s terrible to have

to sully you with the description of it!"

For a moment she faltered, gazing at him, trembling. Her eyes sought his and left them, often, as she spoke. "You don't mean—I've heard that some of these mediums—the vilest of them—don't hesitate to—take advantage of the sensual weakness of their patrons—that they—Oh, don't tell me that you ever had any part in *that*!" She covered her face.

He walked over to her and pulled her hands away, looking down into her eyes. "Do you think I would ever have kissed you if I had?" he said. "No, there were depths I didn't fall to, after all. Oh, I've had my way with women often enough; but not that way."

She threw off her fears with a gesture of relief, and her mood changed. "I believe you. But don't tell me any more, please. I think I know, in a way, just about what you were capable of, and some things I couldn't bear to think about. But my reason has always fought against my intuition whenever I suspected you of any real dishonor. Thank Heaven I shall never have to do so again! I think I was wise enough to see how, in all this, you had the inclinations without the opportunities for better things. You were a victim of your environment. Spare me any more. I can't bear to see you abase yourself so. I am so sure you have outlived all this. It's all over. I have told you that I love you. I shall always love you!"

He yearned for her—for the peace and support that she could give him at this crisis, but his pride was too hot, yet, for him to accept it; he had not finished his confession. She was still on a pedestal—he admired and respected her, but she was above his reach. He could not quite believe that hint in her eyes, for her halo blinded him. She was still princess, seeress, goddess—not yet a woman he could take fearlessly to his arms. His hesitation at her advances, therefore, was reluctant, almost coy. He did not wish to take her from her niche; he must first receive absolution. After that—he dared not think. She had allured him in the first stages of his acquaintance, she still allured him; but her spiritual attributes dominated him. "I think I am another man, now," he said, "but my repentance is scarcely an hour old. It is too young; it has not yet proved itself. It's not fair for me to accept all you can give for the little I can return. I must meet you as an equal."

She looked at him calmly. "It is more than a few hours old," she said. "Do you think I don't know? What I first saw in you I have watched grow ever since. I told you all I could; it was not for me to help you more. It was for you to help yourself—to develop from within. I think you were all ready for me, and I came at the psychological moment." She looked around the room from which the sunlight had now retreated, leaving it shadowy and dim. The hangings of black velvet were scattered about the floor, the little table and its two chairs were like a

group of skeletons, empty, satiric, suggestive of past vanities. "'What is to come is real; it was a dream that passed,'" she quoted.

He found a new courage and a new hope. It shone in his eyes, it tingled in his body; something of his old audacity returned. He stood dark and strong before her.

"Oh, you have helped, indeed!" he said. "I think this would never have come alone, for I was sunk in an apathy—and yet, I'm not sure. The old life was no longer possible. I confess that I was in a trap, threatened with exposure—I feared your discovery of what I had been—I smarted under the shame of your disapproval—but it was not that that influenced me. It was like a chemical reaction, as all human intercourse is; you precipitated all this deceit and hypocrisy at one stroke and left my mind clear."

"I'm so glad you feel it that way," Clytie said. "It brings us together, doesn't it? It lessens the debt you would owe me." Her eyelids crinkled in a delicious expression of humor, as she added, "And it makes this place seem a little less like a Sunday-school room!"

"Oh, I suppose many a man has refused to reform for fear of being considered a prig!" he laughed. "But I haven't swept out all the corners yet. I must finish cleaning house before I invite you in."

"Why should we talk about it any more?"

"But it isn't all over!" he exclaimed. "I haven't told everything. It's all over, so far as I am concerned—I shall not go back—but now you are involved in it. Could anything drag me lower than that?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Only that, because of my fault in not warning you before, your father has already become the latest dupe for this gang of fakirs. I'm afraid he's in their power. Hasn't he told you anything about it?"

"A little. What is there to fear from them?"

"Of course, it's only his money they're after. They have got hold of considerable information about him—I don't know just how or what—and they have succeeded in hoodwinking him into a belief that they have supernatural powers. I'm afraid it's no use for me to attempt to expose them. He'd never believe anything I could say."

"No, that's useless. He has taken a violent prejudice against you, for some reason."

"Oh, the reason is easy to find. I've made enemies of Madam Spoll and Vixley, and they have probably done their best to hurt my reputation. They made me a proposition to join them; in fact, their scheme was for me to work you for information—make love to you, in order to help them rob your father."

Clytie looked at him trustfully. "You can never convince me that that was

the reason why you were attracted to me, for I shall not believe you!" She patted his hand affectionately, as he sat at her feet.

He shook his head. "I don't know—I wouldn't be sure it wasn't."

"Ah, I know you better!" She grew blithe, and a mischievous smile appeared on her lips. Her eyes twinkled as she said archly: "Perhaps I may say that I know myself better, too. I'm vainer than you seem to think, and you're not at all complimentary. Don't you think—don't you think that—perhaps—I myself had something to do with your attentions to me?" She put her head on one side and looked at him with mock coquetry.

His eyes feasted upon her beauty. "I won't be banal enough to say that you are different from every woman I have ever known, or that you're the only woman I ever loved, though both of those things are true enough. If I had ever loved any other woman, probably I should feel just the same about you as I do now. But no woman has ever stirred me mentally before. You have given me myself—nobody else could ever have done that. I have nothing to give you in return—nothing but twenty-odd mistaken, misspent years."

"And how many more to be wonderfully filled, I wonder? You're only a child, and I must teach you. Can you trust me? Remember that I knew you when you were a little boy."

"I wonder what will become of me? I suppose I shall get on somehow. It doesn't interest me much yet, but I suppose it will have to be considered. I'll fight it out alone." He looked up suddenly. "When do you go East?"

She smiled. "I came down here to tell you that I should leave on Saturday."

He jumped up with a bitter look and walked to the window.

She looked over to him with her eyes half shut and a delectable expression upon her lips. "But I've decided not to go—at all!"

She almost drawled it.

In an instant he was back at her side, borne on a flood of happiness. For a moment he looked at her hard. His eyes went from feature to feature, to her hands, her hair in silent approval. Then he exclaimed decidedly:

"Oh, you can't link yourself with me in any way. I'm a social outcast—why, now, I haven't even the advantage of being a picturesque adventurer! You will compromise yourself fearfully—you'll be ostracized—oh, it's impossible—I can't permit it!"

"You need not fear for yourself—or for me," she said, clasping his hand. "If I love you, what do I care—what should you care? I have come to you like Porphyria—but I am no Porphyria—you'll have no need to strangle me in my hair—my 'darling one wish' will be easier found than that!"

There was something in the unrestrained fondness of her look, now, that made him jump to a place beside her. What might have followed was interrupted

by the sound of a familiar voice in the anteroom, demanding Mr. Granthope. Clytie sprang up, her cheeks burning. Granthope turned coolly to the door, with his eyebrows lifted. Mr. Payson appeared at the entrance. He was scowling under his bushy eyebrows, the muscles of his face were twitching. A cane was firmly clenched in his right hand. He bent a harsh look at his daughter.

"What does this mean, Clytie?" he demanded.

She had recovered on the instant and faced him splendidly, in neither defiance nor supplication. "It means," she said in her low, steady voice, "that as you won't permit me to receive Mr. Granthope in your house, I must see him in his."

"Leave this room instantly!" he thundered bombastically.

"Please don't make a scene, father. I'm quite old enough to take care of myself, and to judge for myself. You needn't humiliate me."

"Humiliate you! If you're not humiliated at being found here with a cheap impostor, I don't think I can shame you! This man is a rank scoundrel and a cheat—I won't have you compromise yourself with such a mountebank!"

Granthope stood watching her unruffled, fearless pose, confident in her power to control the situation.

"Mr. Granthope is my friend, father. Don't say anything that you may regret. I don't intend to leave you alone with him till you are master of yourself, and can say what you have come to say without anger. He has respected your request not to call on me at the house, and I came here of my own accord, without his invitation. And he has always treated me as a gentleman should."

"A gentleman!" Mr. Payson sneered. "I know what he is—he's a damned trickster. I've always suspected it, but since I kicked him out of my house I've had proof of it. I know his record"—he turned to Granthope—"from persons who know you well, sir!"

"I suppose you mean Vixley or Madam Spoll."

"You can't deny that they know you pretty well?"

"Your daughter knows more, I think. I have just taken the liberty of informing her as to just how much of a scoundrel I am."

"And you have the impertinence to consider yourself her social equal!"

"I think Miss Payson's position is sufficiently assured for her to be in no danger."

"Well, yours certainly is not. I've heard of your lady-killing. I suppose you want to add my daughter's scalp to your belt. Haven't you women enough running after you yet? So you wheedled her with a mock-confession—tried the cry-baby on her. Well, it won't work with me. I'll tell her all about you, don't be afraid!"

Clytie went to him and laid a hand gently upon his arm. "Father, we'll go, now, please. I can't bear this. You need only to look about you to see that,

whatever Mr. Granthope has been, he is no longer a palmist. You see this room is already dismantled—if you'll only listen, I'll explain everything."

"It does look rather theatrical here." Mr. Payson looked at the piles of velvet on the floor, then turned again to the young man. "It seems that you have the audacity to want to marry my daughter. No doubt this little scene is a part of the game. It's very pretty, very effective. But let me tell you that this sensational tomfoolery won't be of any use. You are a charlatan, sir! You've always been one, and you always will be."

"Mr. Payson," Granthope said, with no trace of anger, "I can't deny that something of what you say is true, but your daughter knows that much already, and she has it from a better authority than yours. I can't blame you for your feeling in this matter; it's quite natural, for you don't know me. But I hope in time to induce you to believe in me. I wish you would let me begin by doing what should have done when I first met your daughter—warn you that you are in the hands of a dangerous set of swindlers who are deceiving you systematically. I can tell you a good deal that it will be greatly to your advantage to know about them."

The old man broke into ironic laughter. "That's just what they told me you'd say," he sneered. "They warned me that you'd try to libel them and accuse them of all sorts of impossible tricks. Set a thief to catch a thief, eh? No, that won't work, Mr. Granthope. I happen to know too much for that!"

"Won't you listen to what he has to say, father? It can do no harm. What do you know about those persons, after all? They are undoubtedly trying to deceive you," Clytie said earnestly.

Granthope added: "I can tell you of tricks they habitually practise."

"What's that to me? Haven't I got eyes? Haven't I common sense? Can you tell me how they find out things about my own life that no one living knows but me?"

"I can tell you how it was done in other cases—"

"Aha, I thought so—you can tell me, for instance, how to crawl through a trap in the mopboard, can't you? I'd rather hear how you impose on silly women, if you're going in for your confessions. What do you expect me to believe? I am quite satisfied with my own ability to investigate. I haven't lived for fifty years in the West to be imposed upon by flimflam. I'm not suffering from senile decay quite yet!"

He took Clytie to the door; there he paused dramatically, to deliver his parting shot.

"I notice you've hidden away that young woman you're living with. You might as well send for her—my daughter is not likely to be back again in a hurry."

As they left, Clytie gave him a look which denied her father's words.

Granthope waited till the hall door had slammed, then went into the office, where the red-haired boy was lolling out of the window.

"Jim," he said, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "I shall not need you any more. Here's your pay for the week. You needn't come back."

Jim shuffled into his coat, whistling, pulled on his cap, and left without a trace of regret. Granthope pulled a chair up to the grate. The dusk fell, and he still remained, watching the fire.

It was after six o'clock when a knock awoke him from his reverie. He called out a moody, annoyed, "Come in!" without rising.

Mrs. Page rustled in, bringing an odor of sandalwood. She was dressed in a squirrel-coat and a Cossack cap, from which a long veil floated. Her cheeks were rosy with the wind, her glossy hair coquetted over her forehead in dark, springy curls. She stopped, her head on one side, her arms saucily akimbo, as Granthope sprang up and snapped on the electric light.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad I found you!" she bubbled. "You're run after so much now that I knew it was only a chance, my finding you in. I hope I didn't disturb you at silent prayer, or anything, did I? You looked terribly serious. Were you thinking of home and mother? If you don't look out, some day you'll be framed and labeled *Pictures in the Fire.* Now, you're angry with me! What's the matter? Don't frown, please; it isn't at all becoming!"

She walked up to him, her hand outstretched. Lightly he evaded her and forced a smile.

"What an iceberg you are, nowadays, Frank!" she laughed. "Don't be afraid; I'm not going to kiss you! It's only little Violet, the Pride of the Presidio. Please laugh! You used to think that was funny."

"Do have a seat, won't you?" he said, in a half-hearted attempt to conceal his distaste.

"Thanks, awfully, but really I can't wait. I just simply tore to get here, and I must go right off. You must come along with me; so get on your hat and coat." She looked about the room for them.

"What is it?" he asked without curiosity.

"Why, a dinner, of course! What else could it be at this time of day? It's Mr. Summer's affair, and I promised to get you."

"Mr. Summer is the latest, I suppose?"

She came back to him and took his coat by the two lapels, smiling up at him.

"That's mean, Frank! You know I never went back on you. But you as much as gave me notice, as if I was a servant-girl. Gay's a nice boy, and I like him—

that's all. I'm educating him. Of course, he doesn't know what's what, yet, but he's rather fun. Do come—we're going to have dinner at the Poodle Dog, and the Orpheum afterward perhaps—Heaven knows where it'll end. There's an awfully swell New York girl coming, a Miss Cavendish, and she's simply *dying* to meet you. You'll like her. She's a sport—you can't feaze her—and she's pretty enough to suit even you. You can have her all to yourself. Come on!"

"I'm sorry, but I can't go to-night," he said wearily.

"Oh, Frank, please! Not if I beg you?" She looked at him languishingly, and tried for his hand.

"Really, no! I'm sorry, but I'm too busy."

Mrs. Page pouted and turned slowly toward the door.

"I suppose you're afraid Gay'll bore you. I'll manage him. I've got him trained. Or, if you say so—we'll go alone? Just you and me. I can get rid of them, some way."

He shook his head decidedly.

"Did you have such a dull time the last time over at the Hermitage?" she tempted. "We might go there. I don't know *when* I'll have another chance. Edgar will be back soon." She raised her brows meaningly.

"It's awfully good of you—but I can't, possibly."

"You might say you'd *like* to!"

"I don't really care to, if you must have it!"

She bridled and tossed her head. "*Oh*, very well!" she sniffed, and was off in a huff.

Granthope went to the desk, and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked the two lower drawers. The first contained a collection of photographs of women. He drew them out in handfuls, stopping at one occasionally, or turning it over to see what was written upon it. The most were inscribed, on the back, or scrawled across the face, "To Mr. Granthope"—several "To Francis"—one or two "To Frank, with love." All types of beauty were represented, all sorts of costumes, all ages, all phases of pretty women's vanity. He looked at some with a puzzled expression, searching his memory for a clue to their identity. At a few he smiled sarcastically, at some he frowned. Once or twice his face softened to tenderness or pity. There was one of Fancy amongst them, showing her in costume. It had been taken years ago, while she was acting. He looked at it with a sort of wonder, she seemed so young, so girlish. On the back was written, "N.F.F.I.L." He put it back into the drawer and gathered up the others.

He made a heap of them and threw them upon the fire, then dropped into the arm-chair to watch them burn. The flames passed from face to face, licking up the features. It was like a mimic death.

The other drawer was filled with letters, tied into bunches. They were all

addressed in feminine handwriting, mostly of the fashionable, angular sort. The envelopes were postmarked chiefly from San Francisco, but there were not a few from Eastern cities and abroad. One out of five bore special delivery stamps. A scent of mingled perfumes came from them. He cut the packages open and threw them into the wastebasket without stopping to read a word.

He poked up the fire, and, carrying the basket over, fed in the letters, a handful at a time. The flames roared up the chimney, sending out a fierce heat. It took an hour to destroy the whole collection. A mass of distorted, blackened, filmy sheets remained.

As he looked, a sudden draft made one leaf of charcoal glow to a red heat, and the writing showed plain—black on a cherry-colored ground. He stooped curiously to read it, and saw that it was the remains of a card, filled with Fancy Gray's handwriting. He remembered abstracting her notes upon Clytie, made after that first day's reading. He had placed it in the letter-drawer for safe keeping, and had forgotten to remove it.

Only the lower part was legible:

"... intuitive powers (?!) Play her Mysticism.
..... Easy. Sympathetic fool ...."

The glow suddenly faded, the charred paper writhed again, black and impotent. He gave it a vicious jab with the poker, and scattered it to ashes.

CHAPTER XIII
THE BLOODSUCKER

Professor Vixley's place was on Turk Street, the lower flat of three, whose separate doors made a triplet at the top of a tri-divided flight of wooden steps up from the sidewalk. The door had a plate-glass window, behind which was a cheap lace curtain. At the side, nailed over the letter slip, was a card bearing the written inscription,

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|     PROF. P. VIXLEY.     |
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Inside, a narrow hall ran down into the house, doors leading at intervals on the right hand, to small box-like rooms. The first one was the Professor's sitting- and reception-room, the shearing place for his lambs. The small type-writer on a stand and his roll-top desk attempted to give the room a businesslike aspect, while the homelier needs of comfort were satisfied by the machine-carved Morris chair, a padded, quilted couch with "hand-painted" sofa cushions and a macramé fringe along the mantel. Art was represented by the lincrusta-walton dado below the blank white plastered walls, partly covered with "spirit photographs," and a small parlor organ in the corner. A canary in a gilded cage gave a touch of gaiety to the apartment.

Here Professor Vixley sat smoking a terrible cigar. Beside him, upon a small draped table, was a pile of small school slates, a tumbler of water and a sad towel.

Opposite him, in a patent rocking-chair, was a young woman of some twenty-four or five years. She was a blonde, with pompadoured citron-yellow hair. Her eyes were deep violet, her nose slightly retroussé, giving her a whimsical, almost petulantly juvenile look that was decidedly engaging. She was dressed in black, so fittingly that no man would remember what she wore five minutes after he left her. This attractive creature, for she was indubitably winsome, was Flora Flint, by profession a materializing medium. Her past was prolific in adventure; by her alluring person and the dashing spirit shown in her eyes, her future promised as much as her past.

"Are you busy to-day, Vixley?" she said.

"That's what," said Vixley. "I've got a good graft doped out, and it's liable to be a big thing. First time to-day. One of Gertie Spoll's strikes, and we're working him together. Old man Payson it is."

"Oh, that's the one Doc Masterson expected me to help him with, isn't it?" Flora asked. "I wish you'd let me in on that."

"He ain't in your line, Flo, I expect. Ain't you doin' anything now?"

"Only the regular set, the same old stand-bys, and there's nothing in it at four bits apiece. I've got so many people to pay that even if I get forty or fifty in a circle my expenses eat it all up. Then I have to keep thinking up new stunts and buy props."

"You don't have to spend much on gas," Vixley laughed, as he began wash-

ing off his slates.

Flora smiled. ”No, but it comes to about the same thing in luminous paint.”

”Why don’t you make it yourself? It ain’t nothin’ but ground oyster-shells and sulphur.”

”Oh, it ain’t only that. I only use the best silk gauze that’ll fold up small—that’s expensive; then there’s a lot of work on the forms.”

”Don’t you get your forms from Chicago now?” Vixley asked.

”No, they’re no good. I can make better ones myself. Oh, occasionally I send for a rubber face or two or some cabinet attachments and extensions. I wish I was clever enough to do the slates.” She watched the Professor sharply.

”Oh, they ain’t nothin’ in slates nowadays—it don’t seem to take, somehow. They mostly prefer the psychics. I s’pose slate-writin’ has been wrote up too much—I know a dozen books describin’ the tricks, and here’s this Drexel chap teachin’ ’em at a dollar apiece, even. He’s a queer guy. When he can get a bookin’ he travels as a magician; durin’ his off-times he sells his tricks to amachures, and then when he’s down on his uppers he does the medium. I’m sorry I went into physical mediumship; the graft’s about played out—people is gettin’ too intelligent. I’ve a good mind to try the developin’ stunt again.”

”Say, do you think Madam Spoll has any real power?” Flora asked.

Vixley stopped in his work to become epigrammatic. ”Some mediums are ’on’ and some are honest—them that’s honest are fools and them that’s ’on’ are foolin’. Gertie’s ’on’ all right, and she does considerable fishin’. I don’t say that when she started she didn’t have some faculty—she used to scare me good, sometimes, and she could catch a name occasional. But Lord, it’s so much easier to fake it; you can generally depend on human nature, and you can’t on psychometry.”

”I can tell things sometimes,” Flora ventured.

”Can you?” said Vixley. ”Say, I wish you’d give me a readin’; they’s somethin’ I want to know about pretty bad; p’raps you could get it for me.”

”Oh, I know you too well. I can’t do it much, except the first time I see a party; but sometimes, when I’m materializing, I can go right down and say ’I’m Henry,’ or whatever the name is.”

”I guess they’re more likely to say, ’Are you Henry?’ They’re so crazy to be fooled that it’s a crime to take their money.”

”Women are. They’re easy. They simply won’t go away without a wonderful story to tell to their friends, but men are more skeptical, as a rule.”

”That’s right. But, Lord, when they do swallow it, they take the hook, bait and sinker. Why, look here, I had a party what used to come regular about a girl he was stuck on, a Swede he was. Well, one day he went up to this Drexel and he showed him one or two easy ways o’ workin’ the slates, provin’ it was all tricks. The Swede comes back to me and says, ’Oh,’ says he, ’I know it’s all a fake now;

you can't fool *me* no more.' I looked him straight in the eye and I says: 'Don't you know that fellow is really one of the best mediums in the business, and he's controlled by Martin Luther? He was just tryin' to test your belief by denyin' the truth o' spiritualism, and seein' if you'd have the courage to stand up for what you believed. If your faith ain't no stronger than that, after the tests I gave you, you'd better go into Mormonism and be done with it.'"

"Did that hold him?"

"I've got that fellow yet; twice a month, regular, I get his little old two dollars; Lord, he swears by me now. No, them that want to believe *will* believe, and you can't pry 'em off with a crowbar. Ain't that right?"

"I guess yes!" said Flora. "But what gets my game is the widow that used to quarrel like cats and dogs when her husband was alive and leaks on his shoulder when he comes to her in the spirit! They're the limit! When a woman once gets it into her head that the dear departed can take possession of a living body, there ain't anything she won't stand for. My brother had a lovely case once. It was a woman whose husband hadn't passed out more than two months and she was all broke up. Well, Harry got her to believe that her husband could get control of his body and talk to her. At first the woman wasn't quite sure, so Harry, talking to her as her husband, claimed that he himself was in a dead trance. 'Why,' he said, 'if you should stick a pin into this medium's leg here, he wouldn't feel it at all!' That was where he was foolish, for the woman said, 'Is that so? I guess I'll just try it and see.' So Harry had to stand for it while she jabbed a hat pin into him, but he was game and didn't whimper. Of course that convinced the woman that she was really communicating with her lawful husband, and she begun to kiss and hug Harry to beat the cars, she was so glad to get hubby back."

"Well, it's all in a day's work!" Vixley showed his sharp yellow fangs in a grin.

"Oh, you have to make it pleasant for sitters, sometimes," Flora yawned.

"I guess it's no trouble for you," Vixley said, looking at her with admiration.

Flora yawned. "Well, I guess we earn our money, what with skeptics and all. Now, if you have any of these reporters come in you can get rid of them easy—but we can't. We've got to make good for the sake of the rest of the crowd, unless they get so gay with us that we can fire 'em out."

"That's right. I never bother with skeptics; what's the use? I don't want their money enough to risk their jumpin' up and gettin' on to the game. No, sir! When any of these slick chaps that look like newspaper men or sports, come in, I just do a few lines and then tell 'em conditions ain't satisfactory and let 'em go. It ain't no use takin' chances."

"You're in luck, Vixley, I tell you! I've had no end of trouble. Why, last week a couple o' fresh guys come in and scattered a package of tacks all over the

floor. When I come out in my stocking feet I thought I'd die, it hurt so. But I had to just grin and bear it! My feet are so sore yet I can hardly walk. I have to sweep the carpet now, just as soon as it's dark, every time, unless Lulu's there to watch out!"

Vixley laughed for almost five minutes. He had to dry his eyes with a silk handkerchief.

"Oh, Professor," said Flora, "I almost forgot what I came for. You know Harry's doing the Middle West now with Mademoiselle Laflamme, the Inspirational Contralto, and he wanted me to ask you if you had anything on Missouri and Iowa. Would you mind lending him your test-book? You was out there a few years ago, wasn't you?"

"Sure. I'll look and see if I can find it," and Vixley arose and left the room. He was gone a few minutes, and returned with a small, blue-covered note-book.

"Here's my test-book," he said, handing it over. "It's rather behind the times. It was five years ago that I was out there, but maybe Harry can get something out of it."

"How did you get the dope, swapping?"

"Oh, no, I done it all myself, and it's O.K. I went through the country first as a book-agent, and I kep' my eyes and ears open. I took a look or two through the cemeteries, when I had time, and I read up the local papers pretty good. Of course I wouldn't go back till a year after I got a town planted, but then it was easy graft."

"I suppose these abbreviations are all plain?"

"Yes, Harry will read that all right, he knows the regular cipher. The name after the first one is the party's control. I've writ in a few messages that'll work, and all the tests I know."

She opened the book and ran through the pages which ran something like this:

Jefferson City, Mo.
Mrs. Henry Field "Mayflower" hb John died
pneumonia 1870 good wishes from little
Emily broken leg.

Cameron, Mo.
Mrs. Osborne "Pauline" hub James calls him Jimmie
da disappeared July 1897 found drowned in Red
River August Aunt Molly is happy Love to Belle
and Joe.

Flora put the book in her bag, and then reached over and took up one of the slates. The one on top was marked diagonally with two chalk-lines, and over this was written in slate-pencil the following inscription:

801,101
Chapter
Marigold.

Beside this, was a thin sheet of slate. She placed it over the marked surface. It fitted the frame exactly and looked, at a cursory glance, precisely like the other slates, its dark surface being clean.

She took up another slate. On this was written:

Unforeseen difficulties will prevent your
book being successful, if you do not take
care. Felicia.

The Professor grinned. "That's the dope for old Payson," he explained. "He ought to be here any time, now." He went to the window and looked out.

"What game are you going to work with him?" Flora asked.

"Oh, only a few of the old stunts. He's so easy that it won't be nothin' but child's play. I got a lot of the old-fashioned slab-slates for a starter, and I can change 'em on him whenever I want. He won't insist on test conditions. Anyways, if he does, I got my little spirit friend here handy."

He reached up his sleeve, and pulled down a thimble attached to an elastic cord. To the end of the thimble a small piece of slate-pencil was affixed.

"The only hard part about it is learnin' to write backwards and upside down," he commented, as he let the instrument snap back out of sight. "Say, I wish't I had a double-jointed leg like Slade! I tell you I'd give some sittin's in this town that would paralyze the Psychical Research!"

"But what's this stuff on the slates mean?"

"Oh, them is the answers I've prepared. You see, I happened to get hold of some questions he's goin' to ask, from a young fellow who goes to his house; and so havin' inside information, it saves considerable trouble. Funny thing—this chap wants to marry the daughter, who'll have money, I suppose, and he's standin' in with me on account o' what I can do for him through the old man."

"Why, I heard that Granthope was setting his traps for her!"

Vixley scowled. "That's right, too. Frank's got something up his sleeve that I can't fathom. He's been trying to buy me off, in fact, but he'll never do it. This fellow Cayley naturally has got it in for him, Frank bein' pretty thick with

the girl. So I got to play both ends and work the old man for Cayley and against Frank. But I can do it all right. The old man's a cinch!"

Flora walked up to him. "You're in luck," she said. She permitted him to put his arm about her small trim waist and looked at him good-naturedly. "Say, Vixley, if he's as easy as that, why can't you fix it for some good materializing? We could do all sorts of things for him."

"I'd thought of that. It might be a good idea later, and we may talk business with you."

"Well, when you're ready, I'll do anything you say. You know me."

At that moment the front door-bell rang.

"Here he is now!" Vixley exclaimed. "Say, Flora, you go out the back door through the kitchen, will you? It won't do for him to see you here."

"Sure! I'll spare him. The Doc says he's scared to death of a pretty woman," and she disappeared down the hall.

Professor Vixley went to the front door, welcomed Mr. Payson with an oily smile, took his hat and coat and then let him into a small chamber next to the front room. There were two straight chairs here on either side of a table which was draped with an embroidered cloth. Behind was a high bookcase.

"Well, I'm all ready for you, Mr. Payson," said the medium. "We'll see what we can do. If we don't get anything I won't charge you a cent. Have you ever seen any slate-writin' done before?"

"No, I haven't," said Mr. Payson, "but I've heard a good deal about it."

"It's a very interestin' phenomena. Now, before we begin, p'raps you'd like to examine this table; it's been examined so often, that it's pretty well used to it by this time, but I want to have you satisfied that there's no possibility of trickery or deceit."

As he spoke, he took off the cover, and turned the table upside down. Mr. Payson looked it over gravely and knocked on the top to see if it were hollow. The investigation finished, Professor Vixley said:

"May I ask who recommended you to me?"

"Madam Spoll—I suppose you know her."

"Oh, yes, and I admire her, too. Madam Spoll is a wonderful woman. I don't know how this community could get on without her. She's brought more satisfaction to them desirin' communication with their dear departed than all the rest of us mediums put together. She's doin' a great work, Mr. Payson. But she has more success with what you might call affairs of the heart, while I find my control prefers generally to help out in the way of business. We're all specialists, nowadays, you know."

"I should think that the spirits could help in one way as well as another."

"Now would you?" said Vixley, fixing the old man with his glittering eyes.

”Spirits ain’t so much different from people on this side. Some o’ them is interested in one thing, and some in another, same as we are. Some is nearer what I might call the material plane and some has progressed so they don’t take much interest in earthly affairs.”

”It seems to me that I’d always have an interest in my friends,” said Mr. Payson.

”Does it?” Vixley replied. ”Where was you raised?”

”In Vermont. I lived there till I was ten years old.”

”Well, are you much interested in the kids you knew when you went to school there?”

”Perhaps not.”

”Well, then, that’s the way it is with spirits who have got progression. Their life on earth seems like childhood’s days to them. Lord, they have their own business to attend to. I expect it keeps ’em pretty busy.”

”Well, I don’t know.” Mr. Payson shook his head and seated himself. ”It’s all very strange and mysterious. But I’m only an investigator, and what I want is the truth, no matter what it may be.”

”That’s the right frame o’ mind to come in,” said Vixley; ”you treat me right and I’ll treat you right. Have a cigar?” He took one from his pocket and put it unlighted into his mouth, offering another to Mr. Payson.

”No, thanks, I don’t smoke.”

”Well, if you don’t mind, I will. It’s a bad habit, I’m told, but it sorts o’ helps me when I’m nervous.”

Mr. Payson placed the tips of his fingers together, palm to palm, and gestured with them. ”Now, Professor Vixley, seeing that I know nothing about you, would you mind letting me see what you can do first in the way of a test, before we go to the main object of my visit?”

”Why, certainly, though I can’t promise to do anything conclusive the first time. I want you to feel at liberty to try me in any way you wish.”

”Well, I’ve got three questions I’d like to have you answer. I happen to know that you couldn’t possibly know what they are. If you can answer them, I’ll be satisfied that you can help me.”

”I’ll try,” said Vixley modestly. ”It all depends upon my guides, and we can’t tell till we begin.” He arose, walked to the mantel and brought back a small pad of paper.

”Here’s what I generally use. This paper is magnetized in order to make it easier. Examine it all you please—you won’t find no carbon transfer paper nor nothin’ like that.”

”Why can’t I use my own paper?”

”I ain’t got no more idea than you have,” the medium confessed candidly.

”Why can’t a photographer take a picture on common glass? I don’t know. I ain’t a photographer. All I do know is, that we can get results from this paper that my control has magnetized, when we can’t from yours. The spirits may be able to explain it—I can’t. Now you write down the name of your control and your three questions, one on each piece and fold it over twice. Then I’ll pull down the shades and see what I can do.”

Mr. Payson brought his hand down on the table querulously. ”That’s another thing I don’t like,” he said. ”Why can’t spirits work in the light as well as in the dark, I’d like to know? It looks suspicious to me.”

Vixley took the cigar from his teeth and sat down patiently before his dupe. He rapped with his forefinger upon the table. ”See here, it’s this way, Mr. Payson; every science has its own condition that has got to be fulfilled before any experiment can be a success, hasn’t it? You can’t go against nature. If you want an electric light or telephone, you have to run wires, don’t you? Why? I don’t know—I’m not an electrician. If you want to develop a photograph, you have to do it in the dark. Why? I don’t know—go ask a photographer. If you want to make a seed grow, you put it down into the dirt and water it. Why? I don’t know. Nobody knows. It’s one o’ the mysteries o’ life. In the same way, if you want to get results in spiritualism, you have to submit to the conditions that are imposed by my guide. Why? I don’t know. And what’s more, I don’t care. If I can get the results, it makes no difference to me how they come. All I do know is that fifty years’ experience has shown us mediums the proper conditions necessary for the physical manifestation of phenomena. Full daylight is all right for psychic influences, but it don’t do for slate-writin’. The question is whether you want to accept the conditions I give you, or do you expect the spirits to work in a way that’s impossible?”

Mr. Payson, overcome with this profound logic, submitted without further protest to having the shades drawn down. The Professor reseated himself and waited till the three slips were written and folded according to direction. In his own lap were three blank slips folded in exactly the same manner.

Vixley now pressed his brow and smoothed it with both hands. ”Some fakirs will palm a blank slip and exchange it for your written one, but you see I ain’t got nothin’ in my hands,” he said, showing them empty. Even as he spoke he dropped his hands into his lap, and secreted one of his folded slips in his palm. Then he reached for one of Payson’s written questions and seemed to place it on the old man’s forehead, but quick as was the motion, he had made the substitution.

”You hold this paper there while I go and get the slates. And keep your mind on the question as hard as you can.”

He returned in a moment, having glanced meanwhile at Mr. Payson’s first

question, while he was outside, bringing back a dozen or more slates which he put on the book-shelf. He took off the top one and handed it to Mr. Payson.

"Just look at it, examine it all you want to, and then take this wet towel, wash it off clean and dry it with the other end, please."

As the old man did so, the Professor went to the pile and took down the next slate. This was the first one which Flora had read, the writing being now concealed by the thin slab which fitted neatly into the frame. As Mr. Payson handed back the first slate, Professor Vixley, looking him intently in the eye, said:

"Now, can you tell me about how many years ago it was that your control passed out? Was it five years, twenty, or how long?"

The question was accurately timed so as to be put just as Mr. Payson extended his hand. Vixley's eyes held the old man's in a direct gaze. During this psychological moment while his victim was intently trying to answer the question, the Professor, with a facile movement, put the two slates together and handed back the same one that had been washed.

"I should say it would be nearly thirty years—twenty-seven."

"All right," said Vixley. "Now, take this slate and wash it off like you did the other." The old man did so without noticing that it was the same one he had had before.

Vixley took back the slate when he had finished, and, with a piece of chalk, drew diagonal lines from corner to corner upon each of the faces of both slates.

"That will show you that the writin' hasn't been prepared beforehand, for you'll see that the pencil will write through the chalk, showin' it's been done after I made these lines."

As he held the two slates together in his hand, the false sheet from the upper one fell into the frame of the lower. He laid the two upon the table and took off the top one. The lower surface upon which the writing was now exposed he took care to hold so that it could not be seen. Next, he took the slip of paper which Mr. Payson had been holding, substituted for it with a deft motion the written question which he had previously palmed, and, throwing the blank into his lap, dropped the real one, with a small fragment of slate-pencil, upon the slate. He put the written slate on top of the other, writing down, then asked the old man to hold it in position, laying his own fingers upon it as well. A faint scratching was heard. It was too dark for the old man to notice the slight motions of Vixley's finger-nail upon the surface. After a moment he removed the top slate and showed the writing, then, unfolded the slip.

Mr. Payson looked at the inscription with curiosity and surprise. "Marvelous!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's incredible. I didn't know it could be done as simply as that. Why, all three of my questions are answered and they haven't

left my possession."

"You seem to have a very strong control. Are the answers correct?"

"I'll soon find out," said Mr. Payson, "if you'll raise the shades while I look at this book." He cut the strings of a package he had brought into the room, showed his copy of the *Astrology of the New Testament* and turned to page one hundred.

"Here it is, 'Chapter IX.' It's most extraordinary, indeed! Now for the number of my watch. Do you know, I didn't even know these answers myself. That would tend to prove it's not mere telepathy, wouldn't it?"

He took out his watch and opened the back covers. Upon the frame were engraved the figures "801,101."

"That's correct, too. Now for the last one—have you a telephone?"

"Right down at the end of the hall."

"If you'll excuse me a moment I'll ring up a friend of mine who will know whether this is the right name or not."

In five minutes he returned with an expression of wonder upon his face. "I wanted to make sure that this couldn't be got from my mind, so I asked a friend of mine to select a name for me. It seems that Marigold was the name. This is a most wonderful and convincing test, Mr. Vixley; I must say that I'm amazed."

The Professor took his praise modestly. "Oh, I hope to do much better for you than this after a while, Mr. Payson. The main point is, that now we can get to work in such a way as to help you practically, without wastin' your time on mere experiments. These test conditions is very apt to deteriorate mediumship and I don't like to do no more of it than is absolutely necessary to convince you of the genuineness of my manifestations.

"Now," he added, "before we draw down the shades again, you write down some important question you want answered and we'll get down to business."

When Mr. Payson had finished writing, the medium, taking a slip of paper from his vest pocket unobserved, held it under the table, saying:

"Now you fold it twice, each time in half." As Payson did so, Vixley folded his own slip in a similar manner and held it palmed in his left hand. After drawing the shades, he said: "Now, then, will you please hold that paper to your forehead? Not like that—here, let me show you."

He took the slip from Mr. Payson and dexterously substituting for it his own duplicate, held it to his own forehead. "This way, so that it will be in plain sight all the time." He gave the blank slip to his sitter, who obeyed the directions.

"I think we'll do better if there's less light," Vixley said, as he arose to draw the shades. "You keep hold of that paper. I don't want it to go out of your possession for a moment. You see I couldn't read it even if I had it, it's so dark. But if you'll excuse me, I'll light this cigar; I haven't had a smoke all day."

As he spoke, he went to the bookcase, and standing, facing Mr. Payson, he

took a match from a box on the top and lighted the cigar which was between his teeth. His left hand, which had already secretly unfolded the ballot, covered the paper. He put it up with a natural gesture to keep the match from being blown out as he lighted his cigar. The operation took only a few seconds, but in that time, illuminated by the match, he was able to read the words: "Will my book be a success?" He dropped his hand, refolded the ballot with his fingers and held it hidden. Then he took two slates from the pile.

There are many well-known ways of slate-writing, and the sleight-of-hand necessary in obtaining the ballots and writing the answers is simple compared with the sort of psychological juggling in which the medium must be an adept. Professor Vixley, however, had no need of any special craft with the old man. Mr. Payson was by no means a skilled observer, and, credulous and desirous of a marvel, was easily hoodwinked by Vixley's talk. The simplest methods sufficed, and he worked with increasing confidence, preparing his sitter's mind, till it would be possible for the medium merely to sit at the table and write openly under the supposititious influence of his control.

The second experiment terminated with the appearance of the message that Flora Flint had read in the front room, the message signed "Felicia."

Mr. Payson read the communication with a frown. "That's bad," he said, "I'm very sorry to find that this answer isn't favorable."

"What's the matter?" the Professor asked sympathetically.

"Well, you see, I may as well tell you that I'm writing a book, Professor," said Mr. Payson, wiping his spectacles, "and, of course, I am anxious that it should be a success. It seems from this that there is likely to be some trouble about it—I don't quite understand how."

Vixley tipped back in his chair with his hands in his pockets. "I thought you looked like an intellectual-minded man. O' course, it wan't my place to ask no questions, but when you come in I sized you up as a party who wan't entirely devoted to a pure business life. So you've written a book, eh? Well, I'm sure my control could help you. I'll ask him, and see what's to be done. But for that, I think we'll be more liable to be successful at automatic writin' than by independent slate-writin'. It's more quicker and satisfactory all round."

"How do you suppose the spirits can help?" said Mr. Payson.

"Why," said Vixley, "all sorts o' ways. It's like this: I don't know nothing about your book, but I do know what's happened before. Take Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, for instance. He predicted that there wouldn't never be no more wars—he claimed we'd outlived the possibility of it, and everything would be settled peaceably. What happened? Why, Napoleon arose inside o' fifty years and they was wars like never had been seen on earth. Now, if Gibbon had only been able to put himself in communication with the spirit intelligence,

he wouldn't have made that mistake—the spirits would have told him what was goin' to happen. Look at Voltaire! He went on record by sayin' that in fifty years they wouldn't be no more churches. Now he's a ridicule and a by-word amongst Christian people. If he'd only consulted the spirit-plane he wouldn't have made a fool of hisself. But, o' course, spiritualism wan't heard of then no more than Voltaire's heard of now. Now let's say, for example, you was writin' a book on evolution ten years ago, thoroughly believin' in Darwin's theory o' the origin of species. Up to that time nobody believed that a new specie had been evolved since man. But look at this here Burbank up to Santa Rosa—he has gone to work and produced some absolutely new species, and what's more, I predicted his success in this very room ten years ago. If you'd written on evolution then, you might have taken advantage o' what I could have gave you. Now, for all I know, some man may come along and breed two different animals together, p'raps through vivisection or what not, and develop a bran' new kind of specie in the animal world. Heart disease and cancer and consumption are supposed by modern science to be incurable, but I wouldn't venture to write that down in a book till I had taken the means at my disposal o' findin' out whether they was or wasn't."

He arose and let up the window-shades; the level rays of the sunshine illuminated his figure and burnished his purpling coat. He shook his finger at Mr. Payson, who was listening open-mouthed, impressed with the glib argument.

"Now, my control is Theodore Parker. You've heard of him—p'raps you knew him. You wouldn't hesitate to ask his advice if he was still on the flesh plane, for he was a brainy man; how much more, now he's passed out and gone beyond, into a fuller development and comprehension of the universe! I don't know what your subject is, but whatever it is, he can help and he will help. I'm sure o' that. It's for you to say whether you'll avail yourself of his guidance or not. I can give you all the tests you want, but I tell you, you're only wastin' your time, while you might be in daily communication with one of the grandest minds this country and this century has produced. I can get into communication with him and give you his messages by means of automatic writin', or I can develop you so's you can do it yourself."

Professor Vixley's victim had ceased to struggle, and, caught inextricably in the web so artfully woven, gazed, fascinated, into the eyes of the spider who

was preparing to suck his golden blood.

CHAPTER XIV
THE FORE-HONEYMOON

Outward, across the narrow, mile-long mole, the Oakland Local, a train of twelve coaches, swept on from block to block, beckoned by semaphores, till it threw itself with a roar into the great train-shed upon the Oakland pier. The locomotive stopped, throbbing and panting rhythmically, spouting a cloud of steam that eddied among the iron trusses of the roof. The air-brakes settled back with a long, relieved hiss. The cars emptied streams of passengers; the ferry-station became as populous and busy as a disturbed ant-hill. Up the broad stairs and into the huge waiting-room the commuters poured, there to await the boat.

It was half-past nine in the morning. The earlier trains, laden with clerks and stenographers and the masses of early workers, had already relieved the traffic across the bay. The present contingent consisted chiefly of the more well-to-do business men, ladies bent on shopping in the city, and a scattering of sorts. Some clustered in a dense group by the door of the gangway, the better to rush on board and capture the favorite seats; the rest took to the settees and unfolded their morning papers, conversed, or watched the gathering throng.

The Overland from Chicago was already in, two hours late, and it had contributed to the assembly its delegation of dusty, tired tourists, laden with baggage, commercial travelers, curious and bold, with a few emigrants in outlandish costumes, prolific in children and impedimenta. Another roar, and the Alameda Local thundered into the shed and emptied its lesser load. The Berkeley train had arrived also, and the waiting-room was now well filled.

Through the glazed front of the hall the steamer *Piedmont* came into view, entering the slip. It slid in quietly and was deftly tied up. The gang-plank was lowered and its passengers disembarked, filing through a passageway separated from the waiting throng by a fence. Then the heavy door slipped upward, the crowd made for the entrance and passed on board the boat. As each party stepped off the gang-plank some one would say, ”Do you want to sit outside or inside?” The continual repetition of this question kept the after part of the deck echoing with the murmur.

Clytie Payson, finding all the best outside seats occupied, went into the

great open cabin and sat down. The saloon soon filled. In a moment there was the creaking of the gang-plank drawbridge, a deep, hoarse whistle overhead, the jangle of a bell in the engine room, and the boat started, gathered way, and shot out into the bay. An Italian band started playing.

It was not long before her eyes, roving from one to another passenger, rested upon a couple across the way. Both looked jaded and distrait. They talked but little. The lady was crisp and fresh and glossy, in her blue serge suit and smart hat; her form was molded almost sumptuously—but there were soft, violet circles beneath her roaming eyes. She leaned back in her seat; her attitude had lost, in its California tendency to abandon, an imperceptible something of that erect, well-held poise that such corset-modeled, white-gloved creatures of fashion usually maintain. Clytie recognized her; it was Mrs. Page.

The young man Clytie did not know. He was a dapper, immaculate, pink-cheeked person, who leaned slightly nearer his companion than custom sanctions when he spoke an occasional playful word to her. In his gestures he often touched her arm, where, for a second his gloved hand seemed to linger affectionately. Mrs. Page gave him in return a flashing, ardent smile, then her eyes wandered listlessly.

Before Mrs. Page had a chance to notice her, Clytie arose and walked forward. Just outside the door she stopped upon the wind-swept deck for a moment to look about her. Above Goat Island, melting into the perfect bow of its profile, lay the crest of Tamalpais. The mountains surrounding the bay of San Francisco were wild and terrible, with naked brown slopes void of trees or grass. To the northwest they came down to the very edge of the water, tumbling precipitately, seamed with gulleys, forming the wall of the Golden Gate. Southward was smoke and haze; forward the peninsula loomed through murk. The whole aspect of the harbor was barren, chill, desolate. One felt that one was thousands of miles from civilization—in a land unique, grim, isolate, sufficient unto itself, shut off by sea and mountain from the great world. Yet it had its own strange beauty, and that charm which, once felt, endures for ever, the immortal lure of bigness, wideness, freedom of air and sky and water.

Clytie stood, holding her hat against the nimble breeze for a while, gazing at a flock of gulls that sailed alongside the boat, circling and screaming, then she turned and moved to the right and walked aft.

There was a young woman sitting in an angle of the seats, by the paddle-box. Her arm was resting on the rail and she was gazing down at the swirling rush of water. From her chic shepherd's plaid frock, so cunningly trimmed with red, so perfectly moulding her svelte form, it should have been Fancy Gray, Queen of Piedra Pinta. But it was a poor, tired Majesty, whose face was filled with infinite longing, whose traitor mouth was lax, whose head, bent sidewise, seemed too

heavy to be held in its whilom spirited pose. She was off her guard; she had dropped the mask she was learning so painfully to bear.

[image]

It was a poor tired Majesty

Clytie stepped in front of her. Fancy suddenly looked up. There was a moment when her face was like that of a child awakened from sleep, then, in a flash Fancy was alive again. First, confusion, then a look of pain, lastly an expectant, almost a suspicious expression passed over her face.

"Why, Miss Payson!" Fancy sat erect, and, by her tone, was immediately upon the defensive, waiting to find out what her welcome might be. "Won't you sit down?"

"Good morning, Miss Gray!" Clytie's voice was low and sympathetic.

Fancy took the proffered hand, grasped it for a brief moment and let it drop. Then she waited for Clytie to give her her cue. The eyes of the two women, having met, lingered without conflict. The serenity in Clytie's face melted Fancy's into a smile. A faint glow of pink began to creep up Clytie's neck and mantle her cheek. She took a seat.

"I'm so glad I found you," she began. "I had a queer feeling that I should meet some one pleasant, though I didn't know who it would be."

What was it that reassured Fancy? No man could have told. But that whatever fears she had entertained were dispelled was evident by the way her face softened, by the way her dimples came, by the way a saucy, amiable sprite looked from her eyes.

"I'm sorry I'm just out of blushes," she said, rallying swiftly, "but I'm as delighted as if I had as pretty a one as yours. Did you really want to see me?"

"I've been wanting to see you for some time."

"Why?"

"I've been thinking about you."

"Think of your wasting your time on me! Why, any one with your brains could think me to a finish in five minutes."

"I wanted to tell you something."

"I *hope* it's something sacred," said Fancy with a twinkle in her eyes. "I love to have people tell me their most sacred thoughts." She smiled like a spoiled child.

This was too much for Clytie, who laughed aloud. But she persisted. "I hope you won't think I'm trying to patronize you—"

"You look awfully pretty when you're patronizing; I don't mind it a bit."

”I’m afraid it’s no use, you’re incorrigible.”

”That’s a dandy word. I never thought of that. May I use it?”

”*Will* you be serious?”

”You mustn’t mind me,” Fancy said. ”I never could do that running throb in my voice. I’ve lost lots of things by not being able to cry to order. But I’ll listen. What is it?”

”I know you’ve left Mr. Granthope’s office.”

”Oh, yes. I got tired of the routine there. It’s awful to sit and watch women who come to hear themselves talked about. It got on my nerves. So I told Frank I’d have to quit or tell them the straight truth about themselves.”

Clytie looked at her curiously for a moment. Fancy turned away from her glance. Clytie went on: ”I wanted to see if I couldn’t get you a position—perhaps with my father.”

”Thank you, but I guess not.” Fancy cast her eyes down. ”I don’t care to go to work just yet—I’m going to drift a while—it’s awfully kind of you, though.”

”Can’t you come and stay with me a while? I thought I might teach you bookbinding and we could work together.” Clytie herself was getting somewhat embarrassed.

Fancy shook her head. ”Sometime I’ll come and see you—but not now.”

”Well, since Mr. Granthope has given up his business—”

Fancy changed in an instant; her frivolous manner fell off. She stared at Clytie in surprise.

”Oh! I didn’t know that. *Has* he?”

”Yes, he stopped last week.”

Fancy’s gaze drifted off to seaward. She was fighting something mentally. She turned her head away also. Finally she said, ”I think I understand.”

”I think not, quite,” Clytie answered softly.

Fancy’s eyes flashed back at her, brimming. ”He gave it up on account of *you*, Miss Payson, I’m sure.”

”He did, in a way, but it was not altogether my doing.”

”I know!” Fancy leaned her head on her hand wearily. ”You did for him what I never could do.”

”I’m glad you wanted it.” Clytie touched Fancy’s hand, as it lay limp in her lap.

Instead of taking it, Fancy moved hers gently away. Then she roused herself. ”Oh, I *am* glad! I’m *so* glad, Miss Payson. He was too good for that—I always told him so. But you are the only woman who could have done that for him!”

”Indeed, you mustn’t think that I did it. He did it for himself.”

Fancy smiled wistfully. ”I know Frank Granthope. And I know the sort of women he knew. I was one of them. And I could do nothing—nothing to help

him!"

"Ah, I don't believe it! You *have* helped him, I'm sure. I know by the way you speak now."

"Oh, I know what you think!" Fancy retorted impetuously. "You think that I am—that I was—in love with him. That's not true, Miss Payson, really it isn't. I never was. We were good friends, that's all. I'm not suffering from a broken heart or pining away, or anything like that. No secret sorrow for mine! But what's the use of trying to explain! It never does any good. I'm glad he's found a woman who's square and who's a thoroughbred like you! Why, Miss Payson, you can *make* him! I saw that long ago!"

She spoke in a hurried frenzy of denial. She seemed to feel the inadequacy of it in Clytie's eyes, however, and nerved herself again.

"You don't believe it, Miss Payson, but it's true! I give you my word that he's perfectly free. Of course, there was a sort of flirtation at first, there always is, you know, but I wasn't in earnest at all! I'm too afraid of Frank—I'm not in his class. And I know he's in love with you—I saw it from the first."

"How *could* he ever help loving such a frank, courageous, irresistible girl as you!" Clytie wondered.

"Miss Payson," Fancy said, avoiding her eyes, "there's a man I'm simply crazy about—I wish I could tell you more, but I can't explain. I never explain. But you can be sure that there's nothing doing with Frank, at any rate. I didn't intend to breathe it to a soul, but I know I can trust you—I'm really—" she drew a quick breath and her eyelids fluttered—"I'm—engaged, Miss Payson!"

Clytie was wearing, that day, a little gold chain from which hung a tiny swastika. As she listened, she unfastened it and took it off and threw it about Fancy's neck. Fancy stopped in surprise.

"Won't you let me give you this?" Clytie said eagerly. "Don't ask me why—I want you to have it and keep it for my sake. You know I have more jewelry than I can wear, but I have always been very fond of this little chain. It belonged to my mother."

Fancy's eyes filled suddenly and her lips parted. Her hand flew up to caress the chain affectionately. Then she cast down her eyes and a timid smile trembled on her lips.

"I accept!" said Fancy Gray.

As she looked off at the water she lifted the chain softly to her lips and kissed it. Then, loosening the collar of her waist, she allowed the chain to drop inside to hang touching her warm pink breast.

Then slowly she turned her head and showed Clytie a new expression, childlike, demure, embarrassed. Her eyes, fluttering, went from Clytie's eyes to Clytie's hair, to her slender, gracile hands. Then, with a wistful emphasis, she

said:

”Miss Payson, do you think I’m pretty?”

There was no need, this time, for her to define the adjective.

”Do you want me to tell you exactly?” Clytie answered. ”I never saw a woman yet to whom I couldn’t tell her best points better than she could herself.”

Fancy nestled a little nearer, warming herself at Clytie’s smile. ”I guess I can stand it. I’ll try to be brave,” she said.

Clytie looked her over critically.

”First, I’d say that your ears are the most deliciously shaped, cream-white, and the lobes are pure pink with a dab of carmine laid on as if with a brush. The hair behind them has curls like little claws clutching at your neck—and I don’t blame them! Your cheeks look as if a rose-leaf had just been pressed against them.”

”I believe I’m going to get the truth at last,” Fancy murmured. ”Oh, it takes a woman, don’t it!” In spite of this jaunty speech the pink had grown to scarlet in her cheeks, and she turned her eyes away in a delighted, flattered embarrassment.

”Then, your mouth has a charming little dent at each corner, and your lips curve in a perfect bow, and the nick above is just deep and strong enough for a baby to want to put his little finger into. Your nose is fine and straight and delicate—I can see the light through the bridge of it, the skin is so transparent—like mother-o’-pearl. Your eyes are clear and child-like and the rarest, deepest, pellucid brown. There’s a moist purple shadow above them, and a warmer brown tone below. Your lids crinkle and narrow your eyes like a kitten’s. Your hands are as dewy-delicate as flowers—white above, faint rose in the palm, deepening almost to strawberry in the finger-tips.”

Fancy had laid her head on her arm, upon the railing. When she at last lifted her eyes the tears trickled comically down her cheeks. ”That’s the first time a woman ever feazed me!” she said, snuffing, and feeling for her handkerchief. ”I’ll have to appoint you Court Flatterer!” She explained the sovereignty that she enjoyed amongst the Pintos. Clytie, amused, accepted the distinction conferred upon her.

Their talk ran on till the boat passed under the lee of Goat Island. It rose, a bare, bleak slope of hillside on the starboard side. Fancy watched the waters curdling below.

”Ugh!” she exclaimed. ”It looks cold, don’t it! I’d hate to be down there; it’s so wet. Isn’t it funny that suicides always jump overboard right opposite Goat Island? There seems to be some fascination about this place. And the bodies are never found. I suppose they drift out through the Gate. The tide runs awfully strong here, they say.”

She removed her gaze with an effort, adding, ”I hate to think of it! Let’s

come forward."

They rose and went to the space of deck below the pilot-house and stood by the rail. Already the tourists and emigrants were there, eager for a first glimpse of the city. San Francisco stretched before them, a long, pearl-gray peninsula, its profile undulating in a continuous series of hills. Along the water front was a mêlée of shipping; behind, the houses rose to the heaving, irregular sky-line where the blue was deep and cloudless. The streets showed as gashes, blocking the town off into parallel divisions. A few tall towers broke the monotony of the huddled, colorless buildings. They passed a ferry-boat bound for Oakland, and a foreign man-of-war lying at anchor, nosed by busy launches. The *Piedmont* rang down to half-speed, then the vibrations of the paddle wheels stopped as she shot into the slip. There was a surge of back-water, a rattling of chains and ratchets, the cables were fastened and the apron lowered. The crowd surged forward and poured off the boat. At the front of the Ferry Building Fancy stopped, offering her hand.

"Good-by," she said genially. "You've done me more good than a Picon punch. I'm going home to wear my looking-glass out."

"You'll never see half I do," Clytie replied, shaking her head.

"That's because I haven't got such fine eyes," countered Fancy.

"I think mine are never so pretty as when they have a little image of you in them."

Fancy gave up the duel. "Well, I guess I'd better go quick before you raise that! You play nothing but blue chips, and I can't keep up!"

Clytie walked up Market Street alone. She turned into Geary Street at the group of tall newspaper buildings by Lotta's fountain, and in ten minutes was knocking at Granthope's office door. There being no response she descended the stairs, crossed the street and went into the square to wait for him upon a bench beside the soldiers' monument.

There were two young women at the other end of the seat. One, scarcely more than a girl, was pretty, in a demure, timid way; she was freckled and tanned, her clothes were simple and neat. The other was of a coarser grain, full-lipped, large-handed, painted and powdered, with hard eyes and large features. She wore several cheap rings, and her finery made her soiled and wrinkled garments look still more vulgar. Clytie gave the two a glance and took no further interest in them until she caught the mention of Granthope's name.

She turned, astonished, to see the younger woman looking seriously at the other. There was a charming earnestness in her face, and, though her lower lip drooped tremulously, it was not weak; nor was her chin, nor her nose, nor the gracefully reliant poise of her head.

"You ought to go see him, Kate!" she was saying. "I tell you he's a wonder!

Why, if I hadn't gone there I don't know where I'd be now. I know one thing, I wouldn't be married. Why, when Bill was out in the Philippines and didn't write, I thought I'd lay down and die! I waited about two months, and then I took five dollars I saved up for one of them automobile coats they was all wearing, and I went to see Granthope. What d'you think?—he wouldn't take a cent off me! That's the kind of a man Granthope is! He said it would be all right and Bill would come back and marry me. But I tell you, I had to do most of the courting!"

"You did, did you? Do you mean to say you run after a man like that—without any nose? I never see such a face in my life! If he'd only wear a patch or something it wouldn't be so bad," commented her companion.

"Bill wouldn't do it; he's too proud. Nobody's ashamed of having only one leg or one arm, why should they be of having a nose gone?"

"What did you think when you first see him, though? Wan't it disgusting, kind of?" her companion asked, making a sour face.

"Why, I was so proud of him that I didn't see anything but a man who loved me and who had fought for his country! But it was some time before I *did* see him, though. He did his best not to let me."

"How did you ever find him?"

"Why, finally Mr. Granthope located Bill down at Santa Barbara. He was working as a gardener on a place a little ways out of town. Bill's captain give me the money to get down there. I guess I cried pretty near all the way, thinking of Bill hiding out like a yellow dog without any friends. Finally I found the place. Bill was living up in a room over the stable."

She paused. "Go on!" said her companion. The woman's voice had changed somewhat. There was something more than curiosity in its tone. Fleurette was looking down, now, fingering her jacket. Suddenly she began to breathe heavily.

"Bill had a little dog named Dot. A fox terrier, it was. Bill says he thought it was the only living thing that didn't despise him on account of his looks. He was awful fond of Dot. So was I, you bet. Dot's dead, now." She put a handkerchief to her eyes.

"Well, I was dead tired. I'd walked all the way from the station. I was pretty hungry, too. I couldn't afford to get dinner on the train, and I couldn't wait to stop to eat in Santa Barbara. And I was good and trembly—because—well, I hadn't seen Bill for over a year. I stumbled up the stairs and knocked on the door, and when Bill heard my voice he wouldn't let me in. I heard him groan—O, God! it almost broke my heart! He called through the door for me to go away. He said he didn't love me any more. Of course I knew he was lying. I didn't know what to do. Bill's got an awful strong will. I didn't know how to make him believe I didn't care how he looked. I just sat down on the stairs and begun to cry. Then Dot begun to whine and scratch on the door. Bill couldn't stand *that.* He swore

at him and kicked him. It was the only time he ever struck him, but Dot *wouldn't* budge and kept scratching on the door. It was terrible. So Bill wrapped a towel round his face and opened the door. I just fell in his arms. But he put me away from him and said he wouldn't curse my life, and that I must go away."

The other girl was staring at her, awed. "What did you do?" she whispered.

"Oh, I ran up to him again, and pulled off the towel and I kissed him." She spoke almost impersonally.

Kate kindled, now. "Oh, Fleurette, did you? Gee, you were game!" She giggled somewhat hysterically. "Lucky his mouth wasn't shot off, wasn't it?"

Fleurette gazed off across the green and spoke as to one who knew not of life's realities, saying, simply:

"Oh, I didn't kiss him on the mouth, Kate—there was plenty of time for that! I kissed him right where that Moro bullet had wounded him!"

Kate shook her head slowly. "I guess you done right!" she said. Then, "Say, I'd like to see Bill again, Fleurette."

Clytie arose, gave the girl one swift glance as she left, and walked away. She had met two heroines that day, and her nerves were vibrating like tense strings. She walked up and down the square, keeping her eyes on Granthope's doorway.

In half an hour she saw him striding up Geary Street. She followed him rapidly, ran up the stairs and knocked again at his door. He opened it and took her instantly into his arms. She lay there without speaking, and there was a blessed interval of silence after his kiss.

The stimulating newness of possession thrilled him. She was still strange, mysterious, of a different caste, and there was something deliriously fearful in this familiarity as she lay captive, unresisting, trembling in his embrace. He had set his trap for a sparrow and caught a bird of paradise. He knew his power over her, now, though he dared not test it. He dreaded to break the spell of her wonderful condescension, her royal grace and favor. He was in no hurry to remove her crown and scepter; the piquancy of his romance fascinated him.

She broke away from him with a gentle insistence, and looked at him, rosy and smiling. "I'm afraid I'm just like all other women, after all—and I'm glad of it!" she confessed, as she readjusted her hat and sank into the arm-chair to look up at him fondly.

"I don't suppose you realize how strange it seems for me to act this way?" she said. "No man has ever held me in his arms before. I have never thought of the possibility of it—even with you. All that sort of demonstration has been inhibited—I have always wondered if I had any passion in me. Of course, when I kissed you the other time it was different—it was the seal of a compact. But this time it seemed so natural that I didn't think. This is the end of my virginal serenity for ever. I think you have awakened me at last!"

She broke into happy laughter. ”Did I do it well, dear? I’m ashamed to think how inexperienced I am—and you have known so many cleverer women. If you call me amateurish, I’ll slay you! But I think I shall be an apt pupil, though. Francis, stop laughing at me, or I’ll go home!”

Her naïveté was breaking up that glorified seraphic vision he had held of her and put her more nearly on his level, or, perhaps, raised him to her. He let his wonder fade slowly. However, with all his customary audacity he could not yet match her mood. She saw his reserve and took a woman’s delight in wooing him.

”Must I convince you that I am flesh and blood?” she exclaimed with spirit. ”And you—the lady-killer—the hero of a hundred victories—you don’t seem to know that you have me at your feet! Nor how proud I am of it!”

Then she jumped up and took his hands in hers softly. ”You must be very good to me, Francis, dear, for I’m simple and ignorant compared to the women you’ve known, I suppose. But I’m a woman, after all. I don’t want to be worshiped. I want the tenderness of an honest man’s love, such as other women have. I want my divine birthright. I’ve been aloof from men all my life. That doesn’t make me any less desirable, does it? I’ve never met a man who answered my demands. You do, or you will before I’m through with you. Don’t think I’m going to be all moonshine and vapors. I’m going to love you till stars dance in the heavens! That’s what you get for wakening me, my friend! I’ve been asleep, floating in dreams. I want a man’s strength and chivalry and audacity and vigor and romance, instead of the painted shadows I’ve known. Aren’t you afraid of me?” She dropped her head to his shoulder.

He needed no further hint. He put away her halo and her crown, he drew the ermine from her, and the vision in her eyes was made manifest. But it was still too new for her to more than sip at the cup of delight; she would take her happiness by epicurean inches. So she slid away and evaded him, putting the chair half-mockingly between them.

”My father has forbidden me to come down here to see you,” she said. ”It’s really quite romantic. But of course I told him I should come, nevertheless, so we can’t quite call it clandestine. He’ll never dare ask me if I’ve been here. He’s quite afraid of me, when I insist upon having my own way.”

”Have you said anything about Madam Spoll and Vixley to him?”

”Yes, but that’s no use. They certainly seem to have given him some wonderful tests—I don’t see how they could have done so well—and he’s absolutely convinced. I don’t see what we can do, unless we wait for them to go too far and arouse his suspicions. I can’t think he’s feeble-minded. They’re making him pay, though that’s the least of the matter.”

”I have had an idea that I might get hold of one of the gang—a Doctor

Masterson—and induce him to sell them out. He's a turncoat, and if he only knows enough about their game he could be bribed."

"I must leave it to you, Francis. I don't like that method, exactly, but we must do what we can. Perhaps it will settle itself. We can do nothing yet, at any rate. To-day I've come down to ask you to invite me to lunch, please!"

"With pleasure—only, if I must confess—I don't know that I can offer you a very good one. Wait I'll see how much money I have left." He felt doubtfully in his pocket, and added, "Oh, that's all right, we can go to the Palace."

Clytie was instantly suspicious. "How much have you?"

"Quite enough."

"Answer me, sir!"

"About twelve dollars."

She gasped. "Do you mean to say that's *all* you have left?"

"Everything. But my rent is paid for a month in advance."

"Have you any debts?"

"Naturally. Two hundred dollars or so, that's all."

She came up to him and worked her finger into his buttonhole. "Francis Granthope," she said solemnly, "are you really—ruined?" Her eyes danced.

"Oh, I've got enough junk in my chamber to pay that off, I expect, but it won't leave me exactly affluent."

She burst into a delicious chime of laughter. "Why, it's positively melodramatic, isn't it? I never happened to know any one who was actually bankrupt before. Of course it must happen, sometimes, but somehow I thought people could always raise some money, even if they had to scrimp. How exciting it is—aren't you nervous about it? Why, I'd be frightened to death! And yet it seems terribly amusing!"

He laughed with her. "I can't seem to take it very seriously, while you're with me, at any rate. To tell the truth, I haven't begun to think about it yet. Of course my fees have always been in cash, and consequently there's nothing coming in. And I've always spent every cent I made, and a little more. But I've been broke before, and it doesn't alarm me, except that, of course, I can't depend upon living by my wits in quite the same way as I would have, if I hadn't chucked that sort of thing. If I didn't care how I did it, I suppose I could make a hundred or so a week easily enough."

She listened and grew more serious. "Of course that's all over. But you've got to have money! Let's see what I have with me." She took her purse from her bag and emptied it upon the desk. Several ten- and twenty-dollar gold pieces rolled out.

Granthope shook his head sharply. "No, don't do that, please! I can't take anything, even as a loan, you know. I can't spend a cent I haven't honestly

earned—I never shall again, if I have to starve, which I don't intend to do, either. You must know that."

"But from me—isn't that different?"

"Not even from you!"

"Of course you mustn't. I see. It's better not to, yet somehow I could have forgiven you if you had let me help a little at first. I don't exactly see how you're going to live. Why, it's awful, when you come to think of it, isn't it? It really is serious. What a goose I've been! I'm afraid I shall worry about you now. Well, you'll have to have lunch with *me* to-day, anyway. That's only fair, if I invite you."

"On the contrary, I'm going to invite you to share my humble meal."

"All right; let's be reckless then, if you *must* be proud and show off. It will be fun. I never economized in my life, but now I'm going to show you how. Hand over all your wealth, please."

She counted it out upon the desk, a five dollar piece, six silver dollars and two halves and a few nickels. "Now," she said, "how long can we make this last—a week?"

"I've lived for three weeks on that much, often, and paid for my room."

"Something's bound to happen within ten days, I'm sure. If you see nothing ahead at the end of a week, I'll put you on half-rations, and till then I'll allow you a dollar a day. Shall I keep it for you?"

He was delighted to have a treasurer.

"Now we'll take fifty cents and go to some nice dairy place and sit on a stool."

But, as he insisted upon a place where they could talk in quiet, they went, instead, to a shady little restaurant around the corner, and there they seriously discussed his prospects.

He did so whimsically. It was really absurd that he, in full health, six feet high and a hundred and seventy pounds in weight, at twenty-eight, could do nothing, so far as he knew, to support himself honestly. He had been a parasite upon the vanity of fools. After much casting about for ideas, she sent for an *Examiner* and began to search through the "Help Wanted; Male" column.

The Barber's College she rejected first, although he pointed out the advantageous fact that it offered "wages while learning." Canvassing for books or watches they both agreed was not interesting enough. Boot-black—he raised his eyebrows in consideration, she shook her head energetically; it was too conspicuous, with these open-air sidewalk stands. She turned up her nose, also, at the idea of his distributing circulars. The Marine Corps tempted him next—but no, she couldn't think of sparing him for three years, not to speak of a girl in every port. She asked him what a job-press feeder was; he didn't know, but he was sure

he couldn't do it—it would be all he could do to feed himself. Profiler—if he could make as good a profile as Clytie's now, he might get that job. But it appeared to be something connected with a machine-shop. He looked at his white hands and smiled. Weavers, warpers and winders—equally mysterious and impossible. The rest of the wants were for mechanics and tradesmen. Clytie dropped the paper, disappointed.

He declined to let the matter disturb him, as yet. He had no fear of the future, and the present was too charming not to be enjoyed to the full.

"What I've always wanted to do," he said, "is to study medicine. If I could get money enough ahead to put myself through a medical school, I wouldn't mind beginning even at my age. I think I'm fitted for that, for I've cultivated my powers of observation and I know a good deal about human nature, and I've read everything I could lay my hands on. Some day I shall try that."

"Very well, Doctor Granthope, I shall make up my mind to being a doctor's wife, and being rung up at all hours, and being alone half the time."

"I wasn't aware that I had proposed yet," he answered jocosely.

"Why, people don't propose, now, do they? Not real people. What a Bromide you are!" she laughed joyously.

"I'll have to disprove that. Let's spend the rest of the afternoon out of doors and get acquainted! Then when I have a good chance I'll ask if you'll be my wife. Do you realize how little we know of one another? It's ridiculous. Why, you may have a middle name for all I know! You may eat sugar on canteloupe or vinegar on your oysters; you may be an extraordinary mimic; you may have escaped sudden death; you may have been engaged when you were seventeen; you may sulk; you may mispronounce my favorite words! How do I know but you like magenta and Germans and canary birds, and wear Jaegers; and object to profanity and nicknames, and say 'well-read' and read the *Philistine*!"

"Good Lord, deliver us! That's a devil's liturgy!" In denial of his categories she held him out her palm. "Oh, you should know me by that right hand! You're supposed to be a trained observer of symptoms and stigmata. *You're* the one who needs investigation! Do you realize what a risk I am running? Why, I haven't yet heard you speak to a dog, or answer a beggar, or seen you eat a banana, or watch a vaudeville show—and all four are necessary before I really know you."

She bent her head in mock humility and looked up at him from beneath her golden lashes. "You needn't be afraid, Francis; if you tell me what your rules are, I'll obey them. If you *really* want me to wear magenta, I shall be terribly fond of it, and I shall only think I've been stupid all my life to loathe it, and be so glad to learn. But I hope you don't!"

"If you'll allow me five cents for dessert," he said as seriously, "I'll order bananas, at the risk of losing you for ever."

They had begun now to revel in the piquancy of the situation. Their meetings had, up to this time, seemed fatal in their dramatic sequence, fraught with meaning, working steadily up to the climax in the studio. There had been few scenes between them, but those scenes had been cumulative in feeling. They had played their parts like actors in a play of destiny, a play whose plot had been closely knit and esthetically economical in incident and dialogue, each act developing logically the previous situation. Now that the tension was released, and the reaction had come after an histrionic catastrophe, each looked at the other with new eyes, seeking the living person under the tragic mask.

In this delightful pursuit they came upon such fantastic surprises, such rare coincidences, such lovely similarities of whim and taste and prejudice, and, above all, such a rare harmony in their points of view on life, that their talk was as exciting as if they had just met for the first time. The talk ran on, back and forth, lively with continual revelation. It came out, not in dominating trends of thought, or principled opinions, but in many charming lesser exemplifications of their mutual fastidiousness. She reached for a plate, and his hand was outstretched to give it to her at precisely the same instant—their fingers touched, and their eyes spoke in delighted surprise. He discovered that she, like himself, took no sugar in her coffee, and on that consanguinity of taste an imaginative structure arose, to be destroyed with equal delight when he found that she was resisting a temptation to use cream. She quoted spontaneously a line from Stevenson that, for no reason whatever, he had always loved: "For to my mind one thing is as good as another in this world, and a shoe of a horse will do." She knew his language, he fulfilled her test. Such were their tiny psychological romances at table.

They had reversed the usual order of progression in their friendship, or rather Fate had reversed it for them. Had they become betrothed in the ancient manner without previous knowledge of one another, their position could have been no more alluring and delicate, for, strangers physically and, to an extent, mentally, their intimacy of spirit was as certain and irrevocable as a blood relationship. They played with a series of little embarrassments.

To-day they had changed their characteristic parts; he was timid, as he had never been timid with women. She was bold, as she had never been bold with men. The primitive woman had come to life in her. They were, however, both of that caste which can notice, analyze and discuss the subtleties of such a condition while still enjoying it to the full. It delighted them to glean the nuances and overtones of that harmony. It was a new experience to Granthope to be with one who understood and was sensitive to the secondary and tertiary thrills of delight without having become hyper-refined out of vibration with the primal note of passion. That sharing of the wonderful first fruits with her, mentally as well as physically and spiritually, kept his appetite for her whetted to a keen

edge. He could not get enough of her from sight or hearing, and each touch of her hand became a perilously exciting event, a little voyage of poetic adventure.

They were both learning swiftly the art of loving, but, though one goes far in the first sensational lessons, one can not go all the way, no matter how reckless is the attempt. Passion has to be adjusted to tenderness, and affection to experience, or there is discord. For her, perhaps, that love held more of faery, more freshness and delicious abandon, more mystery, for her nerves had never been dulled by contact; but for him there were newer and truer wonders as well. He had taken another degree in sentiment, and the initiation was as marvelous for him, an apprentice, as for her, a neophyte. And, in that sacred, secret lodge, when the time came, she would jump in a single intuitive moment to his level and surpass him.

Already she was tuned to the emotional pitch; she would notice every false move, every mistake in his devotion, as well as if she had been with him past-master in the rites of love. She could already teach him, and already she began to hold him back sensitively, to linger over every transient mood of feeling, every minor phase which women, in that stage between wooing and winning, so care to taste to the last sweet drop. Every reflex, every echo, she would bid him answer to, indefinitely prolonging, now that she was sure of him, the fineness of the reward of her moment, delaying the definite end. He had taught her the rapture of a caress—she would teach him the excitement of a smile, a tone, a gesture.

They lingered long at the table and then went forth into the sun. The cable-car carried them, still bantering, to the gate of the Presidio, and they set out rollicking across the golf-links. The open downs stretched in front of them in long, sweeping lines, like the ground swells of the sea, skirted to the north by groves of cypress and eucalyptus trees. Beyond, to the west, the ground grew sandy as it approached the ocean, and from that direction a sea-breeze sailed, salt and strong. Behind them was Lone Mountain, with its huge cross on top, and from there in a scattering quadrant a multitude of little houses, the outskirts of the city, skirmished towards the park. The turf was hard and smooth as a carpet, burned, here and there, in patches of black, but elsewhere of a pastel green, colored by the hardier weeds that had sustained the drought and fought their way through the matted, sunburned stalks of dry grass.

Dipping down through a wide, sandy hollow, tangled with fuzzy under-growth, they climbed up again, making for a shoulder of the hill where the road curved sharply round the summit. They were alone in the world, now; no one was in sight, at least, and the glory of this free space of earth and air brought them as near to one another as if they had regained childhood. Clytie's hat was off, and her hair wantoned over her forehead and neck. She gave him her joyous laughter unrestrained, and he listened as to a song, and attempted by every wile

he knew to provoke it again and again. If she had been high-priestess before, now she was pixie, and he was, at first, almost as afraid of her in this new guise. He explored a new world with her, as Adam did with Eve. As Adam did with Eve, he marveled at her.

It came to him, as they walked, that what had kept them apart, mentally, was an odd lack of humor. He saw how his whole life had been a pose towards himself as well as towards the world, repressing what now, the costume and custom gone, would come forth bubbling without care. He had kept a straight face so long! What mirth he had felt, in presence of his dupes, had been strained fine, escaping in the corner of a smile, while he fashioned his glib phrases. It had been a preacher's sobriety, the sedateness of priest-craft, aging him prematurely. She held him her hands now down the years, back to decent, cleanly fun. To his surprise he found that he could give full vent to it. He could laugh aloud, and need not study effects and poses; he need not impress her. His wit was clumsy; it even approached silliness, in its first runaway impulse, but he at least lost his self-consciousness. He followed her merriment, and they discovered nonsense together.

So, jollying, they tramped up to the road and came suddenly upon the sea, flaming, peacock blue, at the foot of the cliff which fell almost vertically at their feet. Across the dancing waves, from a coast like Norway's, Point Bonita arose, guarding the Golden Gate. At the end of a semicircular cove to their left a ragged cliff jutted into the channel; behind its promontory the hills rolled back.

She gave a cry of joy and happiness and sat down on the verge of the bluff to feast upon the view. He dropped beside her and took her hand. An automobile whirred past them and she did not flinch. There he underwent a revulsion of feeling.

[image]

He dropped beside her and took her hand

"How can you love me?" he said bitterly. "What good am I? I have no capacity, no prospects, no purpose, even! I am a mere negative, and if I loved you I should free you from the incubus."

"Do you recall reading the palm of a girl whose lover in the Philippines refused to write to her?" she asked. "It happened about the time I first knew you, I think."

He nodded, watching a tug towing a bark out through the Gate, and she told him what she had heard of Fleurette's story that morning. It was no slight

relief to him to think that he had helped some one, though his assistance had been based upon deceit.

”Don’t you see?” she said. ”Don’t you understand how women love? It makes no difference how poor or how dishonored a man may be, if she loves him her happiness must be with him.”

”Oh, a physical deformity is easy enough to forget. But how about a moral one? You’ll be the wife of an outcast.”

”If you refused to accept my love, if you left me, now, you would be inflicting a far greater pain than any gossip could ever give me.”

”The mere problem of living appals me,” he went on gloomily. ”I would never think twice of it, if I were alone. But you know what a coward marriage makes of one.”

She laughed in his face. ”I’ll be your first patient, Doctor Granthope, and I’ll pay you well!”

”If there was some way of getting that money of Madam Grant’s. I’ve never even thought of trying to claim it, but perhaps I might go up to Stockton and inquire about it. Of course, there’s no fear of being accused of stealing it, now. But even if I had it, I don’t know whether or not it would be right to use it myself.”

”You might at least borrow it for a while, but for my own part I’m convinced that it’s yours. There’s no reason why the bank should have the use of it for nothing. I wish we could clear up that matter of Madam Grant.”

They set out again, she with a buoyant tread, willowy and strong. It was not till her muscles relaxed that her characteristic, dreamy languor was apparent, and this trait was slowly disappearing under the influence of the new interest in her life. It was as if she had found, now, what she, in her former quiescent moods, had been watching and waiting for, and Granthope’s presence stimulated her with energy. She was almost coquettish with him at times, now, the mood alternating with a noble frankness, the boldness of a gambler who has cast all hardily upon a single stroke. She was not afraid of being seen with him. She gave him herself in every word and glance. A casual observer could have read her fondness for him.

They went along the road, skirting the water, past the battery emplacements and disappearing guns, over a low hill toward the Fort. From this side the Bay opened to them, and beyond lay line on line of mountains, growing hazier in the distance, to the north and east. They had regained their spirits with this exercise, and talked again freely as boy and girl. He noticed with amusement and delight how she edged, unconsciously, nearer and nearer him. If he crossed the road, she came to him, without perceiving the regularity of it, as the armature comes to the magnet. She nearly forced him into the wall, or off the walk, in her unthinking pursuit of him, so strongly he attracted her. She blushed furiously

when he spoke of it—it was so droll that he could not help mentioning it—but that comment did not cure her. She was over by his side, rubbing elbows as unaffectedly the next instant. How could she help it, when he kept his eyes on her as he did? she said. So, along the shore by the Life Saving Station, up to the parade ground and the barracks, then by a climb up the steep, narrow, tree-grown path to the corner gate of the reservation they sported.

That was the first of a series of outings they had together that week. The Golden Gate Park, Sutro's forest and the beach were each explored in turn, and while still within the limits of the city they tasted of country, mountain and shore, and let the days fly by. Clytie brought the luncheon, and they ate it, picnic fashion, under the blue sky. She kept strict account of his finances, and as his small capital dwindled they came back to his plans for the future. He met her, one day, with news.

"I think I shall have to go to work, after all," he said. "I've got a position."

She congratulated him, not without a shade of sorrow that their holidays were to end.

"It's too much like my old work to be very proud of, but it's a step up. It's founded on vanity, but this time I shall exploit my own instead of others'. I'm going on the stage. I've found my name is worth something."

She was a little disappointed and he was not surprised. "Oh, I'll soon become unbearable, I suppose. Most of the time I don't spend in front of the make-up glass looking at myself, I'll spend being looked at, trying to propitiate an audience. It's a school of egoism. But at least my pose will be honest. I saw the stage manager of the *Alcazar*, and I'm going to begin to rehearse next Monday."

He spoke banteringly, but she felt the truth of his jests. Still, it would provide for the present. It would make him more than ever notorious—but it was better than idleness.

The next day at ten o'clock she appeared at the studio to spend the day with him. It was Wednesday, and they were anxious to make the most of what time remained.

Except for his bed, table and bureau, his chamber was empty now, all his effects having been sold at auction. The sum received barely sufficed to pay off his debts. The studio, too, was bare, and placards hung outside both doors indicating that the premises were to let. The little office, however, was left as usual, except for the casts of hands, put away in the closet, and in this room they stayed by the open fire.

He was looking over his card catalogue as she entered. He had conceived the plan of writing a book on palmistry along new lines, in which he might embody his observations and theories. His aim was to attempt to correlate chirography, chiromancy, phrenology, physiognomy and all those sciences and pseudo-

sciences which seek to interpret character through specialized individual characteristics, and to trace the evidences from one to another, showing how each element or indication would recur in every manifestation of a person's individuality, and how one symptom might be inferred and corroborated by another. It would take time and trouble, but he could spend his leisure upon it. The plan was tentative and hypothetical, but so suggestive that he was becoming interested in proving its verification. Clytie was enthusiastic about the book and desirous of helping him. He was becoming less afraid of her, and more sure of himself, after their days together, and he greeted her boldly enough, now. Yet there was still a fascinating novelty in his possession of her that made his familiarity seem like recklessness. Not for her, however. Once having given him her lips she could never refuse them again, nor could she longer think the action strange.

She took off her coat and hat, tucked in an errant curl or two over her ears and seated herself luxuriously in the arm-chair. As she had played with him, so now she worked with him, arranging his notes, dictating for him to write, or stopping to discuss the subject. She was too adorable in all this assumption of importance and seriousness for him not to interrupt her occupation more than once, for which diversion of her attention he was sent back promptly to his desk. The business kept them so employed for two hours, when she opened her package, brought forth their luncheon and brewed a pot of tea on the hearth.

"Francis," she said, after that was over, "do you know we are actually becoming acquainted? Isn't it too bad!"

"Don't you enjoy the process?"

"Decidedly I do. That's why I regret that it must soon be over."

"I doubt if we'll ever finish—if we do, it will be still more delightful to know you. And this process brings us toward that beautiful consummation."

"Yes, but this part is so pleasant. I hate to see it go. I want to roll it over on my tongue. Now, every word you say is a revelation and a surprise—a surprise that I have been anticipating all my life, if you'll pardon the bull. It's like unwrapping a mummy—I get excitedly nearer and nearer my ideal of you."

"But there's no satisfaction in opening doors if one can't go in."

"Ah, there's the immortal difference between a man and a woman! Most men want a marvel, patent and notorious. They want to come to the end of the rainbow and find the pot of gold; that's all, whether that means a kiss or a marriage. Women enjoy every step of the journey. Men think of nothing but fulfilment, women of achievement. Men care only for the black art of the Indian fakir who makes a grain of wheat grow to full maturity in a few minutes. Women appreciate the wonder of the natural development of that same little seed in the warm bosom of the earth, with its slow evolution of sprout and stalk and leaf and blossom—the glory of every step on the way!"

”But, can’t you see that progress in affection needn’t be a limited journey to a finite end, even the end of the flower, but, no matter how fast one travels, if one is really in love, the goal is always infinitely distant? There are enough things to be understood and enjoyed.”

”Oh, I’m sure enough that I’ll never get enough of you, and never know enough about you!”

”That’s almost too true to be funny. You’ll never know even who I am, I’m afraid. Think what a risk you run, my dear!”

”Oh, I know who you are well enough. You’re the son of Casanova and Little Dorrit.”

He grew reflective. ”Isn’t it strange,” he said, ”that you, with all your wonderful intuitions, shouldn’t be able, somehow, to solve that riddle? Do you think I am Madam Grant’s son? Sometimes that seems to be the inevitable conclusion.”

”I can’t quite think you are, Francis. Everything you have told me about her has brought her very near to me, somehow, and I feel as if I knew her, but you don’t affect me in the same way. I think you’re a changeling, myself! It is strange that I can’t quite ’get’ you now, though, not nearly as well as I used to. My power seems to have waned ever since—”

”Since what?”

”Since that first kiss! You see, I’ve exchanged that elusive power for something tangible.” She put him away with a gesture. ”No, not now! I want to be serious! And oh, here’s what I found in my father’s scrap-book. It seemed to have been cut from a very old paper. Somehow it seems to point to her. I want to know what you think about it.”

She had copied it out and read it to him:

”Miss Felicia Gerard, who spoke immediately after Mrs. Woodhull’s address, is one of that lady’s most devoted adherents and helpers, having been connected with the cause for nearly a year. Although only twenty years of age, Miss Gerard has brought into action talents of no mean order. She was graduated at Vassar College, and is endowed both physically and mentally with the rarest and most lovable qualities. She was first presented to Mrs. Woodhull in Toledo, where the remarkable clairvoyant powers shared by the two women drew them naturally together. Miss Gerard is a regular contributor to *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* where her spirited articles have attracted wide notice and flattering praise.”

”That must be Mamsy,” he said.

”I’m sure of it. I shall ask my father as soon as I get the opportunity.”

For the rest of the afternoon they talked as if they were never to meet again. Once or twice there came a knock, and the door was tried, but Granthope did not answer, and they were left alone in peace. She rose to go at six, and, as she was to be busy all the next day, the parting was long delayed. They were, indeed, getting rapidly acquainted.

CHAPTER XV

THE REËNTRANT ANGLE

Blanchard Cayley strolled into the Mercantile Library, one afternoon, and, nodding to the clerk at the desk, walked to an alcove in the corner of the main hall. He stopped at a shelf and sat down on a stool. He had done this several afternoons a week for years, going through the library as a business man takes account of stock, examining every book in order. Of some he read only the titles, glancing perhaps also at the date of the edition; of some he looked over the table of contents. Others he read, nibbling here and there. A few he took home. He had, by this time, almost exhausted the list. He read, not like a bookworm, with relish and zest, nor like a student desirous of a mastery of his subject; he read, as he did everything, even to his love-making, deliberately, accurately, with an elaborate scientific method that was, in its intricacy, something of a game, whose rules he alone knew. He had, indeed, specialized, taking up such subjects as jade, Japanese poetry, Esperanto, higher space, Bahiism, and devil-worship, and in such subjects he had what is termed ”lore,” but his main object was the conquest of the whole library in itself.

This afternoon he did not read long. Looking over the top of his book, as was his custom from time to time, to discover what women were present, he caught sight of Clytie Payson in the alcove containing the government reports. He replaced his volume and went over to her.

She was in high spirits, and welcomed him cordially, as if she had but just come from something interesting and stimulating; another man’s smile seemed still to linger with her.

”Why, how d’you do, Blanchard?” she said. ”I haven’t seen you here for a long time. What has happened? Have you finished the library yet?”

”Oh, no, not quite. I’ve still a few more shelves to do, but I’ve been studying psychology on the side.”

She looked at him with an indulgence that was new to him. ”In petticoats, I presume, then?”

He shrugged his shoulders. ”No, I’ve been studying a man,” he said. ”What are you doing?”

She overlooked the purport of his question and answered lightly, ”Oh, only looking up some statistics for father. I’ve been coming here quite often, lately, but I’m almost finished, now. Is there anything in the world duller than a statistic? I always think of the man who went for information to a statistician at Washington and was asked, ’What d’you want to prove?’”

”How is your father getting on with the book?”

Clytie grew a little more serious. ”Why, father’s queer lately. I can’t understand him at all. He’s taken up with some spiritualists, and I’m rather worried about it.”

”He’s talked to me about them. But I should hardly think you’d be surprised at it. You’re as much interested in palmistry as he is in the spooks, aren’t you?”

Clytie flashed a glance at him. ”Didn’t you know that Mr. Granthope had given up palmistry?”

Cayley smiled and smoothed his pointed beard. ”Oh, yes. I’ve heard considerable about it. Nobody seems to understand it but me. Very clever of him, I think.”

”What d’you mean?” Clytie was instantly upon the defense.

”I like his system. It’s subtle.”

”His system?”

”Yes. You don’t mean to say you still think he’s sincere, do you?”

”I don’t think it’s necessary to discuss Mr. Granthope,” said Clytie carelessly. ”Of course I do believe he’s sincere, or I wouldn’t call myself a friend of his. He has given up a good paying business because he was sick of that way of earning a living.”

”And also in order to make more money by quitting.”

”How?”

”By marrying you.”

She winced. ”Blanchard,” she said, ”if you weren’t an old friend, I couldn’t forgive you that. But because you are, I can’t permit you to think it.”

”It was because we are old friends that I permitted myself to speak so plainly. You’ll count it, I suppose, merely as jealousy. But I hate to see you taken in so easily.”

Clytie looked up at him calmly, folding her hands in her lap. ”Now, Blanchard, please tell me exactly what you mean, without any more insinuations.”

”Why, Granthope has been for two months trying to marry you. He’s after your money.”

”Thank you for the implied compliment,” she retorted dryly.

”Oh, well, you know perfectly well what *I* think of you, Cly. I was thinking of what I know of him, not what I know of you. He’s made a deliberate attempt to get you, and this reform business is only a part of the game.”

She smiled and turned away, as if she were so sure of Granthope that it was hardly worth her while even to defend him.

”It’s not pleasant to say it,” he went on; ”but you spoke of being distrustful of these mediums your father knows, and my point is that Granthope’s tarred with the same brush. He has worked with them and plotted with them.”

She was as yet unruffled; the spell of her happiness was still upon her, and she answered mildly. ”I can hardly blame you for thinking that, perhaps. I suppose I might myself, if I didn’t know him so well. But I do happen to know something about his life, and I’m sure you’re mistaken. He’s told me a good deal, and I have my own intuitions besides.”

Cayley was as serene. ”Do your intuitions tell you, for instance, that he has a definite understanding with these mediums—in regard to you?”

”No, they do not!” she answered calmly, looking him fair in the face.

”It’s true, nevertheless.” Cayley, with sharp eyes, noted her flush. Her eyes were well schooled, but her quivering mouth betrayed her trouble.

She took up her book as if to dismiss the subject.

Cayley watched her with impassive eyes. ”You may be his friend, as you say, but there are a lot of things about Granthope that you don’t know yet.”

”No doubt,” she replied without looking up.

”And there are things which you ought to know.”

She looked at him now, to say: ”Do you fancy that you are helping your own chances any by attacking him?”

”Will it help his chances any if you find that he has given away particular facts that he’s discovered about you and your father?”

She had begun to be aroused, now, and she showed fight. ”I don’t believe it!”

Still unperturbed, he went on in his mechanically precise way. ”I’ve made it my business to find out about Granthope, Cly. It shouldn’t surprise you—you know I’m in earnest about wanting you. I’m as earnest, too, in wanting to protect you. I don’t propose to hold my tongue when I find that you’re trusting in a man that’s knifing you behind your back.”

Her voice rang with pride and scorn as she rose, saying, ”I don’t care to discuss the matter further, Blanchard.”

”Not when I say that I have seen notes in Granthope’s own handwriting that were given to a medium as a part of a deliberate scheme? These notes were on definite things he had learned, I’m sure, from his conversations with you.

Some of them are personal matters that I'm sure you wouldn't at all care to have made public. You could easily prove it if you saw them."

She had lost courage again, and hesitated, staring at him.

Then she said, freezing, "Let me see them, then. If you're determined to have a scene, you may as well follow the rules of melodrama."

"I can't show them, because this medium wouldn't let them out of his possession. But I can get him to let you see them, if you like."

"You say they are about things we—that I talked about?"

"Yes."

"Things—about—*me*?"

"Yes. I forget all of them. I had only a moment's glance."

For some moments she stood silent. Then she spoke swiftly. "I don't believe it. He couldn't do such a thing!"

"My dear Cly, you must remember that one's whole mental evolution is merely the history of the conflict between reason and instinct, and reason is bound to win in the end. That's the way we develop. The fact is, he *could* do it and *did* do it. He's a charlatan and he has used a charlatan's methods. I said he was clever. This giving up his studio was merely a kind of gambit. But he made a mistake when he tried to use a lot of cheap fakirs to help him out with you."

"Oh!" She clenched her fists. "Don't! I won't stand it!" Her head dropped as if she were weary. Her eyes burned.

"Oh, there's good in everybody, the copy-books say," he returned. "But the fact is, Cly, he isn't in your class, and never was. You should have seen that!"

She looked at him without seeing him, her eyes caught meaninglessly by the garnet in his tie, clinging to it, as if it were the only real thing in the world. Her lips parted, the color was leaving her cheeks, she looked as frail as a ghost. Suddenly she threw off her reverie, and placing her hand on his arm, said, "Let me see them—the notes—Blanchard. There must be some horrid mistake. I want to clear it up immediately."

"Very well, I'll take you now, if you like. It isn't far."

She followed him out of the library as if hypnotized. They spoke little on the way. Cayley tried his best to arouse her, but finally gave it up as impossible. He watched her, preserving his usual phlegmatic calm. She walked with head erect, her chin forward, with her long, graceful gait, beside him, but never seemed two human beings further apart in spirit.

Flora Flint opened the door to Vixley's flat. She acted quite as if she belonged there and invited them in cordially, with an up-and-down scrutiny of Clytie as they passed in. Then she disappeared down the long, tunnel-like hall. Cayley took Clytie into the office where, refusing a chair, she stood like a statue, her eyes fixed on the door.

Vixley entered, currying his beard with his long fingers. ”Well, Mr. Cayley,” he said, ”what can we do for you? Like a sitting?”

”Professor, you recall telling me something about some memoranda Granthope gave you, don’t you?”

”I been thinkin’ about that, Mr. Cayley, and I don’t know as I ought to have said anything. I’m rather inclined to regret it.”

”You *have* said something, and I’ve brought this lady down to show the memoranda to her,” said Cayley.

”H’m!” Vixley looked her over. ”It ain’t exactly customary to show things like that, you know.”

”We’ve had all that out before. I’m here to see those cards.”

Vixley drew up a rocking-chair for Clytie, and seated himself on the edge of the revolving chair in front of his desk, putting the tips of his long fingers together. ”Francis Granthope is a bright young man,” he said, ”a very bright young man. Very painstaking, and very thorough. I won’t say he ain’t a *leetle* bit unscrupulous, however. A man who ain’t got no psychic influence behind him has got to do some pretty good guessin’. Now you go to work and take me, with my control, Theodore Parker, and his band o’ spirits, I don’t need to bother much. I can get all I want out of the other plane. I ain’t sayin’ nothin’ against Granthope, except maybe that he uses methods, sometimes, that ain’t *exactly* legitimate, such as what I was tellin’ you about.”

”How did he happen to give you these notes?” Clytie asked.

”Why, I s’pose he expected me to give him an equivalent in return. I will say I have helped him out, at times, feelin’ rather predisposed toward him, and him bein’ a likely chap. But Lord, *I* don’t need his help! And so I told him. In this case I didn’t feel called upon to give away none of my client’s affairs. Naturally he got a little huffy about it, and he’s acted so that I’m inclined to resent it. I can’t bear anything like ingratitude.”

He opened his desk and took from a pigeonhole two cards. He handed them to Clytie.

”I was tellin’ Mr. Cayley, here, I knew about Granthope and his methods. It’ll show you what a poor business this palm-readin’ reely is. Lord, they ain’t nothin’ in it at all! If anybody wants to know anything about the future the only way to do is to establish communications with the spirit-plane through the well-known and well-tried methods of spiritualism.”

Clytie was not listening. Her eyes were upon the cards. She looked and looked, reading and re-reading, her face set in tense lines, the notes in Granthope’s fine, closely written hand. There it was, as he had set it down:

Oliver Payson, b. Oct. 2nd, 1842. b. d. present from dau., bound copy of 'Montaigne' 1900. Tattoo mark anchor on right arm, near shoulder. Writing a book. Economics (?) Knew Mad. Grant (?) Wife visited Mad. G. x. v. p.

Clytie Payson. Engaged to Blanchard Cayley (?) Mole, left cheek. Ring with "Clytie" inside. Turquoises. Claims psychic power. Clairv. Goes to Merc. Lib. afternoons at 3. Buried doll under sun-dial in garden.

As she came to the last line she dropped the card from her fingers. She had become a woman of ice.

Vixley picked up the card and smiled, showing his yellow teeth. "Kind of a give-away, ain't it? *I* call his work lumpy."

"I hope you're convinced now," Cayley added.

She turned her head slowly, deliberately, to the Professor. "When did Mr. Granthope give you this card?"

"Oh, I dunno, exactly, he's gave me so much, one time or another. About two weeks ago, I should judge. Why?"

"I'm very much obliged to you." Her voice came as if from an immense distance. Then she nodded to Cayley, who rose.

"Nothin' more I could do, is they? Wouldn't you like to try a sittin', Miss?" Vixley asked with urbanity.

"Thank you, no." Clytie walked out slowly, without another look at him, like a somnambulist. Vixley hastened to escort her to the front door, and opened it.

Cayley gave him a look. It was returned. Vixley bowed. Clytie went out.

"Are you going over to North Beach?" Cayley inquired. "I'll walk up to the car with you."

"I'll go alone, I think."

"Oh, very well—but—"

"Good afternoon. You'll have to excuse me, Blanchard."

"All right. Good day."

She strode off, leaving him there.

She walked all the way home, and walked fast, her head held high, looking straight ahead of her. She took the steep hills with hardly a slackening of her speed, breasting the upward inclines energetically, leaning forward with grace. Up Nob Hill and down she went, along the saddle, up Russian Hill and over, without her customary pause to enjoy the glorious outlooks. Under her arm she still carried the book from the library which she had forgotten to put down when first Blanchard Cayley spoke to her. She held it automatically, apparently not knowing that it was there. With it she gripped her glove; her right hand was still

bare, clenching her skirt.

She turned into her street at last, and climbed the wooden steps, into the garden. As she went up the path, her eyes lighted upon the sun-dial. She stopped and looked at it for a moment fixedly. Then into the house, up-stairs to her room, to throw herself upon the bed...

The wind had risen and blew gustily about the house. Her shutter banged at intervals. The noise kept up till she rose, opened the window and fastened back the blind, and went back to her bed. There she lay, staring, with her eyes wide open...

Her father did not come home that evening. At half-past seven she got up again, washed her face, arranged her hair, and went down-stairs to eat dinner alone. Afterward she stepped out into the garden. The wind billowed her skirts, fretted her hair into a swirl of tawny brown, cooled her cheeks. For an hour she walked up and down in the dark. The harbor was thick with mist. The siren on Lime Point sobbed across the Gate intermittently ...

Later, she went into the library and sat down with a book beside the fire. For a half-hour she did not turn a page, but remained quiescent, gazing at the flames...

At ten she went up to her workroom, lighted the gas, and took out her tools. For two hours she sewed leaves on her frame, working as if automatically. Her gaze was intent; one would have said that she was completely absorbed in her task. Slowly the sheets piled, one on another, each stitched to the back with deft strokes. Finally the whole volume was completed. She bound up the loose threads and put the book away. Then she heated her irons, got out her gold-leaf and spent an hour tooling a calf cover, pressing in roses and circles and stipples while her lips were sternly set. She arose, then, and looked out into the night...

She undressed at last and went to bed. Long after midnight there was a sound below of her father coming in. His footsteps went to and fro for a time, then they came up-stairs. His door was closed softly. There was no sound, now, but the ticking of her little clock, and, occasionally, the far-away echo of a steamer's whistle, and the dreary note of the siren. She tossed uneasily. The clock struck

one, two, three, four. Then the wind began to sing round the corner of the house as the gale rose. The noise was soothingly monotonous, hypnotic, anesthetic...

At breakfast she was cool, serene, quiet, showing no traces of her emotion. She talked with her father, laughed with him, as usual, flying from one topic to another, never serious. As he got up to go, she remarked:

"Father, I think I'll go up to Sacramento to visit Mrs. Maxwell at Lonely a few days. I've put it off so long, and she's been after me again to come. She's up there all alone."

"All right, Cly. I saw her down-town, day before yesterday, and she told me she was going to ask you."

Clytie frowned. "You did? Why didn't you tell me?" She looked at him for a moment curiously. He seemed to wish to evade her question. Then she asked, with emphasis, "Did you ask her to invite me?"

Mr. Payson hesitated. "Why, I told her that you would probably accept—"

She bit her lip, still frowning. "I understand. On account of Mr. Granthope, I presume?"

"Well, I thought it would be just as well for you to take a little vacation."

Clytie said nothing. Mr. Payson lingered, ill at ease in the face of her implications. At last he looked at her over his spectacles and said petulantly: "I've been surprised at you, Cly, really. I have been considerably worried, as well. I'm afraid you've compromised yourself seriously by having been seen so much with Granthope. I haven't spoken of it, before, because I had already said all I could to you. You knew very well what my wishes were in the matter and it seems you've seen fit to disregard them."

Clytie still kept silent, listening to him calmly. He had worked himself up by his own words to an irascible pitch, but her non-resistance balked his temper, and it oozed away, as he continued.

"I hope this trip will give you a chance to think it well over, Cly, and I have no doubt that you'll come to see it as I do."

"Oh, I'll think it over," she replied listlessly.

Mr. Payson, having won his point in getting her out of town, shook his head without replying, and prepared to leave the room.

But Clytie continued. "At least, I am sure he was sincere in warning you against those mediums you are going to, father."

He turned to her, his irritability rekindled by her remark. "That's exactly what I most dislike about the man," he exclaimed. "If he hadn't attempted to prejudice me against them I might believe in his own change of heart, or whatever it was. But he went back on the very people with whom he's been associated for

years. Isn't that suspicious?"

"Didn't he do that to save you from their tricks?" Her voice was low and evidently troubled; she seemed to be attempting to convince herself, rather than her father.

"I notice he didn't explain how they managed to give me my tests," Mr. Payson retorted, shaking his head emphatically. "He seemed to consider me the most simple and credulous person in the world. His statements, at least those he dared to make, were all general ones, and they implied that I was not old enough, or else, perhaps, too old to sift the evidence for myself. They were positively insulting. These mediums have given me proof enough to convince any one. They've told me things that couldn't possibly have been found out by any tricks. Take that about your giving me a copy of *Montaigne* for my birthday, for instance. How could they have found that out? You hadn't told any one about it, had you?"

"No," said Clytie faintly.

"There you are, then!" Mr. Payson wagged his head solemnly. "What did I tell you?"

"What else did they say?" Clytie asked anxiously.

"Plenty of things. Things I myself didn't know the truth about till I investigated. Things about my personal affairs, about my past life—oh, so much that I can't help feeling that there's something in this business that we don't understand. Oh!"—he paused for a moment, looking at her—"there was one thing I wanted to ask you about—I forgot to speak of it. It sounded like nonsense, at the time—you know that even spirits are sometimes frivolous and inconsequent—and there were so many other more important communications at the time that it slipped my mind. Vixley's control said something once about a doll that was buried underneath—"

"Oh, I forgot to ring up Mrs. Maxwell," Clytie interrupted, springing up. "I *must* tell her I'm coming. If I don't do it right away now I may not catch her—it takes so long to get a long distance connection."

She went up to him and putting her arms round his neck, kissed him. "Don't wait, father, if you're in a hurry. Good-by!"

She walked to the door.

"Well, then, I'll go along down-town," he said. "Be sure and write when you get up there."

She left him hurriedly and ran up-stairs.

At ten she was at the ferry, waiting for the boat which connected with the Sacramento train. There was a crowd going, coming and waiting in the long arcade outside. As she approached the ticket office a man was at the window. He was

tall, dark-haired, distinguished. At sight of him, Clytie withdrew out of sight, and let him finish his business and leave. Then she approached, bought her ticket, and, watching sharply, dodging behind groups here and there, she succeeded in passing the ticket collector and losing herself in the assembly in the waiting-room without being observed. She wormed her way forward near the gate, and with the first rush of passengers, after the gate was raised, hurried on to the boat and went, immediately into the ladies' room.

On the other side she acted as cautiously. She remained till almost the last passenger had left the boat, then walked swiftly through the train-shed to her car. For an hour, as the train sped on, she scarcely looked to the right or the left.

The train slowed up at Stockton, and stopped. Clytie looked carelessly out of the window. Just as the train started again, Granthope appeared on the platform. He went up to a cab-driver and began talking. Clytie, flushing deeply, watched him so intensely that at last, as if attracted by some mental telepathy, he looked round and caught sight of her. His hat came off to her immediately. He gave a quick glance at the now rapidly moving train, as if intending to board it, then he gave it up as impossible. Clytie's eyes lost him, and she was carried on. It was a long time before the color faded from her cheeks.

CHAPTER XVI
TIT FOR TAT

Professor Vixley had prepared his campaign with Mr. Payson with the scientific delight of an engineer. His cunning was not too low to prevent his love of the sport for the sport's sake, and his elaborations and by-plays were undertaken with relish and enthusiasm. The pleasure was vastly heightened for him by the character of his dupe. Mr. Payson was a figure in the community, a man of weight and influence. He had an established position and an assured wealth. Heavy and slow, mentally, he had the dignified respectability that is usually associated with business success.

In the mental manipulation of such a personage Vixley felt a sense of power as enjoyable as the pecuniary reward. The dwarf, socially, led the giant.

He had his charge, by this time, well in hand. The old gentleman's ponderous mentality had been managed like an ocean steamship lying at the dock. One by one the lines of doubt and distrust and prejudice had been released. It was

now time to fire his intellectual boilers. By means of their tricks, eavesdropping methods and clever guess-work, and with Cayley's help, they had fed him fuel for the imagination until now he was roused to a dynamic, enthusiastic belief in spiritualism, or that version of it which best suited their ends. Captain and pilot were aboard and in command. It remained but to ring up the engines, turn over the wheel and get under way for the voyage. Many another such argosy had been fitted out and had sailed forth from their brains, to return laden with treasure. There was hazard of collision or shipwreck, but the only obstacle now in view was Granthope, and Vixley felt sure that he could be blown out of the way with the explosion of a few scandals.

Mr. Payson's mind had an inertia which, once successfully overcome, was transformed to momentum. He was as credulous, as responsive, as influenced by the specious logic of the medium as if he had never been a skeptic. Vixley's next move was to realize financially on Payson's vanity and literary aspirations.

The ensuing series of communications from "Felicia," automatically transcribed by Vixley, developed the fact Mr. Payson's book would meet with disastrous competition from an unknown author who was working upon the same subject in Chicago. Such a publication would, in the eyes of any publisher, materially affect the value of a San Francisco book. Something must be done to prevent the rival work from being printed. The first step necessary, Vixley asserted, was to send a man to Chicago and investigate the case and report upon it. This preliminary reconnaissance cost a considerable sum. Payson did not see the emissary, for Vixley had warned him of the possibility of blackmail. "Felicia" now informed the sitter that the aid of the spirit world could be invoked to forestall the competing writer's efforts.

There was a band of spirits on the "third sphere," it seemed, who, though usually maleficent, could be placated. These "Diakkas" could, and possibly would, exert certain magnetic or psychic powers so as to prevent competition. It was difficult, however, to win over spirits so fantastic as these, even when one had established communication with them—itself an intricate and dangerous process. The only safe way, Mr. Payson was assured, was to create an atmosphere pleasing to them, one which absorbed antagonistic vibrations, and facilitated communication by intensifying the sitter's aura and rendering their acceptance of earthly conditions easy. And so forth, through an elaborate exposition.

The thing was accomplished by means of charging the room with the perfume of ambergris. Ambergris, however, was expensive. Mr. Payson had to pay fifty dollars an ounce for his; moreover, a fresh supply was necessary for each séance as the material quickly absorbed the deleterious psycho-physical elements of the atmosphere, and became inert to vibration. Professor Vixley divided this revenue with Madam Spoll, but he could not divide his pleasure in his artful fic-

tion. Madam Spoll was only a woman; the artistic niceties of the harlequinade were lost on her.

This could not, however, go on for ever, nor were the two conspirators content to do business in so small a way. Both were convinced that the only chance for a large and permanent income lay in the production of Payson's and Felicia's child, and they set about the plan by which this should become remunerative.

Ringa was settled upon for the impersonation. He was simple, easily taught and led; he was willing. He would be as easily managed when the time came for a division of the profits of the enterprise. And so, one day, Madam Spoll waddled out to Turk Street to complete the negotiations.

Professor Vixley was bending over a small machine with horizontal arms in the form of a cross, decorated with mirrors, when she rang; before opening the door he covered the instrument with a black cloth and put it on his roll-top desk by the type-writer.

Madam Spoll came in smiling, unruffled as if her face had been freshly ironed out.

"I been walking lately, to reduce my flesh, but, Lord, I get such an appetite I eat more'n enough to balance," she panted, as she lowered herself carefully upon the quilted couch and crushed back into a sofa pillow, whereon was painted a fencing girl with a heart on her plastron. She loosened her beaded cape, and breathed heavily in relief.

"Well, I managed to get here, after all! What d'you think? Mrs. Riley has been to me for a private setting. Do you recall her, Vixley? She's that woman who was tried for murdering her husband some years back and was acquitted; or rather the jury was hung. Anyways, *she* wasn't. But I believe she done it. She's as nervous as a cat, and can't look you in the face to save her soul. It seems that she knew Madam Grant in the old days, and used to get readings off her. I don't know but we could use her, someway."

"Has she got any money?" said the slate-writer.

"She keeps a boarding-house, I believe. It wouldn't be much, but 'every little helps,' as the old lady said when she spit into the harbor. I might work her for five a week, I s'pose, but now I think of it, Masterson's doctoring her."

"Then they won't be much meat left on her bones!" Vixley grinned. "But I ain't botherin' with landladies till we finish with Payson. Did you see him yesterday?"

"I did, and he said he'd give a thousand dollars if we'd find the boy. I shouldn't wonder if he'd pay more if we work it right, not to speak of what we get from Ringa when he's fixed."

"Lord! A thousand dollars for Ringa! Wouldn't that make you seasick?" Vixley cackled, slapping his claw-like hand on his knee. "I say, Gertie, we ought

to get a couple of good crockery teeth put in his jaw first, or the old man will want to return him for shop-worn. Ringa as Mr. Max Payson, Esquire! Gee whizz! I want to be there when the old gent falls on his neck and kills the fatted calf!"

"I've known a heap of worse boys than Max Ringa to have for a son," Madam Spoll said, a little irritated. "You go to work and wash him and dress him up in a Prince Albert and I don't know why he won't do as well as anybody."

"Oh, he'll do—he'll do elegant! He'll do Payson, anyways, and that's all we want."

"Oh, I'm going to teach him to jump through the hoop all right. He'll be doing the papa's darling act so natural you'll think he'd always slep' in a bed!" She chuckled now till she shook like a jelly-fish. "He's just crazy about it. Says he'll come down and take me to ride in his automobile car. Why, Payson will be good for all sorts of money if Ringa works him right. He ought to get an allowance of two or three hundred a month if the old man's got any proper feelings as a father."

"It's more'n likely he'll pay Ringa to stay away," Vixley remarked cynically. "I've seen these here fond parents before. I don't seem to see Ringa doin' society somehow. He'd be tryin' to blow the foam off his champagne and chewin' tobacco in the ball-room the first thing. But he'll do for a starter. If worse comes to worst we can hold the old man up to keep the story dark—and then there's the weeklies, they wouldn't mind gettin' hold of it."

"Say!" Madam Spoll suddenly exclaimed, "what's become of Fancy Gray, now that Frank has thrown her down?"

"Why, ain't you heard? She's took up with this fellow Cayley."

"No!" Madam Spoll's eyes were opened wide at the bit of gossip. "What's he up to with her, anyway?"

"Why, I expect he's trying to use her someway, so's to queer Frank's game with Miss Payson. Fancy knows all about Frank, if she can be induced to tell. If Cayley can show Frank up, he stands a better show to catch Miss Payson himself. At least, that's the way I figure it. I ain't got no idea that Cayley cares a rap for Fancy, but he's smooth, and as long as he can use her he'll keep her jollied along."

The Madam had been thinking hard. "Fancy ought to be pretty sore on Frank," she offered.

"I don't blame her. He's treated her bad."

"And there's no doubt about her being stuck on Cayley?"

"It certainly looks like it; she's with him all the time."

"Well, then, what's the matter with getting Cayley to work her so she can help us out with Payson? I believe we could use her good. She's a saucy chit, and she makes me tired with her fly-up-the-creek impudence; but all the same, she's clever, and if Cayley could only induce her to go into it, I can see lots of ways she

could help."

Vixley thought over the matter for a few minutes in silence. "All right, Gertie, I'll speak to him about it. I guess he'll do it; he'll be afraid not to. We got him pretty well tied up, now."

"You can promise him that Felicia will recommend that he marries the girl. That'll be an inducement."

"I'm afraid the Payson girl has got something to say about that herself, from all I hear."

"Well, at any rate, we've queered Frank Granthope, and that's what Cayley wanted most."

"I guess so; at least, that's what I make out from what he says. He's pretty close-mouthed."

"Well, if he ain't close-mouthed about Payson, he can tend to his own affairs alone, for all I care. Has he gave you any more dope?"

"Has he! Why, he's been a-ringin' of me up every day, tippin' me off to everything the old man's up to!"

"You ain't let on anything about this child business to Cayley, have you?"

"D'you think I want to queer the whole game? Of course not. Why, Cayley would be scared that the daughter wouldn't get any of the money if he knew they was another heir. All the same, we got to be careful of Cayley, for he certainly has helped considerable. The old man wouldn't be where we got him now if Cayley hadn't shown up. What d'you think he told me this mornin'? Payson's been round to a lot of printers, gettin' estimates on the book, so's he can publish it hisself! Ain't that a gall? He never asked my advice about it! I'm going to give him a dig about that."

"Oh, well, let's get down to business, I ain't got any too much time," Madam Spoll interrupted. "About the materializing, now. We got to have a private séance, of course?"

Vixley rose, clasped his hands behind his back, and lifted himself up and down on his toes as he gazed at her. "I been a-thinkin' it over, Gert, and I come to the conclusion that it ain't best. Payson ain't prepared for it yet, and we got to go easy. He ain't actually convinced of physical mediumship yet, as it is. I think we better spring it on him at a public. Flora can pack the room with believers and cappers, and then, after Payson's seen a lot of other folks recognizin' spirits and gettin' messages, why, he'll be more inclined to swallow his test. I've made a study of him, and that's my opinion."

"Has Flora got plenty of help?"

"She wants one more girl to play spirit, for she's just lost a dandy she had—she was arrested for shopliftin', I believe. We can fix her up, though. There's your Miss French, for one."

”I don’t trust her much, but she’ll do on a pinch. But Perry we must have. It’s better to use our own people. Who’s Flora’s cabinet control?”

”Little Starlight. Flora does her with a telescope rod. Oh, Flora’s slick! She’s a cracker jack of a ventriloquist—she’s got at least six good voices!”

”How does she work, now? From the front seats?”

”No, mostly through the foldin’ doors. As soon as the room is dark and the singin’ has commenced she has the door rolled back the wrong way about a foot, and her players come in that way. They don’t show against the black cloth, and they’s no danger at all, for if anybody wants to examine the cabinet they ain’t no panels nor nothing to be exposed. Flora’s just got up a grand disappearance act, she tells me. She wears a white petticoat and her overskirt is lined with white. When she comes out of the cabinet her skirt is lifted up and wrapped round her head inside-out, as natural as life. Then she gradually lowers it and the whole form slowly disappears down to the ground like a snow-man meltin’ in the sun. No, sir, you can’t beat that girl, not in this town!”

”Vixley, I don’t see no end to this graft. Why, after we’ve materialized we can etherealize, can’t we?”

”Yes, and then we’ll develop him till he don’t know where he’s at.”

”And spirit-pictures, too. Felicia’ll take a grand photograph!”

”You bet. I’m going to try them big cloth ones that you spray with prussiate o’ potash. You can get blue, yeller, and brown fine. I been workin’ on it already.”

A ring at the front door-bell interrupted her colloquy. Vixley tiptoed to the window and peeped out; then he turned with a scowl.

”It’s Doc Masterson. What the devil does *he* want, anyway?”

”No good, I’ll bet,” she replied.

”I got to let him in, I s’pose. It won’t do to send him away, the old snake-in-the-grass. He’s too smooth!”

”Oh, I ain’t afraid of him. I wan’t born yesterday,” was her contemptuous reply.

”All the same, you be careful what you say to him, Gert,” Vixley cautioned, as he went out into the hall.

He reappeared with the doctor. Madam Spoll smiled sweetly.

Doctor Masterson greeted her with a sour expression, and shook hands limply. He sat down deliberately, and, pulling out a soiled silk handkerchief, wiped his creased forehead and his bald pate. Then he cleaned his iron-bowed spectacles, blinking his red eyes as he breathed on the lenses.

Vixley, from the organ bench, watched him shrewdly, and offered him a cigar.

”No, thanks, I don’t smoke,” said the doctor peevishly.

”Since when?” Vixley asked in surprise.

”Since you give me that last ’Flor de Chinatown,’ or whatever it was. When I want to smoke rag carpets again I’ll try another.” He showed his black teeth in a vicious grin.

Vixley tittered. ”What’s wrong, Doc? Looks like you had a grouch. Been takin’ too much of Hasandoka’s medicine lately? You didn’t come round here to look a gift-horse in the mouth, did you?”

The doctor cleared his throat and pulled down his plaid waistcoat. ”No, I didn’t. But I didn’t come round for to give you any hot air, neither! I’m glad I struck Madam Spoll here, for what I got to say may interest her, too.”

”Spit it out and get rid of it, then,” said Vixley; ”don’t mind us.”

”The fact is,” said Masterson, ”you ain’t neither of you treated me square. I fully expected to be in on this Payson game, from what you led me to believe, and you not only let me out with only a month’s work, but you’ve shut me off from the main graft.”

Madam Spoll fired up. ”We never told you we was going to whack up with you, at all! Seems to me you got considerable nerve to try and butt in! Who’s running this thing, anyway? You got all that’s coming to you. We ain’t never took him into partnership, Vixley, have we?”

”I ain’t seen no contrack to that effect. You ain’t got no call to complain, Doc; they ain’t enough in it for three. Payson ain’t loosened up enough for us to retire on it, yet.”

Masterson’s thin lips drew back like a hound’s, to show his fangs. His Adam’s apple rose and fell above his celluloid collar, as he swallowed his irritation. ”*Oh*, very well,” he said quickly. ”Of course, if you want to freeze me out, you can. But I don’t call it a square deal. I was the one what got him going, wan’t I? Didn’t I do my part all right? I understand you’re going to materialize him and develop him, and the Lord knows what-all. I don’t see why you can’t find room for me, somewhere.”

”You ought to be thankful for what you got out of it!” Madam Spoll exclaimed. ”Lord, we didn’t have to take you on at all! They’s plenty of others we could have used. You’re three hundred ahead of the game as it stands, and that’s more than you’ve ever made in six months, before. Don’t be a hog!”

”That’s a nice thing for *you* to say,” he sneered. ”When I get up to two hundred pounds I’ll begin to worry about *that*.”

Vixley interfered craftily. ”We’ll think it over and let you know, Doc; we may be able to use you, perhaps, but we can’t tell yet a while—not till we see how this thing turns out.”

Madam Spoll broke in again, shaking her fat finger at him. ”Don’t you believe it, Masterson! Me and Vixley can work this thing alone, and you better keep your nose out of our business! If you come here looking for trouble, you

can find it, fast enough!"

Vixley winked at her, but she was too angry to notice it. Masterson rose stiffly and faced her, his thumbs caught in the armholes of his plaid waistcoat. "All right," he said. "I ain't going to get down on to my knees to *you*. But the next time I'm asked for a good clairvoyant, it won't be you. I only ask what's fair, and I didn't come here for to be insulted."

"Oh, get on to yourself!" Vixley said, taking him by the arm. "Nobody ain't insulted you. You can't blame us if we want to do this our own way, can you?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and took a few steps toward the door. "You may think better of it when you talk it over," he hinted darkly. "You may see my side of it. Good afternoon, Madam Spoll, I won't take no more of your valuable time." He walked out.

"You was a fool, Gert," said Vixley, after the door slammed. "It won't do to let him get down on us. He knows too much."

"Pooh!" she flouted, bridling. "I ain't afraid of Masterson, nor anybody like him. He ain't got enough blood in his neck to do anything. He just came round here like a pan-handler to see if we wouldn't give him a poke-out. I'll see him further!"

"I ain't so sure," Vixley replied, rubbing his beard thoughtfully. "My rule is, don't make no enemies if you can help it. But of course we got to cut him out."

Madam Spoll subsided and changed the subject. "Have you got that developing machine yet?" she asked, her eyes, roving about the room.

He walked to the desk and carried the machine to the small table in front of her. Taking off the cloth he disclosed the revolving mirrors actuated by clockwork. It was much like the instrument first used by Braid in his experiments with mesmerism. He wound the spring and set the mirrors in motion. They whirled madly in their circle, casting flashes of light.

"That's the way it works—you just stare at it hard. I guess that will hold Payson a while. He's got the scientific bug enough to like this sort of thing."

Madam Spoll put her elbow on the table and rested her head on her hand, gazing, fascinated, at the flash of the revolving mirrors. As the machine began to whir, the canary in the cage by the window began warbling in an ecstasy of song. Vixley swore at the bird, and then, as it refused to stop, took down the cage and walked to the door with it.

"I guess that'll bring Felicia, all right, won't it?" he said as he went out of the room, leaving Madam Spoll transfixed, lulled and charmed by the flying mirrors.

He was gone longer than he intended; it was seven or eight minutes before he returned, whistling through his teeth. He turned into the front room and stopped in astonishment.

Madam Spoll was standing beside the machine, which had now run down.

Her eyes stared blankly at the desk, one hand clutched her breast, the other was raised, as if to put something away from her. Her little low-crowned Derby hat had fallen partly off and hung on one side of her head. She stared, without speaking, her face set with an expression of terror.

"For Heaven's sake, Gert, what's the matter?" he cried.

She turned her eyes slowly toward him, shuddered, sighed, and her hands fell together. Then her face lighted up in a frenzy. "My God, Vixley, I got it! I got it! After all these years!"

"Got what, you crazy fool? The jimjams?"

"I got materializing—I got a spirit! She was right over there by the desk—a woman with white hair, it was, and she give me a message!"

"Rats!" Vixley was contemptuous. He took her hand and gave her a little shake. "Is *that* all? I guess you was hypnotized, Gert, that's all. That's what I got this jigger for, only I never thought *you'd* be one to go off half-cock like that!"

"Vixley," she said emphatically, "don't you be a fool! I see a spirit for the first time in my life, and you can't make me believe I didn't. And I know who it was, now. It was Felicia Grant, as I'm a sinner, and she came to warn me about Payson. Oh, you can laugh; I s'pose I would if I was you, but this was the real thing, sure!"

She reseated herself on the sofa and put her hands to her eyes. Vixley sat on the arm of the Morris chair and laughed loudly. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, "if that ain't a good one! Spirit, was it? Well, I guess if it'll work on Gertie Spoll it'll work on Payson, all right. Oh, Lord!"

She shook both hands wildly, almost hysterical with excitement, the tears flowing. "My God! We can't go on with Payson now. I don't dare to. I'm frightened."

"Oh, you just got an attack of nerves, that's all. You'll get over it and laugh at it. You keep still and cool off."

She wagged her head solemnly, unconscious of her hanging hat. "See here, Vixley, you know me! I'm too old a bird to be fooled with fakes—I've done too much of that myself. I've always claimed that I had clairvoyance, but I lied. I never got that nor clairaudience, no matter how I tried for it, and I've had to fake. I've had a gift o' guessing, perhaps, but that's all. But I swear to God, I got materializing just now. I've scoffed at it all my life, but I believe it now. I see her just as soon as you left, standing right over there by the desk, she was, and she turned to me and she says, 'If you persist you will come to harm. Take my advice and don't you do it!' and then she faded away. What d'you s'pose it means?"

"It means you need a drink," he said, and, walking to the desk, he took out a whisky bottle and poured out a stiff dose. "Them's the spirits that'll help you most. You put this down and see how you feel!"

She put it away with an impatient gesture. ”Oh, you don’t believe it,” she cried, ”but I see her just as plain as I see you this minute, and I heard her, too. What’ll I do, Vixley? I can’t give up my business, can I? I got to live.”

”What’s the matter with you? I don’t see as they’s anything to worry about, granted it was a spirit, which it wasn’t one, o’ course.”

”She said, ’If you persist you will come to harm!’ What else could that mean but Payson? Let’s call it all off, before anything happens.”

”Bosh! It ain’t likely it meant Payson any more than it did anything else. Why, the thing is as simple as a rattle. Spirits be damned! You leave that to the suckers—with money.”

Although his incredulity and sneers prevented her from actually withdrawing from the projected séance, she was by no means restored to calmness. She gave but a reluctant, distracted attention to his plans, and talked little herself. She went home oppressed by the sinister suggestions of her vision, muttering her dread for the future.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MATERIALIZING SÉANCE

FLORA FLINT’S Marvelous Spirit Messages and Grand Materializing Test Séance To-night. 50c. 5203 Van Ness Ave. Come, Skeptics.

Dougal pointed to this notice in the *Call* one night at Fulda’s. There were six at table; he and Mabel and Elsie, Maxim, Starr and Benton.

Benton took up the paper, with a gleam in his eyes, as one who smelled the battle from afar. Starr was for going, most enthusiastically for it; he wanted another chance of seeing Benton in action. Maxim was always to be depended upon; he never refused to go with the others. Elsie smiled and did not commit herself to an opinion. She was a fatalist. If things went well, she smiled. If they went wrong, she was equally, perhaps even a little more, amused, and smiled as enigmatically. Mabel giggled hysterically; her eyes shone; she held up two fingers, the sign of acquiescence. No project was too mad for her to accept and welcome; the madder it was, the more enthusiastic she grew. In her the spirit of adventure still breathed. She was one to whom things always happened, for

she never refused Fate's invitations. Fate, having invited her, usually saw her through the affair with gallantry. She always escaped unscathed, preserving all the freshness of her enthusiasm and ingenuousness. No one credited her with a history.

Their plan had been talked over and perfected for some time. Mindful of Fancy's warning, it had been decided to enter the place in two groups and find seats near together, being careful to hold no communication with each other.

Dougal was captain of the proposed exposure. He carried an electric torch and was to choose the proper moment for attack. When he flashed the light upon the spirit form and rushed forward to seize the actor, Maxim was to follow at his heels and help, while Starr and Benton "interfered" for him as in a foot-ball game. The girls were to take care of themselves and watch everything that went on so as to report the affair.

There was no adjournment to Champoreau's that night, for it was necessary to be at Flora Flint's early and attempt to get front seats. Half-past seven found them at the house on Van Ness Avenue, where they divided, Mabel going in with Dougal and Maxim, Elsie with Starr and Benton.

They went up a narrow staircase covered with yellow oil-cloth and encountered, at the top, a long, pale, tow-headed youth with two front teeth missing. He was slouching in the hall, by a little table, as if attempting to hide the tallness and awkwardness of his figure. Collecting the entrance fees without a word, he pointed to a door and the seats inside.

The room was square, and had two windows upon the street; it was lighted dimly from a chandelier in the center, and was crowded with chairs arranged on each side of a central aisle. There were already a score of visitors, and prominent in the second row was Mr. Payson, solemnly calm, impassive, his hands upon the top of his cane. Vixley sat in front and was conversing over the back of his chair with Lulu Ellis. Dougal and his companions found seats on the end of the fourth row; the others had to go farther back.

Hung about were the usual mottoes, worked in colored yarn on perforated cardboard, and, in addition, a notice warning visitors against disorder. It was evident that the materializing business was not unattended with risks. The air was stuffy and smelt of kerosene oil. A curtain of black cambric was stretched across one corner of the room, between the folding doors and the mantelpiece, opposite the windows. The hangings parted in the center, and were now draped up to each side, revealing the interior of the "cabinet."

Professor Vixley rose to announce that any one wishing to examine the cabinet might do so, but nobody seemed to think the investigation worth while. He then went on with an audible conversation with the plump Miss Ellis. He described, first, the wonderful willingness of Little Starlight, who was frequently

sent by Flora with astral messages to her mother in Alaska. Lulu played up to him. She saw spirits in the room already—an old man was standing by the door, looking for some one. Another spirit was sitting down beside that young lady in green. Vixley regretted that he couldn't "get" materializing himself, though he had tried all his life. He had occasionally "got" clairvoyance, but it couldn't be depended upon. Clairaudience, of course, was easier. It could be developed in any one who had patience. With his revolving mirrors he could guarantee it in a month. He handed one of his business cards to a woman in black who seemed interested.

Flora Flint, pretty, dressed all in black, came in and joined the conversation. She complained of being tired and headachey, she had worked so hard that day. She stroked her forehead and rubbed her hands, but her eyes were busy with her audience.

She hoped that Stella wouldn't come to-night; Stella always "took it out of her." That was always the way with spirits who had lately "passed out," and who were not yet reconciled to their condition. Stella insisted upon coming back all the time to communicate with her mother—she was not only hindering her own "progression" but worrying her mother by so doing. Stella, moreover, had not yet learned the Laws of Being on the spirit-plane, and had not accustomed herself to the principles of control. Why, it was sometimes positive agony to be taken possession of by Stella. She came in with a bounce like, and it racked the medium all over; and she didn't know how to withdraw her force gradually and easily the way older spirits did. If Wampum, Flora's Indian control, weren't always ready to assist her it would be something terrible. Indians had special power over physical conditions. They were Children of Nature, nearer to earth conditions than others. They had more magnetism, and knew the secrets of natural medicine. Being simple creatures, they were more easily summoned from the spirit sphere—they hadn't "progressed" so far, and they were apt to be still actuated by the motives and desires of the flesh-plane. Oh, yes, they were often coarse and vulgar, but they meant well, indeed they did. Wampum was a great help.

As Flora Flint talked, her eyes ran over the room, looking carefully at her audience. Some she bowed to smilingly; on others her glance rested with more deliberation. She came back again and again to Dougal and Maxim, and to Starr and Benton, in the rear of the room. She whispered to Vixley, after this scrutiny, and he went out to hold a colloquy with Ringa in the hall. Soon after, Mr. Spoll came in and took a seat between the two groups of Pintos. He sat rigidly erect, his thin, bony face impassive, with only his wild eyes moving.

The Pintos listened with delight to Flora's jargon. Starr, placing his notebook under his hat, on his knees, made copious notes. Maxim was most impressed, almost persuaded by the seriousness of the dialogue. Mabel was all ready

to believe at the first promise of a marvel. Elsie smiled, Benton yawned, Dougal hugged his electric torch fondly inside his coat.

Madam Spoll soon came in and seated herself between the two windows, under a box containing a lighted kerosene lamp. Her face, usually so complacent, was showing signs of perturbation. She was nervous, looking round every little while suddenly, running her fingers through her short cropped curly hair, throwing her head back as if she found it hard to breathe. She was without a hat, and wore, instead of her professional costume of silk and beads, a black cotton crape gown.

Shortly after eight o'clock, Flora took a chair in front of the cabinet. Vixley rose, fastened black shutters in front of the windows, closed the door, put out the gas and turned down the lamp in the box, shading it with a cloth curtain. The room was now so dark that one could scarcely distinguish anything, until, when eyes became somewhat accustomed to it, figures indistinct and shadowy could be vaguely recognized. Flora Flint spoke:

"I must ask you all to keep perfect silence, please. The spirits won't manifest themselves unless the conditions are favorable and the circle is in a receptive state. We can't do anything unless there's harmony, and if there's any antagonistic vibrations present there's no use attempting anything in the way of demonstration."

After this prologue, she began, accompanied by the faithful, the dreariest tune in the world:

"We are *waiting*, we are *waiting*, we are *waiting*, just now,
Just now we are *waiting*, we are *waiting* just now;

To *receive* you, to *receive* you, to *receive* you just now,
Just now to *receive* you, to *receive* you just now.

Show your *faces*, show your *faces*, show your *faces*, just now,
Just now show your *faces*, show your *faces* just now!

Come and *bless* us, come and *bless* us, come——"

The fourth stanza was here interrupted by three sharp knocks.

"Is that you, Starlight?" the medium asked. Two raps signified assent. "Are you happy, to-night?" Two more knocks.

"Starlight's always happy!" Vixley remarked aloud.

"Yes, she *is* a bright little thing," the medium assented. "She passed out when she was only twelve; they say she's very pretty. Are there any spirits with

you, Starlight?"

Two more raps.

"Who's there—Wampum?"

Two raps were given with terrific force. Everybody laughed.

"Wampum's feeling pretty good, to-night," said Vixley.

"Anybody else?" Flora asked.

Yes, some one else.

"Who? Is it Mr. Torkins?"

Yes.

The voice of a little old dried-up lady on the front row was heard, saying, "Oh, that's Willie! I'm *so* glad he's come. Are you happy, Willie?"

Yes, Willie was happy. Had he seen Nelly? Yes, he had seen Nelly, and Nelly was also happy. And so, for a time, it went on, like an Ollendorf lesson.

Starlight was then asked if she could not control the medium, orally. She consented, and soon, in a chirping voice the medium twittered forth:

"Hello! Good evenin', folkses! Oh, I'se so glad to see you all, I is! Hello, Mis' Brickett, you's got a new bonnet, isn't you? It's awfully nice! Oh, I'se so happy. I got some candy, too. It's *spirit* candy; it's lots better'n yours." Here she laughed shrilly and the company snickered.

Mabel could scarcely hold herself in check and had to be pinched. Starlight resumed her artless prattle, with Vixley as interlocutor. The two exchanged homely badinage and pretended to flirt desperately. But she refused this time to sit upon his knee. Finally an old man asked if Walter were there.

"Well, I just *guess*!" said Starlight. "He's my beau, he is! He giv'd me this candy. Want some?" A chocolate drop flew into the middle of the room.

"That's real materialized candy!" Vixley explained. "We're liable to have a good séance, to-night!"

Starlight, after giving a few messages, announced that the spirits had consented to materialize, and requested the company to sing. Flora went into the cabinet, Madam Spoll turned the light still lower, and Vixley, stating that the medium would now go into a dead trance, took the chair in front of the cabinet. A doleful air was started by the believers on the front seats:

"I have a father in the spirit land,
I have a father in the spirit land,
My father calls me, I must go
To meet him in the spirit land!"

then,

"I have a mother in the spirit land,"

and so on, through the whole family, brother, sister and friend.

The darkness was now thick and velvety. The sitters could not see what they touched, and, gazing intently into the void, their eyes filled it with shifting colors and spots of light conjured up by the reflex action of the retina, as if their eyes were shut. As the song ended, there came an awed silence to add to the stifling darkness as they waited for the first manifestation from the cabinet.

Then the hush was broken by excited whispers, and a tall form, dimly luminous, was seen in the opening of the curtains.

"Why, here's the Professor!" said Vixley, shattering the solemnity, and making of this advent a friendly visitation. "Good evening, Professor, we're glad to see you. It's good to have you here again!"

A deep, slow voice replied, articulating its words painfully, "Good eve-ning, friends, I'm ver-y glad to be here to-night!" Every word was chopped into distinct syllables. The figure moved forward a little. It was a typical ghost, a vague, unearthly, draped figure, wavering, indistinct. The face melted into amorphous shadows. It glided here and there noiselessly.

The Professor was an affable celebrity, but somewhat verbose. He spoke to several of the company by name, and interspersed his greetings with jocular remarks to Little Starlight who was supposed to be flitting invisibly about the room. "She's a lit-tul darlink, ev-ery-bod-y loves lit-tul Star-light," he said, in answer to Vixley's comment.

He retreated silently to the cabinet, and the curtains closed upon him. Some one asked if they couldn't see the "Egyptian Hand" and Starlight's voice from the cabinet gave assent. Forthwith it appeared and made a hurried circle of the front part of the room, shedding a ghostly, phosphorescent glow, and, on its way, patting the heads of the faithful.

"Oh, I feel something so nice and soft!" cried Mrs. Brickett. "It's perfectly 'eavenly—right on top of my head—what is it?"

"That's *hair*!" Starlight called out.

The Professor bellowed from the cabinet, "Oh, ho, ho, ho! You must-unt mind lit-tul Star-light! She's so love-ly we don't mind her, do we?"

Vixley gave the cue for another song to cover the next entrance. This time it was *My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean*, its special appositeness seeming to lie in the line, "Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me!"

Another shorter form appeared and stood wavering in front of the curtains, then, without a word, withdrew.

"That's Stella," said Vixley. "She's only come to get progression. She ain't very strong yet, so she can't stay but a minute, but we're always glad to see her

and help her along all we can with our thought."

A woman, with a sob, rose to go forward.

"No, not to-night, Mrs. Seeley; the medium ain't strong enough!" said Vixley.

How he recognized these spectral visitors nobody asked. They looked just alike, except, perhaps, for height; all were wavering, white and mysterious, without distinguishable faces. At the entrance of another, like all the rest, Professor Vixley startled the company by saying, suavely and patronizingly:

"This is Mr. McKinley, friends. It's good to see you, Mr. McKinley. I'm glad you come. We're *always* glad to see you. Come again, come any time you feel like it." He explained, after the spirit vanished, that Mr. McKinley had had great difficulty in finding any medium sympathetic enough for him to control, and he wandered from circle to circle, hoping to establish communication with the earth-plane.

The next visitor was no less than Queen Victoria. "That's good!" said Vixley, "we're awful glad to see you, sure!" It now transpired that the spirits whispered their names to him in entering. His conversation became a bit dreary and monotonous and he failed to rise to his obvious opportunities.

A few forms, after this, came farther from the cabinet, and their friends were permitted to embrace them. These favored few sat on the front seats. Whispered dialogues took place—innocuous talk of troubles and happiness, perturbed commonplaces that, had they not been sometimes accompanied with genuine tears, would have been nothing but ridiculous. The spirits were all optimistic and willing to help. Their advice, usually, consisted of the statement that "conditions would soon be more favorable." At intervals the singers broke out into new songs, There's a Land that is Fairer than Day—*Nearer, My God, to Thee!*—and so on. The air became oppressively close. The audience began to whisper, cough and shuffle. Mabel, desirous of excitement, had nudged Dougal again and again, but he had muttered "Not yet!" at each hint.

The song *Over There* had just ended, and the hush of expectancy had fallen over the company when another form appeared and took a step towards Vixley.

"She says her name is Felicia," he announced. "Does anybody recognize her?"

"I do!" an unctuously mellow voice replied.

"She says she has a message for you," said Vixley, "but she don't want to give it out loud before all these people. Will you come up here?"

Mr. Payson made his way with difficulty, in the dark, past those on his row and came forward.

"You can touch her, if you want to; she's completely materialized. Very strong indeed for one outside Flora's band. She ain't got much vitality, though,

and you mustn't tax her too much."

The old man reached forward and touched a cold hand.

"Is it you, Felicia?" he asked tremulously.

"Yes, dear!" was the answer, in a thick, hoarse whisper. "I'm glad to see you here. You must come often. I've tried so hard to get you. I want to help you."

"You have a message for me?"

She whispered, "Yes; it's about the child."

"What is it?" His voice was eager.

"I've found him."

"Oh, I'm so glad! I've longed so to find him and do what was right by him. You know, don't you?" All this was spoken so low that but few could make out the words.

"Yes, I know. I know you love him."

"Where is he, Felicia?"

"He's in this city. I shall bring him to you. Then we'll be so happy, all three of us—you and I and our dear son!"

Payson's voice rang out sharply in an angry exclamation:

"It's all a damned fraud!" he cried. "This is not a spirit at all!" He took a step forward.

On the instant, before even Vixley could move, Dougal had jumped up and run forward. As he dashed up the aisle he pressed the key of his electric torch and cast a bright light upon the group by the cabinet. The draped form had started back, Payson faced her, Vixley had risen from his chair fiercely, Flora Flint's startled face peered through the curtains.

"Come on, Max!" Dougal shouted, and threw himself bodily upon the person wrapped in the sheet. Maxim grappled at almost the same time, but before him Vixley sprang in and rained blow after blow upon Dougal, who fell, dropping his torch. Vixley then locked with Maxim. Starr and Benton had run up, hurtling past Spoll, who had risen to block the way. They were just too late to save Dougal, who had fallen, still holding his captive fast. It was too dark to see what was happening, but Vixley's oaths led them on, crashing over chairs, creeping and fighting through the now terrified crowd. A match was struck somewhere behind them, and, before it flared out, Starr and Benton fell on Vixley together and bore him to the floor.

The room was now horrid with confusion. A racket of moving chairs told that every one had arisen in panic. Women screamed, and there was a rush for the door. It seemed hours before there was a light, then Madam Spoll reached up and turned up the light. At that moment Ringa flew past her—she was thrown down and the lamp fell crashing upon the seat of a chair beside her. There was an explosion on the instant. She was drenched with blazing oil, and the flames

enveloped her.

Her screams rose over the tumult so piercingly that every one turned, saw her, and fell back in fear and terror. She clambered to her feet clumsily, shrieking in agony, ran for the door, tore it open and fled down-stairs, to fall heavily at the bottom, writhing.

Benton was that moment free, and the only man to keep his senses. He burst right through the room, throwing men and women to right and left and broke out the door after her, and down the stairs, tearing a table-cloth from a table as he ran through the hall. He wrapped it about her, the flames scorching his face and hands as he did so. The woman was struggling so in her blind terror and torture that it was for a moment impossible to help her. Then, in a few heroic moments he conquered the fire. At last he called to the crowd above for help, and they carried her up into a small side room and laid her upon a bed.

Starr, meanwhile, still clung to Vixley while Maxim had held Ringa off. Spoll was busy extinguishing the fire on the carpet. Then some one at last lighted the chandelier, showing a score of white, frenzied faces, men and women in wild disarray, chairs broken and strewn upon the floor, a smoking, blackened place on the carpet where the remains of the lamp had fallen. The room smelled horribly.

Vixley lay in a welter of ornaments that had been swept from the mantel in his struggle. He was still cursing.

Dougal had held his captive fast through all that turmoil, yelling continuously for a light. Now Mabel and Elsie, who had flattened themselves against the wall, joining their screams to the din, crept trembling up to him to see what he had caught. He turned the limp figure in his arms and sought amongst the folds of the sheet, and turned them away at the face. Elsie gave a little cry.

[image]

He sought amongst the folds of the sheet

It was Fancy Gray.

CHAPTER XVIII
A RETURN TO INSTINCT

Clytie Payson had come home after a two weeks' stay at Lonely with Mrs. Maxwell, poised, resolute, calm. She seemed sustained by some inward faith manifesting itself only in a higher degree of self-consciousness, as of one inspired by a purpose.

At breakfast, on the morning after the materializing séance, Mr. Payson read the morning journal interestedly, so intensely absorbed in its columns that he scarcely spoke to his daughter. But he did not mention the evening's event, and was moody and morose. The affair had received an extensive notice. Madam Spoll, it seemed, still lingered at the point of death. Although Mr. Payson's name was not mentioned, he was much disturbed and apprehensive of publicity. Clytie, noticing his abstraction, did not disturb him with questions.

After her father had left the house she went up to her workroom, put on her pink pinafore and commenced her bookbinding. She worked at the bench near the window where she could occasionally look out upon the shadows that swept over Mount Tamalpais. The day was alternately bright and lowering; it promised rain before night.

At ten, as she was pausing from her work, with a lingering look out into her garden, she saw a young woman coming up the path. It was Fancy Gray, looking about her as if uncertain whether or not she had found the right place. Fancy wore a black-and-white shepherd's plaid suit, bright and tightly-fitted, which picked her out, in an errant glance of sunshine, against the dull green shrubbery. She stopped for a moment to look at the sun-dial, raising her white-gloved hand to her red and white hat, then passed on toward the house, out of sight.

Clytie went down-stairs herself to answer the bell, and opened the door with a look of pleasure on her face.

Fancy hesitated. "Are you busy, Miss Payson?"

"Of course not!" Clytie held out both her hands. "If I were, I'd be so glad to have you interrupt me, Miss Gray. Do come in! How charming you look! I'm so glad to see you."

Fancy accepted the welcome, looking long into Clytie's eyes, as if she expected to find in them something of special significance. Her own were steady, and had in them an evidence of resolve.

"I've been hoping you'd come to see me, Miss Gray," Clytie began.

Fancy stopped on the threshold.

"Fancy Gray, please!" she corrected, with an elusive smile.

"Fancy Gray—I'm glad to be permitted to use such a lovely name."

"Make it Fancy, straight. Then I'll be more natural. I'm always stiff and stupid when people call me Miss Gray. I always feel as if they were talking about me behind my back." Fancy's smile broke out now, as if in spite of herself.

"I'd love to call you Fancy! It's good of you to let me!" Clytie answered.

Her smile was as delicious, in this gallant interchange. Fancy's smile seemed as much a part of her natural expression as the brightness of her open eyes; it was embracing, like a baby's. Clytie's had the effect of a particularly gracious favor, almost a condescension, a special gift of the moment.

Fancy stopped again at the entrance to the library.

"Say, this is awfully orderly," she said, "haven't you got some place that isn't so tidy and clean? I'm afraid I wouldn't be comfortable here, and I want to talk to you."

Clytie looked at her amusedly. "So you're one of those persons who think dust is artistic? Come up into my workroom, then. You'll find that untidy enough."

Up-stairs they went, to the workroom.

"My!" said Fancy. "If you call this place untidy, you ought to see my room! Why, it's as neat as a pin!" She entered, nevertheless, and looked about her with curiosity at everything.

"Haven't you a looking-glass here?" she asked in astonishment.

"No, but I'll get you one."

Fancy laughed. "I couldn't live an hour without a mirror," she confessed. "You're really queer, aren't you! And you don't even wear jewelry! I'm afraid modesty isn't my favorite stunt. It's very becoming to you, though. I suppose it doesn't go with painted hair." She sighed.

"I don't believe that even you could improve on nature, Fancy!"

"I'm sure nature intended me for a blonde, and got careless. Did you ever know a brunette who didn't want to be a blonde?" She looked at Clytie's tawny hair with evident admiration.

Clytie shook her head, smiling. "I'd give you my hair for your complexion."

"Done!" Fancy rubbed her handkerchief across her pink cheeks, and handed the bit of cambric to Clytie. After this comedy pantomime, she took the little silver watch from her chatelaine pin, opened the back door, where, inside, was a bright and shiny surface, and regarded her face, pouting. Then she looked across at Clytie.

"You're so pretty, Miss Payson! You're four times and a half as pretty as I am!"

Clytie ventured to touch her little finger to the dent in Fancy's upper lip. Fancy retreated a step. "My dear," Clytie asserted, "if I had *that*, I'd be sure that men would be crazy for me till I was seventy years old!"

Fancy shook her head. "I guess I can't beat that. That's what Gay calls 'the pink penultimate.' And the worst of it is, I suppose it's true! But I'll never be seventy if I can help it." She turned away, suddenly grown serious. The room grew dark. It was as if Fancy's mood had turned off the sunshine.

”What are you doing, now?” Clytie asked.

”Oh, just drifting.” Fancy’s voice was not hopeful.

Clytie took her hand. ”Why don’t you come here and stay with me for a while? I’d love to have you.”

Fancy gently released her fingers in Clytie’s and did not look at her.

”Oh, I wish you wouldn’t be quite so kind to me, Miss Payson; I can’t stand it!” Her mouth trembled; her gaze was serious.

”But it would be so kind of you to come!” Clytie urged.

Fancy smiled wanly. ”I can’t do it, Miss Payson, I won’t explain. I never explain. It bores me. But I simply can’t.”

”Well, you know, if you ever do want to come—”

”I’ll come, sure!” Fancy looked at her now, with fire in her eyes, not flaming, but burning deep. ”Whenever I forget what a thoroughbred is like, I’ll come! Whenever I need a teaspoonful of flattery to last me over night, I’ll come! Whenever I want to know how much finer and kinder women are than men, I’ll come! Whenever—”

She would have gone on, but Clytie interrupted her. ”Whenever you want to make me very happy, whenever you want to do me the greatest favor in your power, you’ll come!”

Fancy’s eyes narrowed and twinkled. ”I’m all out of breath trying to keep up with you! I give it up. Take the pot!” She turned to the bench and examined the tools in a box.

”Ugh!” she commented. ”They look like dentists’ instruments!”

”I don’t believe *you* ever had to suffer from them! It doesn’t seem possible!” said Clytie.

In response, Fancy engagingly showed her double row of small, white, zigzag teeth. Then, with a sudden access of frivolity, she favored Clytie with an exhibition of her little, pointed tongue, which she erected and waved sidewise. This done, she dropped into a chair again. The sun had returned and visited the room, making a brilliant object of her jaunty figure as she sat under the window. She wore the fine gold chain with the swastika that Clytie had given her. She fingered it as she spoke.

”Miss Payson,” she said, ”I’m going to ask you something that perhaps is none of my business.”

”Ask what you please,” said Clytie, but she looked at Fancy with something like alarm.

”Have you seen Mr. Granthope lately?”

Clytie shook her head. ”No.”

”Could you tell me why not?”

”I’m afraid I can’t, Fancy.”

”I’m terribly worried about it. I’m sure there’s some trouble. Oh, Miss Payson, I know he’s awfully unhappy. And I can’t bear that!”

Clytie walked to the window and looked out, standing there with her hands behind her back. There was a faint line come into her forehead. ”I’d rather not talk about it,” she said quietly.

”But I’m sure that if there is any misunderstanding, I might help you. Oh, Miss Payson, I don’t want to be impertinent, but I can’t bear it to think that he isn’t happy. Can’t you tell me about it?”

Clytie turned slowly, a look of pain deepening on her face. ”I can only tell you this, that I was mistaken in him.”

”Mistaken? How?”

”Not in quality, so much as in quantity, if you know what I mean. I know what he’s capable of, what he has done, and what he can do. I don’t feel any anger or resentment, for what I know, now, that he has done. I feel only pity and sorrow for him.”

”But what *has* he done? That’s just what I want to know. You mean that it was something definite?”

”Yes.”

”And—you believed it of him?” Fancy could not restrain her surprise.

”I had to believe it. Oh, Fancy, don’t you understand? It was the sort of thing that no woman could forget. It was of no importance except as showing that he wasn’t so far along as I had thought. It merely means that I’ll have to wait for him. And I shall wait for him. I’m so sure of him that I can wait, though it hurt so at first that I couldn’t possibly see him. That’s all.”

Fancy bit her lip. There was a little, determined shake of her head that Clytie did not see. ”Miss Payson,” she said, ”you must tell me what it was. I’ve heard Professor Vixley say a thing or two that aroused my suspicions.” She went on slowly, with an effort. ”I know that Frank adores you—that he has, ever since that night you came with him to his office, after his accident.”

”Oh, but this was after that,” Clytie said wearily. ”It was something he told Vixley.”

”After that! Why, Frank hasn’t had anything to do with Vixley or Madam Spoll since then, except to try to get them to leave your father alone.”

”I saw his own handwriting, Fancy; the very notes of what I had talked about to him—even the little intimate things—they nearly killed me. And Professor Vixley told me himself that Frank had been giving him information right along, up to only a few weeks ago—while we had been so happy together—oh, to think of it!”

Fancy’s face had varied in phase, like the opening and shutting of the clouds. Now it was eager, rapt ”Oh, I understand, now!” she cried, jumping up.

”Why, Miss Payson, Vixley can no more be trusted than a gambler! Don’t you know that he’s wild with Frank? Vixley’s got it in for him; he is trying to ruin him! Don’t you know that Frank has been trying to buy him off, just to save your father from being cheated by them? Why, Frank offered Vixley a thousand dollars to leave town, only last week. Vixley told me so himself!”

”A thousand dollars? That’s impossible.” Clytie’s voice was still hopeless.

”I can’t imagine where he got the money, but he had it with him, in cash. Vixley said so.”

”How long ago was that?”

”Two weeks ago, about.”

Clytie reflected. ”I saw Frank on the platform at Stockton, two weeks ago. I wonder—”

”Yes, it was the day after he got back, I remember now.”

”Oh!” Clytie’s face lightened as if another person had come into the room. She looked away, as if to greet an unseen visitor. Her hand was raised delicately. ”I see.” Her voice came suddenly, definitely. Then she stared hard at Fancy. ”Oh, Fancy, I’m almost frightened at it! I don’t dare to believe it. Oh, if I’ve made a mistake in suspecting him. If I’ve accused him to myself unjustly, how can I ever bear it! But I saw those notes—”

”And you didn’t ask him to explain them?” Fancy spoke very slowly. She did not accuse, she only wondered.

”No.” Clytie’s tone had dropped low, and she went on, fluttering hurriedly. ”I simply went away. Oh, think of it—it was as melodramatic as a play—that’s the way women do on the stage, isn’t it? But you see, I *did* know awful things about him. Fancy—he had told me, and I suspected more. There was something in the notes about my present to father, and his birthday had only just passed. That proved to me that Frank’s notes had been made recently, I thought.”

Fancy looked at her with a quizzical expression. ”I knew a fellow once who used to call me a marmoset. I guess that’s what you are, you poor dear! Why, Frank told me about your binding a book for your father the day he first came here. You must have spoken of it then.”

”I did!” Clytie fairly threw out. ”I remember it now! And that was *before*—before he really knew me, wasn’t it! Oh, what shall I do, Fancy?” Her look was, for the moment, as helpless as a child’s.

”Do?” Fancy repeated, shrugging her shoulders. ”Why, the telephone wires are still working, aren’t they?” She spoke a bit dryly. She had done her work, now, and relapsed into a sort of apathy.

”And I prided myself on my intuition, and on my fairness!” Clytie went on, unheeding her. ”I knew that I saw in him what no one else saw—not even you, who knew him so well, and who wouldn’t suspect him of anything so base as

that! To think of my being the victim of such a claptrap trick!"

Fancy raised her eyebrows and watched her quietly. "What I can't understand now, is why you're wasting your time talking about it."

Clytie stared at her, her face still shadowed by her emotion. Then her smile came rapturously. She turned and ran down-stairs to the telephone.

Fancy walked to the window forlornly. There she leaned her head on her arm against the pane and shut her eyes, as if she were fatigued. It was black in the west, and the Marin shore was shrouded in the murk. The harbor was covered with dancing whitecaps. The storm was imminent. She stayed there, motionless, until Clytie's step was heard coming up, then started into life again and gave herself a shake.

"He's coming right up!" Clytie announced.

Fancy immediately looked at the blue enameled dial of her little silver watch. "Well, I must be going."

"Oh, please stay!" Clytie exclaimed, holding her tightly. "I really want you to, so! It's you who have done it all."

Fancy smiled at last, and released herself. "Yes, I've spent my life in straightening out other people's snarls," she said. "Sometime I hope some one will be able to straighten mine. But I've got a date, really."

"Oh, do tell me that you're as happy as I am," Clytie exclaimed. "I've been so selfish, I'm afraid! I don't know who he is, but I'm sure he must be fine, if you care for him. How I wish I could help you, dear!"

"The only way you could, I'm afraid, is by lending me some of your brains—and I'm afraid they wouldn't fit my noddle. He's awfully clever, and I feel like a fool when I'm with him."

"But you do really love him, don't you?" Clytie asked anxiously.

Fancy nodded gravely. "I guess yes. As much as I can love anybody. I'm afraid of him. That's one sign, isn't it?"

"And you can't tell me who he is?"

"Not yet."

"Fancy, when you're married, I'll give you a wedding."

"I accept!" said Fancy Gray.

She turned to go, but hesitated a moment, as if she could hardly make up her mind to ask the question, yet couldn't go without asking it. "Miss Payson," she said finally, "did you tell Frank that I had been here?"

"Of course I did!"

"What did he say?"

"He said that it was like you. That you always played fair."

"Good-by!" Fancy said, and suddenly breaking through the reserve that had so far constrained her, she laid her cheek for a moment to Clytie's.

Clytie kissed her. The two walked down-stairs arm in arm. At the front door Fancy paused and said:

"Take my advice, Miss Payson, and don't explain. Never explain. If you once get into that habit you're lost. It only wastes time. Get right down to business and stay there. Your head belongs on his shoulder, remember that. All Frank will want to know is what you're going to do next. Keep him guessing, my dear, but never explain! Now, I'm going to try and get home before it rains."

She turned up her collar, gave a quick toss to her head, and walked rapidly down the garden path. At the gate she turned, gaily gave a mock-military salute, a relic of her old vaudeville manner, then ran down the steps.

Clytie watched her till she had disappeared. Then she went up-stairs and changed her frock.

Fancy's sage advice was wasted. There were explanations, a torrent of them, when Francis Granthope came, explanations voluble, apologetic, impetuous, half-tragic, semi-humorous. The equilibrium of Clytie's mind was completely overturned and its readjustment came only after a prolonged talk. Every trace of the priestess, the princess, the divinity was gone forever, now. She was more like a mother rejoicing at the restoration of a lost child, for whose absence she blamed her own neglect and carelessness. It was all too delightful for Granthope to wish to cut it short. He was hungry for her.

He, too, had his explanations and his news. For two weeks his hands had been tied. Clytie had disappeared from his ken, and he had had no way of tracing her, for it was useless to telephone to the house or to ask of her father. There had been nothing for it but to wait in the hope that whatever had caused the interruption would come right of itself. He had never really felt sure of Clytie—her acceptance of him had seemed too wonderful to be true, a fortune to which he was not really entitled, and which he might lose any instant. Whether or not Vixley or Madam Spoll had effected the separation, he had no way of determining.

He told then of his trip to Stockton where, by establishing his identity by means of the finger-prints, he had succeeded in obtaining possession of the money he had deposited there so many years ago. This had amounted, with interest, to several thousand dollars. He had gone immediately to Vixley to seal the bargain they had made, but the Professor had absolutely refused to accept any payment for leaving town. Indeed, he had hinted that he had schemes on foot which would bring him an income that Granthope could not hope to rival. How matters stood between Mr. Payson and the mediums, neither Granthope nor Clytie knew. They had not yet heard of the materializing séance, and the situation was, so far as they knew, the same as before. It was agreed that there must be another attempt to rescue Mr. Payson, and this time through Doctor Masterson, who was probably venal.

Granthope, meanwhile, however, had perfected his plans. He had sufficient money, now, to warrant his devoting himself to the study of medicine, a project he had so long contemplated that, with the start he had already made, would make it possible for him to practise in two or three years. He had, therefore, abandoned all idea of going upon the stage. Clytie approved of this with considerable relief. The prospect of reviving gossip by Granthope's appearance as an actor had caused her much dread. They had already been much talked about. Society had discussed them until it had grown tired. Nothing was sensational enough to last long as an object of curiosity in San Francisco, and a half-dozen other affairs had caused them to be almost forgotten.

After this first flurry of talk, in which she had come down from that lofty spiritual altitude where she had dwelt for the last two weeks, she was sheer woman, thrilling to his words and to the sense of his nearness. As they had progressed in intimacy her maternal instinct had asserted itself more and more frankly towards him. She had treated him at times almost as if he were a boy whose education she was fondly directing. She had lost some of that feeling, now, in virtue of her mistake; she was curiously humble.

He, too, had somewhat changed. Before Clytie's direct gaze he had lost something of his power; he had been afraid of her. In this readjustment the normal phase of courtship was restored, and, feeling his way with her, delicately perceptive as he always was with women, he began to notice that she would willingly resign the scepter—she would gladly be mastered if he would but put forth his power. She was learning to be a woman; she would be conquered anew.

He was to learn all this slowly, however; so slowly that, at every manifestation of her inclination he had a moment's pause for the wonder of it, tasting the flavor of her condescension, marveling at his own conquest. To him, as to all lovers, his sweetheart had been a woman different from all her sex. He was now to find that she was not one woman but two—that in her the subtly refined spirit of his vision shared her throne with that immemorial wild creature of primal impulse who is the essence of sex itself; who, subdued or paramount, dwells in all women, saints and sinners alike. He had, in virtue of his victory, merged those two warring elements in her soul into one. She had come into her birthright, not lost it. She seemed a little frightened by the metamorphosis, but there was a triumph of discovery, too; he reveled in its manifestation, but he was still timorous before the new, splendid, potent being he had invoked. There was an intoxicating excitement, now, as he saw in her traces of every woman he had known. It was as if, after exploring a strange land and meeting its people, he had at last come upon the queen who combined all the national characteristics and fused them with the unique distinction of royalty.

They had, also, as yet, a whole lovers' language to manufacture, metaphors

to weave into their talk, words to suggest phrases, phrases to stand for moods and emotions. But such idioms are untranslatable—they will never bear analysis. For love is a subjective state, whose objective manifestations are ridiculous. No one can see a kiss—it is a state of being.

But into this relation they entered, as children go to play, making their own rules of the game, establishing their own sentimental traditions as lovers use. With such vivid imagination as both possessed the pastime became deliciously intricate; it had pathos and comedy, wind and dew and fire. They spoke in enigmas, one's quick intuition answering the other—there were flashes so quick with humor that a smile was inadequate in satisfying its esoteric message. An observer would have seen Clytie, her eyes alight, her pose informed with gracile eagerness, waking from her gentle languor to inspired gesture—Granthope pacing the room, erect, virile, dark, sensitive in every fiber to her presence, flinging a whimsical word at her, or with a burst of abandon pouring himself out to her to her delight. There was an intellectual stimulation as well as an emotional pressure in their intercourse that forbade any monotony of mood. There was a tensity of feeling that broke, at times, into waves of laughter; but there were moments, too, when the sudden realization of their relation, with all its doubts, its unknown paths, and secret, fatal web of circumstance, impelled them to make sure, at least, of the moment, and to defy the future with an expression of their present happiness. So they came down, and so they went up. From height to depth, from shadow to light he pursued her. He chased, but she was ready enough to be caught! She held a hand to him and helped him up; they met in delightful solitudes of thought; they walked together through the obvious. That he should so follow her, that she could understand, there was wonder enough, even without that other diviner communion. It was a lovers' play-day, now; there was time enough for the lovers' ritual and the worship at the shrine. For this day was the untellable, impossible delights of wonder. They took repossession of their kingdom, no longer jeoparded by doubt.

It was Clytie, who, at last, grew more bold, more definite. She rose and put her two hands on Granthope's shoulders, smiling at him with pride in her possession.

"I can't wait any longer," she exclaimed. "I've suffered enough. Before anything else comes between us, let's settle it so that nothing can separate us. You see, my instinct has triumphed after all. I'm sure of you—indeed, I always have been. I must speak to father to-morrow, and, if you like—" She hesitated, in a sudden, maidenly access of timidity.

"We'll be married—instantly? Dare you?" He crushed her impetuously in his arms, not even this time without a wonder that she should permit him, not quite daring even yet to believe that she was more than willing.

She freed herself with an expression that should have reassured him. ”There’s nothing, now, to be gained by waiting, is there?”

”Nothing, if you can live on what I can provide.”

She laughed at the very absurdity of it. ”It may be hard, but I think I can manage father,” she went on. ”He’s too fond of me really to oppose what I’m set on.”

”I only wish I could do something to assure him, to propitiate him,” said Granthope. ”My position has been so undignified that I’ve had no chance. I have been meeting you surreptitiously, and I suppose he suspects me of being after your money.”

”While the truth is, I’m after yours!”

”I wonder if, after all, it *is* mine?” he said thoughtfully. ”I have never been able to find any heirs of Madam Grant—and her last message to me seemed to be that I should have what she left.”

”Oh, it’s yours, I’m sure!” she said.

”I long so to know about her! If I could once convince your father of my sincerity there’s much I’d like to ask him.”

”Father is a strange man. He is often unreasonable and prejudiced in his judgment and treatment of people, but there’s a warm vein of affection underneath it all. There’s something hidden, something almost furtive, even in his attitude toward me, sometimes, that I can’t understand. I happened on a queer evidence of his emotional side only a little while ago. There is a big trunk upstairs in our garret where my mother’s things are stored. It’s always kept locked; I’ve never seen the inside of it. Well, I started to go up into the attic for something, and as I was half-way up the steps where I could just see into the loft, I heard a noise up there. Father was on his knees, in front of that trunk. He was examining something in his hand. There was a tenderness and a pathos in his posture—I got only one glimpse of him before I went down again. You know my mother died when I was about five years old—soon after that day at Madam Grant’s. He never seems to want me to talk about my mother at all; he evades the subject whenever I mention her. I think that he must have been very fond of her, and it’s still painful to discuss her.”

”Have you ever asked him about that clipping about Felicia Gerard?”

”Why, he’s as reserved about her, too. Isn’t it. strange? But I’m sure that she was Madam Grant—there’s a mystery about her I can’t fathom. Do tell me more about her. You don’t know how queer it seems that I have actually seen her.”

He gave her all he knew of the strange, mad woman’s life—it was not much, as he had been so young then—his straying into her rooms, her adoption of him, his education, his loneliness, his love. She warmed to him anew as he told the

story.

”Ah, that’s the part of you I know and love the best!” she exclaimed. ”How good you were to her! If anything could make me love you more, it would be your devotion to that poor, lonely, ravaged soul. It seems as if you have served me in serving her, and I would like to think that I could pay you back, by my love, for all you gave her. It stirs me so to think of her pain and her despair!”

”Let’s make a pilgrimage!” he said impulsively. ”I haven’t been inside the Siskiyou Hotel since I was a child, though I’ve passed there often enough. It’s a pretty disreputable place now, I’m afraid.”

”Oh, yes!” Clytie caught up with his eagerness. ”Think of seeing that place again, where we first met! It will be a celebration, won’t it! How long is it? I don’t quite dare think.”

”Twenty-three years!”

”And all that time we’ve been coming together—”

”It was a wide curve my orbit traced, my dear!”

”It’s one of the mysteries of life that while we seem to be going away from each other, we’re as really coming together. But we’ll travel the rest of the course together, I’m sure!”

They set out, forthwith, on their quest for what had been. It had begun to rain, but their spirits were unquenchable by the storm. The excursion was, indeed, an adventure. Granthope himself felt his fancy aroused at the thought of the revisitation of the old home. It had a double charm for him now, as the spot where the two women who had most affected his life had been.

He left her under the shelter of an awning while he went into the saloon to interview the bartender who rented the rooms in the building. The man had heard of Madam Grant, though it was so long since she had lived there. There were still stories told of her wealth and her eccentricities, as well as of her occult powers. The rooms had even, at one time, been reported to be haunted, but they had always been let easily enough. At present they were occupied by some Russians. Yes, Granthope might go up; perhaps they would let him in.

They ascended the narrow, dingy stairs together. The wall was grimy where many dirty elbows had rubbed the plastering; the rail was rickety and many balusters were missing. Granthope rapped at the door in the hall with a queer, sick feeling of familiarity, though it was as if he had read of the place in some story rather than a place he had used to inhabit.

A Jewess opened the door, her sleeves rolled to the elbows, her face plump and good-natured. She smiled pleasantly.

”Would you mind our coming in to look at your rooms?” he asked.

”What for?” she said.

”Why, I used to live here when I was a child, and I’d like to show this lady

the place."

"If you want to, you can, I suppose. It ain't much to look at now, though. We have to take what we can get, down here."

Her curiosity was appeased by the coin which Granthope slipped into her hand, and she sat down to her sewing phlegmatically, looking up occasionally with little interest.

The place was, of course, much changed. The windows were washed, the floor scrubbed and partly covered with rag rugs. It was well furnished and well aired. Granthope pointed but the little chamber where Madam Grant had slept, where his own bed had been, and, finally, the closet from which he had first spied upon her. Clytie looked about silently, much moved, and trying to bring back her own recollections of the place.

"If I close my eyes, I can almost see it as it was," she said. "I can almost get that strange feeling I had when I came here. If I could be here for a while alone I think I could see things. I'd like to go into the closet again. Let's see if the crack is still in the door."

It was still there. She asked permission to go inside, and the Jewess rather uncomfortably agreed. The place was filled with clothing; it was close and odorous; the shelves were filled with boxes, rags and household belongings. Clytie went in rather timidly.

"Go over where I sat in the front room, that day," she said. "I want to look through the crack, as you did. I'd like to be locked in, too, but the key is gone."

She closed the door on herself while Granthope walked to the bay-window and looked idly out. It was such a strange sensation, being in the old place again, that for some moments he lost himself in a reverie; then, turning and not seeing Clytie, he walked rapidly to the door and opened it.

She stood there, leaning back against the wall of clothing with a wondering, far-away expression, her eyes staring, her face white, her breath coming fast through her parted lips. He took her hand, thinking that she was fainting, and led her out. She recovered herself quickly and drew him into the front room.

"I saw my father while I was in there," she whispered. "He was looking about the room furtively, as if searching for something. What can it mean? I'm afraid something has happened to him—I'm alarmed about it. I must go right home and see if anything's the matter. I had a strange feeling, like a pain, at first, in the dark, and I was frightened. Then I saw him. Come, let's go away!"

She went up to the Jewish woman and shook hands with her, thanking her for the courtesy. The old lady patted Clytie's hand approvingly.

"That's funny, what everybody wants to see my room for," she said, "but I don't care when I get a dollar every time, do I? Last week they was an old gentleman here, like you was, to see it!"

”What was he like?” Granthope inquired.

”Oh, he was bald-head, with a spectacles and some beard.”

Granthope and Clytie exchanged glances.

”He must have been down here for something,” she said. ”I can’t make it out. I’m afraid that there’s some trouble. It worries me.”

CHAPTER XIX
FANCY GRAY ACCEPTS

The rain had come in a vigorous downpour, washing away the mantle of dust that had so long lain over the city. The storm finally settled down to a steady pelting of heavy drops, lightened occasionally to mild, drizzling showers, only to be resumed with greater violence toward night. Every one was glad for the flushing the town received. There was a novelty and excitement about the rain, a relief after the parched, monotonous months of cloudless skies. Men and women walked the streets smiling, the women especially; for that free, fearless gaiety, the almost abandoned good nature of San Francisco girls, was not to be quenched.

On Thursday evening, Fancy Gray, to all appearance her old, gay self, smiling as if she had never a care in the world, went down to Fulda’s to dine with Blanchard Cayley.

In a city of restaurants, Fulda’s restaurant was unique. The Pintos had discovered the place, and by their own efforts had made it. Maxim and the artists of the quarter had gained Fulda’s consent to a new scheme of decoration, a plan so mad and impudent that the room was now a show-place for visitors. The walls were covered with cartoons and sketches as incongruously placed, perhaps, as the embossed pictures on a bean-pot, but what was lacking in art was made up for by a bizarre, esoteric humor that was the perpetual despair of the uninitiated.

Maxim’s chief contribution, a huge cartoon with caricatured portraits of his friends, had the place of honor; it was a superb piece of low comedy in crayons. Beyond this the sketches became more grotesque, the inscriptions more cryptic. Quotations from Rabelais, from Brantome, from Chesterton, Whistler and Wilde were scattered here and there, mingling with fiery burlesques of Bohemians, Philistines, lobsters and artists. No one, not even the authors, knew the point of most of these jokes well enough to explain them intelligibly, and it was this baffling suggestiveness which drew patrons to the restaurant and kept its charm

piquant. One saw at each table new-comers with questioning faces pointing to legends in Greek and Esperanto and Yiddish, and wondering at the inscrutable accompaniment of illustration. It was a sort of mental and artistic hash spread upon the walls. The humor grew fiercer as one's eyes rose to the ceiling. There, a trail of monstrous footprints, preposterous, impossible, led, with divagations, to a point above the central table which was always reserved for the Pintos. To crown this elaborate nonsense, they had drawn a frieze below the cornice with panels containing the names of the frequenters of the place, alternated with such minor celebrities as Plato, Browning and Nietzsche.

In a larger city, such a place would have had a temporary vogue, and then, after having been "discovered" by reporters and artists, have sunk into the desuetude of impecunious rural diners-out, one of the places of which one says: "Oh, you should have seen it two years ago." But San Francisco is of that fascinating size, half-way between town and city, and of that interesting age where the old is not quite forgotten and the new not quite permanently instated,—it is, above all, so delightfully isolated that it need not ape the East. Though it has outgrown some of its Western crudities, it is significant that such a restaurant as Fulda's could become and remain a resort for the gathering of the cleverest spirits in town. It had already achieved that reputation; it was patronized by the arts. The visitors, for the most part, either did things or wanted to. One was apt to know almost everybody there. If one didn't know Mr. Smith, one's friend did; or one knew Mr. Smith's friend.

To this place entered Fancy Gray, drifter, the day after the materializing séance, in a new, blue mackintosh and a pert but appropriate hat. She nodded, to Felix, at the counter, and, following underneath the trail of footprints on the ceiling, came, jovially as ever, to the central table. Dougal, Elsie and Benton were sitting at the far end of it. Dougal sprang up with a grin.

"Come and sit down quickly and tell us all about it!" he exclaimed. "What happened after we left?"

She sat on the side of a chair without removing her coat, and gave them her ever-ready smile. "Say, you didn't raise a rough house or anything, did you? I thought it would be a case for the coroner before you got through. If I'd known you were going to be there I wouldn't have been in the cast. Wasn't it awful? Madam Spoll was pretty badly burned, I hear."

"I hope I'll never have to see anything as horrible as that again," said Benton. "But I did what I could. I hope she'll recover."

"We waited till the police and the ambulance came and then we got out," Dougal added. "There was nothing more to do but testify. Did you see the account of it in the paper? I believe they're going to have more about it, and play it up for all it's worth. What became of you, Fancy? Last I saw of you you had

skipped into that back room."

"Oh, as soon as I had put on my shoes, I got out as quick as I could by the back way. I didn't know whether the house was going to be pulled or not. I'd had trouble enough for one evening. I'm all black and blue now, from Dougal's holding me."

"How did Vixley feel, I wonder? He must have been pretty sore."

"Sore! I guess he was, in more ways than one. But Flora Flint was the funniest! They found her in the cabinet, half dressed, after all the crowd was cleared out—she had been afraid to move."

"How did you happen to be there, anyway, Fancy?" Elsie asked. "I thought you hadn't done anything with that medium crowd for years."

It was not often that Fancy was embarrassed, but she seemed so, now.

"I haven't. I don't know why I did—except—they asked me, and I wanted to oblige somebody—and I needed the money. I had forgotten I had told you to go to Flora's."

"Aren't you going to eat?" Dougal asked. Fancy usually dined at the central table several times a week. Cayley's attentions were already on the wane.

"No, I've got free eggs to-night," was the reply.

Her eyes had been on the door of the restaurant, and, at this moment, they were rewarded by the sight of Blanchard Cayley, who entered and looked about the room for her. "Well, I'm going to meet my royal meal-ticket," she said, rising and waving a hand at him. He nodded, and came down to her, bowing to several friends on the way, and the two took a table beyond the Pintos. She faced Dougal who made disapproving faces at Cayley's back.

The room filled up. One long table was decorated, with flowers, and a party of ladies and gentlemen from up-town soon came in and took seats there. They began immediately to chatter and look about the walls, commenting upon the decorations. At other tables Fancy saw artists, newspaper men and men about town, who had been pointed out to her before. To some of them she nodded. Cayley knew many more. It was like a great family dining-room.

"Well?" said Cayley, in his peculiar tone that made of one word a whole sentence.

"I evidently made a hit. I hope you're satisfied, now."

"You certainly brought down the house." There was a sarcastic, almost a surly note in his voice.

"I'm awfully sorry things went wrong, Blan," she said. "I wouldn't have done it if I'd known the crowd was going to be there. I'm sorry now I consented to take part. I hope I'll never see Vixley again. He was horrid to me."

"I've seen Vixley. He says Madam Spoll isn't expected to live."

"Isn't it awful? I didn't want to do it, Blan, you know I didn't; I wouldn't

have done it for anybody but you. I don't see how you can bear to have anything to do with Vixley. Ugh! What *did* you want me to do it for, anyway?"

"Oh, only to find out some things, that's all. Of course I couldn't do it myself, could I?"

It was evident, now, that he had been drinking. He had not shown it in his walk or in his voice, but there was a slight glaze to his eyes that told the story. He had been abstinent for so long that Fancy wondered at it. He ordered a flask of chianti and poured two glasses.

"You oughtn't to begin again, Blan—don't!" she said anxiously. "Water's good enough for me."

"Pshaw! Don't worry, I'm all right. You don't think I'm drunk, do you?" He laughed harshly.

"N—no, but I don't like it."

"Forget it, Fan; nobody ever saw me drunk. I only get confidential, that's all. *In vino veritas.* There's a double meaning there. Exoteric and esoteric."

At this moment the waiter appeared with a stone bottle and two Chinese cups. "Mr. Dougal sent this over with his compliments. It's *saké*," he explained. Fancy kissed her hand to Dougal, and poured for herself and Cayley.

"Ugh! It's horrible!" she said. "Isn't it?"

"No, it's the real thing; I like it." Cayley drank it all and helped himself to more.

"Did you find out what you wanted to know?" said Fancy, proceeding with her dinner daintily.

"No, the row came just in time to queer the whole thing."

"Of course you know that if Dougal had had any idea it was me—"

"Oh, it wasn't Dougal, it was old man Payson—he caught on—"

Fancy laid down her fork, and narrowed her eyes. "*Payson?*" she repeated.

"Yes, of course; the old chap you were talking to, weren't you?"

She looked at him with a strange expression. "Payson? I didn't think—I was too excited to realize—I mean—who is he, Blan?" Her hands fell into her lap and clasped one another tightly.

"Oh, an old boy I know, a good sort, but a fool. No fool like an old fool, is there?" He poured another glass of chianti, without noticing how intense she had grown. His eyes were dallying with two good-looking girls across the room.

"Is Miss Payson—the one who was with you at Carminetti's—his daughter?"

He looked up at her sharply, now, but her frown meant nothing to him. He returned to his tagliarini. "Yes—why?" he said.

"Tell me about her, Blan, please," Fancy begged, with an unusual air of anxiety.

"Nothing to tell, except she's a disdainful beauty, and a little too haughty

for me. Fastidious, pre-Raphaelite, and super-civilized and all that. You wouldn't care for her, any more than you would for a Utamaro." He smiled to himself at what Fancy had once said of Japanese prints.

"H'm!" Fancy put her chin in her hands, and kept her eyes on Cayley. "So that old gentleman was her father," she said in a low unimpassioned voice. "It was Miss Payson's father I was hired to fool!" Suddenly she spoke up more sharply, but with a tremor in her voice. "What did you want me to play spirit for, Blan? Out with it!"

He saw now that something was wrong. It made him peevish.

"What do you know about Miss Payson, anyway?" he demanded.

"I've—seen her."

"Well, what did you think of her?"

"I thought she was a thoroughbred."

"Indeed?" Cayley thought it over, looking somewhat abstractedly at a picture on the wall, entitled: "*Je congnois la faulte des Boesmes.*" Then he turned with an open countenance to her and said, with an air of candor:

"You see, Fancy, I happened to know Payson was in the clutches of Vixley and this Spoll woman—they were sucking his blood. I thought I could rescue him if you would play spirit, and then tell Payson afterwards what a fraud it all was. Understand now?" He smiled blandly.

"I see," she said, and went on with her dinner.

"Then again," Cayley remarked, "I thought you wouldn't mind getting even with Granthope."

This brought her up again with an angry flush. "What has he got to do with it?"

"Well, he played it rather low down on you, didn't he?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Oh, he fired you."

"He didn't! I left of my own accord." Fancy's lie came impetuously.

"Did you know that he's after Miss Payson, now?"

"So I've heard."

"You're remarkably amiable about it, my dear. You didn't really care for him, then?" His smile was unendurable.

"I never explain. If people can't understand without explanations, they never can with them."

"Then you don't mind it at all?" he insisted.

"No—I don't mind it. I'm glad." The words came from her slowly, this time.

"What d'you mean?"

Fancy was silent.

"Well, don't you think he ought to be—shown up a little?" He was on his

third cup of *saké*, but his hand was as steady as ever.

Her lips parted, and her breath came suddenly for an exclamation, but the protest got no further than her eyes. She dropped them to the table-cloth, where she marked crosses with her little finger-nail. Dougal was making overt attempts to attract her attention and the diversion was maddening.

"What d'you mean?" she asked.

"If you were really a good enough friend of mine to help me out—"

"Oh, I'll help you out, Blan; what d'you want me to do?" she said quite eagerly, now. He did not notice her suppressed excitement.

"Well—I suppose you know a good deal about him?"

She nodded wisely.

"And some things, I suppose, might make considerable difference if they came out? You know what I mean."

"Do you want me to tell them?" she flung fiercely at him.

He took alarm, and, reaching across the table, attempted to touch her hand. She evaded him. "Of course I don't want you to do anything dishonorable—but—you said yourself she was a thoroughbred—do you think it's quite the square thing to stand by and let a man like him marry a nice girl like Miss Payson?"

"I thought you said she was supercilious!"

"No, super-civilized, that's all. Call it statuesque. But all the same I hate to see her get stung—don't you, now? Come!" He leaned back and folded his arms.

"She's too haughty for you, I thought!"

"Did I say that? Well, I'm a friend of the family, you know—I want to do what I can for them."

She reached nervously for her wine-glass, and her hand, trembling, struck the chianti flask and tipped it over. Before she could set it straight it had spilled into a plate, drenching a napkin which lay partly folded there. The linen was turned blood red. Cayley laughed at her carelessness loudly. Dougal looked across again, but Fancy avoided his eye.

"Blan," she said, leaning slightly towards him and speaking low, "do you love me? Or are you just playing with me?"

He seemed to consider it. Then he said, very earnestly, and evidently with a subtle psychological intent, "I'm only playing with you, Fancy!" And he smiled.

Her fingers drummed on the table.

"But I'll never treat you the way Granthope did," he added.

Her hands came together again in her lap. "That'll be all about Granthope," she said through her teeth.

"See here," he insisted, "you know what a cad he's been as well as I do! He's trying to marry Miss Payson, damn him! I've seen her with him often. If you'll just go up to her and tell her a few things—you needn't violate any confidences—

just enough to put her on her guard—we can head him off and spoil that game!"

"Oh!" Fancy's breast heaved violently. "I *see*!" she exclaimed slowly. Her eyes blazed at him. "So *that's* what you've been after all this time, is it? I think I know you now, Blanchard Cayley!"

Her eyes did not leave him as her right hand stole over the cloth, reaching for the wine-soaked napkin, and grasped its dry end. Slowly she rose from her seat, stood up, and leaned far over the table towards him.

Then, raising her hand suddenly, she struck him as with a flail, once, twice across the cheek, across the eyes, leaving a purple stain whose drops trickled down into his beard. The sound was heard all over the room, and drew all eyes. For a moment she watched him put up his arm to ward off the blows; then, with a gasping sob, she turned and ran swiftly down to the door and out into the street.

Cayley, his face now reddened not only by the wine, but from the furious flush which burned in his cheeks, sat for a moment as if paralyzed. Then he wiped the mark with his napkin, automatically. His face worked like a maniac's. He rose deliberately, reached for his hat and strode down the aisle after her.

Dougal saw the pursuit just in time. Quickly his foot shot out into the passage, and Cayley, passing, tripped over it, and fell headlong upon the floor. Dougal, cigarette in mouth, leaped out of his chair and held him lightly. Benton jumped up and stood by him, ready. Cayley was mumbling curses. They helped him up politely, and Dougal muttered:

"Go back to your table, Mr. Cayley, and sit down there for five minutes. If you don't, by God, I'll kill you!"

The room buzzed with exclamations; every one stared.

Cayley stared sullenly, his mouth open, then turned back and sat down and put his hands to his forehead, leaning on the table.

Dougal conferred with Benton. "You wait here, Benton, and wherever Cayley goes, you follow him. I'm going out after Fancy. There'll be the hell to pay to-night if we don't find her. I've never seen her that way before, and it looks like trouble to me!"

With that, he hurried out of the restaurant.

She had run out into the rain without either coat or umbrella. Turning down Commercial Street in the direction of the ferry, she walked hurriedly, as if bent on some special errand; but, at the foot of Market Street, she hesitated, then crossed, walked along East Street past the water-front, saloons and sailors' boarding-houses, stumbling and slipping on the uneven, reeking, board sidewalks. Then she went up Howard Street, dark and gloomy, all the way to Fourth Street. Here she made back for the lights of Market Street, crossed, looked idly in at a drug

store window for fully five minutes. A man came up and accosted her jocosely. She turned and stared at him without replying a word, and he walked away.

Then, almost running, now, she flew straight for Granthope's office. Looking up from the street, she saw a light in his window. She ran up the stairs and paused for a moment to get her breath outside his office door. Just at that moment a voice came to her from inside, and then a man's answered, followed by a chorus of soft laughter. She stood transfixed, biting her lip nervously, listening. The woman's voice went on, evenly.

Fancy staggered slowly down the stairs and went out again into the storm. Down Geary to Market Street, down Market Street, hopelessly, aimlessly. Here the rain beat upon her mercilessly in great sheets. Again she stopped, looking up and down wildly. Finally she turned the corner and went into the ladies' entrance of the "Hospital." A waiter led her to a booth where she could be alone.

The "Hospital" was, perhaps, the most respectable saloon in the city where women were permitted. The whole rear of the establishment was given over to a magnificently fitted-up department devoted to such women as were willing to be seen there. One might go and still retain a certain relic of good-repute, if one went with a man—there were married women enough who did, and reckless girls, too, who took the risk; but it was on the frontier of vice, where amateur and professional met.

From a wide, carpeted passage booths opened to right and left; little square rooms, with partitions running up part way, screened off with heavy red plush portières hanging from brass rods. Each of these compartments was finished in a different kind of rare wood, handsomely designed. Arching from a heavy, molded cornice, where owls sat at stately intervals, an elaborately coffered ceiling rose, and in the center was suspended a globe of cathedral glass, electric lighted, glowing like a full moon.

Fancy hung up her jacket to dry and ordered a hot lemonade. Then she went down to the telephone and called up Gay P. Summer's house number. She got him, at last, and asked him, tremulously, to come down to the "Hospital" and see her. She would wait for him. He seemed surprised, but she would not explain, and, after a short discussion, he consented. She went back to the "Toa" room and waited, sipping her drink.

All about her was a persistent babble of voices, the women's raucous, hard and cold, mingled occasionally with the guffaws of men. Across the way, through an opening of the portières, she could see an over-dressed girl tilted back in her chair puffing a cigarette. White-aproned waiters passed and repassed, looking neither to the right nor left.

She was staring fixedly at the wall, her elbows on the table, her chin on the backs of her hands, when Gay entered a little crossly. She looked up with a

smile—almost her old winning smile—though it drooped in a moment and was set again with an effort.

"Hello, Gay, here I am again!" she said. She gave him her cold little hand.

He drew off his rain coat and sat down, as fresh and pink as ever, the drops still glistening on his cheeks. "What's up?" he said, touching the electric button and pulling out his cigarette case.

"I'm through with Blanchard Cayley," she said, watching him.

"It's about time," he remarked.

"Aren't you glad to see me, Gay?"

"Sure!" he answered, without looking at her. He scratched a match, and, after he had lighted his cigarette, looked up at the waiter who appeared in the doorway. "Two Picon punches," he said. Then he turned to her and folded his arms.

"What can I do for you, Fancy?"

He seemed, somehow, to have grown ten years older since the time they had frolicked together at the beach. His cheek was as blooming, his figure as boyish, but his eyes were a little harder. His voice showed a little more confidence, and his pose was quite that of the man of the world. Much of his charm had gone.

"Gay," she said, "we were pretty good friends, once."

"That's what we were, Fancy. How much do you need?"

She recoiled as if he had struck her and buried her face in her arms on the table. Her shoulders shook convulsively. "Oh, I didn't want to graft, Gay, don't think that! That's not what I called you up for, really it isn't!"

"What was it, then?" he asked, growing a little more genial.

The waiter appeared with two glasses on a tray and set them down on the table. Fancy looked up and wiped her eyes. When they were alone again he said, "Fire away, now. I've got a date at ten. I'm sorry I said that, but I didn't know but you were hard up, that's all."

"Gay," she said, "do you remember what you said that day we went down to Champoreau's the first time?"

"I believe I said all that crowd had the big head, didn't I?"

"That isn't it, Gay. I wonder if you've forgotten already?"

"I guess I have. Lots of things have happened since that." He blew a lungfull of smoke into the air over her head.

"You've said it several times since then. Do you happen to remember asking me to marry you?"

"I believe I did make a break like that, now you speak of it. And you threw me down good and hard, too."

She got his eyes, and smiled. "You said that—whenever I changed my mind and gave the word—you'd marry me."

”Did I?” Gay moved uncomfortably in his chair.

”You did, Gay, and when you said it, I thought you meant it. I believe you did mean it then. Oh, Gay, dear, I want to quit drifting! I want to settle down and be a good wife to some man who’ll take care of me, some one I can love and help and be faithful to! Oh, you don’t know how faithful I’d be, Gay! I’d do anything. I’m so tired of drifting—I’m so afraid I’ll go on like this! I’m not a grafter, Gay, you know I’m not! But I want to get married and be happy!”

”You ought to have said that two months ago,” he said, knocking the ash from his cigarette with exquisite attention.

”Don’t you want me now?” she said, shaking her head pathetically. She reached for his hand. ”I like you, Gay, I’ve always liked you and I think I could learn to love you sometime. But I’d be true to you, anyway. Take me, please, Gay! I can’t stand it any longer.”

”For Heaven’s sake, don’t talk so loud, Fancy; somebody’ll hear you! Say, this isn’t fair! I gave you a good chance, and you threw me down. Why didn’t you take me then? I was crazy about you, but no, you wouldn’t have it!”

”Then you’ve got all over it? You don’t want me now?”

He had a sudden access of pity, and stroked her hand. ”Why, I couldn’t make you happy, Fancy? You know that. You wouldn’t have me marry you if I wasn’t in love with you, would you? I suppose I have got over it; I was fascinated, and I thought it was the real thing. We all make mistakes. I’ve been about a good bit since then, and I know more of the world. I’m sorry, but it’s too late.”

She looked away, and for a moment her eyes closed.

”I guess nobody wants me, then. Men get tired of me, don’t they? I’m good enough to play with for a little while, but—I can’t make good as a wife. Never mind. I thought perhaps you were in earnest, that’s all. I’m sorry I bothered you. You can go, now!”

He went up to her and put his hand on her shoulder. She shook it off, shuddering. ”Go *away*!” she cried.

He took his hat and left her.

For a quarter of an hour she sat there, and then, looking up haggardly, stared about the room. She consulted the little chatelaine watch that dangled on her breast. Going up to a mirror, she attempted to straighten her hair, but her hands shook so that it was of little use. She was, even in that warm room, shivering. Then she rose and went down the carpeted passage, past luxurious paintings, past the compartments filled with giggling women and tipsy men, out into the night again.

The rain had stopped at last, but it was cold and gusty. Great detached masses of cloud pied the heavens, and in the clear spaces of sky the stars shone, twinkling brilliantly. She turned down Market Street.

Half-way to the ferry she met Dougal, almost falling into his arms before she recognized him.

”Well, I’ve found you at last!” he exclaimed. ”Lord, how wet you are! Come right along home with me, and Elsie will give you some dry clothes.”

”Oh, no, thank you, Dougal, but I can’t, really! I’ve got to go to Oakland to-night.”

”Nonsense! Wait, I’ll get a cab.”

”I can’t go, honest I can’t. Please don’t tease me!”

”Well, I won’t leave you, at any rate!” He put his arm through hers.

”You can come down to the ferry, if you want. I’m going to Oakland.”

”All right, I’ll go, too. But you’re cold! You oughtn’t cross the bay to-night. You ought to go right to bed.”

”Oh, I’ll be warm enough soon!”

They walked along for a while in silence, till she stopped him to ask, ”Have you got a pistol with you, Dougal?”

”Yes, why?”

”Lend it to me, will you?”

”Not on your life! What do you want it for?”

”Never mind, I want it. Please, Dougal!”

”Not after that scrap I saw to-night. I don’t want you in the papers to-morrow morning. You’ve had trouble enough without a shooting scrape. If anybody’s going to shoot Cayley, let me do it!”

She sighed, and gave it up.

”Do you want to tell me what’s the matter, Fancy?”

”No, Dougal, I’d rather not. It doesn’t matter.”

”You’ll get over it all right, I expect.”

”Oh, yes, I’ll get over it.”

”Anyway, you just want to remember you can call on me any time for anything you want, Fancy, barring guns. Don’t get blue when you have good friends to fall back on. We’re with you to a finish, old girl!”

”You’re a dear!” She flashed a smile at him.

He grinned, and gripped her arm tighter. Then he began to dance her down the sidewalk. Fancy grew hilarious and laughed aloud, excitedly. They began to sing, as they marched, a song they had learned by rote, from Maxim. Neither of them well understood the words:

”Josephine est mor-te,
Morte en faisant sa——
En faisant sa prié-re
A bon Saint Nicolas,

Tu-ra-la!
Ca n'va gu-ère—
Tu-ra-la!
Ca n'va pas!"

They kept it up in this vein till the Ferry Building was reached. There he bought her ticket and took her to the gate. She still smiled, still flung him her odd jests, still clung affectionately to his arm.

"Well, good night, Fancy Gray!" he said at last. "Don't do anything foolish till I see you again!" His grin was like a blessing.

She seemed loath to leave him, and drew back from the gate. She unpinned the little silver watch from her coat and handed it to him.

"Say, Dougal, would you mind taking this to a jeweler and having it adjusted for me?" she said suddenly. "It doesn't go very well, and I won't have time to attend to it. Don't forget it. I'll tell you—perhaps you'd better give it to Elsie—and let her take charge of it."

He took it and put it in his vest pocket. "All right," he said, "I'll give it to her."

"Tell her to be careful of it, I'm awfully fond of that watch!" she added. Then her fingers went to the little gold chain with the swastika at her neck and she started to unclasp that, too.

"And, Dougal—"

"What?"

She left the chain where it was.

"Never mind, it's nothing. Good-by, Dougal, you may kiss me if you want to!"

"Do I want to!" He gave her a bear's hug, and a brother's kiss.

She was still unready to go and stood looking at him whimsically. Then, impulsively, she seized his arm and drew him back under an arc light, and held up her face.

"Dougal," she said, "will you answer me something absolutely honestly?"

"Sure!"

"Do you think I'm pretty?"

He studied her a moment, and his lips worked silently. Then he said deliberately:

"Well,—I don't know as I'd call you exactly a *pretty* woman, but you're something more than that—"

"Cut it out!" she exclaimed dryly; "I know all the rest! I've heard it before. Stop before you tell me I have 'fine eyes' and am good-natured. I know! 'The

bride was a distinguished-looking brunette of great grace and dignity, and wore her clothes well!' Never mind, Dougal, you're honest, anyway," she added.

He opened his mouth to protest, repentance in his eyes, but she blew a kiss at him and darted through the gate. He watched her till she passed through the inner door, where she waved a last time.

She walked rapidly on board, went up the stairway, and hesitated by the door of the cabin. A girl passed her, looked back and then returned timidly.

"Excuse me, but ain't you the young lady that works in Mr. Granthope's office?" she said.

"I did, but I'm not there any more. He's gone out of business," Fancy managed to reply. Her quick eye had recognized the girl as Fleurette.

"I'm sorry for that. He's nice, isn't he? He was awfully kind to me, and he said it was on account of you. Did you know he wouldn't even take any money from me?"

"Wouldn't he?" said Fancy. "That's like him."

"And he gave me such a lovely reading, too. It just saved my life, I think, and everything came out just as he said it would, too. Don't you think he's awfully good-looking?"

"Yes, very." Fancy was breathing hard.

"And he's so good. Why, I 'most fell in love with him, that day. I guess I would have, if I hadn't been in love already. I was awfully unhappy then. I'm the happiest girl in the world, now! Say, weren't you awfully fond of him?"

"Yes."

"I guess he was of you, too. He said some awful nice things about you!"

"Did he?" Fancy's eyes wandered.

The girl saw, now, that something was wrong, and evidently wanted to make up for it. She spoke shyly: "Say—there's something else I always wanted to tell you. I wonder if it would make you mad?"

"Go ahead," said Fancy.

"You won't think I'm fooling?"

"No."

"Well," Fleurette almost whispered, "I think you're *awful* pretty!"

With that, she turned suddenly and went into the cabin.

Fancy went down-stairs slowly, biting her handkerchief. The lower deck was deserted; she looked carefully about, to make sure of it. She glanced down at the water which boiled up from the paddle-wheels and shuddered.

Overhead the stars now shone free of cloud, in the darkness of space. San Francisco was like a pincushion, stuck with sparks of light. She crossed to the port side of the boat, and saw Goat Island, a blotch of shadow, with its lighthouse, off the bow. It grew rapidly nearer and nearer. It fascinated her. When it was directly opposite, a few hundred yards away, she clenched her teeth and muttered to herself:

"Well, there's nothing in the race but the finish! This is where *I* get off!"

Clambering to the top of the rail, she took a long, deep breath, then flung herself headlong into the bay, and the waters closed over her.

CHAPTER XX

MASTERSON'S MANOEUVRES

Francis Granthope ran up the two flights of stairs like a boy, and pounded at Masterson's door. The doctor appeared, with his celluloid collar in one hand and a half-eaten orange in the other. He was coatless and unshorn, although his office hours, "from nine till four" had already begun. He looked at Granthope, took another bite of his orange, and then, his mouth being too full for clear articulation, pointed inside to a chair by the fireplace under the shelves full of bottles.

Granthope dumped a pile of newspapers from the chair and sat down. The sun never came into the room, and the place was, as usual, chill, dim and dusty. A handful of fire fought for life upon the hearth. Behind a fringed portière, which was stretched across the back of the room, the doctor's cot was seen, dirty and unkempt.

Masterson finished the last of his orange with a gulp, went to a bowl in the corner where a skull was perched on a shelf, and washed his hands. After he had wiped them and rubbed a blotch of juice from the front of his plaid flannel waistcoat, he put on his coat and sat down by the fire.

"Well, I must say you're quite a stranger. How's things, Frank?" he said casually.

"So-so," was the reply. "I've given up my business."

"So I hear. What's the matter? Sold out?" asked Masterson.

"Oh, no, I just threw it all up and left."

"That's funny. I should have thought you could have got something for the good-will. What you going to do now?"

”Nothing. I didn’t come here to talk about myself, Masterson, I came to talk about you.”

”Well, well, that’s kind of you,” said the healer, buttoning on his collar. ”That’s what you might call friendly. You didn’t use to be so much interested when you was wearing your Prince Albert. What makes you so anxious, all of a sudden?”

Granthope smiled good-naturedly, and poked at the fire till it blazed up. ”See here,” he said. ”I can show you how to make some money easily.”

”That sounds interesting. I certainly ain’t in business for my health. Fire it off. I’m listening.”

”There’s no use beating about the bush with you. And I’m a man of my word. Isn’t that so?”

”I never heard it gainsaid,” said Masterson. ”I’ll trust you, and you can trust me as equally.”

”Well, I’ll tell you how I’m fixed. You know that Madam Spoll and Vixley have got it in for me—they’ve tried to run me out of this town, in fact.”

”Oh, *that’s* why you quit? Lord, I wouldn’t lay down so easy as that!”

”Well, I’m out of it, at any rate. I won’t say why, but they tried to hurt me, fast enough. Now I want to give them as good as they sent.”

Doctor Masterson grinned and clasped his hands over his knees. ”That suits me all right, I ain’t any too friendly myself, just at present.”

”Then perhaps we can come to terms. What I propose to do, is to checkmate them with Payson.”

Masterson rubbed his red, scrawny beard. ”That ain’t easy,” he said reflectively.

”Easy enough, if you’ll help me.”

”How?”

”Simply by giving the whole business away to Mr. Payson. He’ll believe you when he won’t me.”

”Well, what is there in it?”

”You know what my word is worth. If you help me, and we succeed in getting Mr. Payson out of the net, I promise you a thousand dollars.”

”H’m!” Masterson deliberated.

”Of course, they know I’ll spoil their game if I can, so I take no chances in telling you. So it’s up to you to decide whether you’ll stand in with them, or with me. I can do it alone, in time, but if you help, so much the better. You stand to win, anyway. It isn’t worth that much to work with them, as things are, and you know it.”

”I don’t know about that,” said Masterson craftily, watching his man; ”a thousand ain’t much for giving away pals.”

”They’re not your pals. They’ve tried to freeze you out—Fancy Gray has told me that from the inside. They’re going to get rid of you in short order. Besides, you’ll have the credit of rescuing a credulous old man from the clutches of swindlers.”

”That’s true,” said the doctor. ”They’re a-bleeding him something awful. It *had* ought to be stopped, as you say. I don’t believe in grafting. I’m a straight practitioner, and if any of my patients want fake work they can go somewheres else.”

”Well, what d’you say, then?”

Masterson thought it over as he warmed his hands. His reverie was interrupted by a knock on the door, and he rose to open it. An old, shabby woman stood in the hall.

She was wrinkled and veined, with yellowish white hair, vacuous, watery gray eyes, a red, bulbous nose, and a miserable chin. She had nothing of the dignity of age, and her thin, cruel lips were her only signs of character. All other traits were submerged by drink and poverty. Her skirt was ridiculously short and her black shawl ragged and full of holes. She breathed of beer.

”How d’you do, Mrs. Riley?” said Masterson. ”I’m sorry to say I’m engaged at present and you’ll have to wait. Can’t you sit down on the stairs for a while?”

”Oh, dear, but that fire looks good!” she whined. ”Can’t I just come in and have a seat to rest my bones on? I’m feeling that miserable this day that I can’t stand.”

”Let her come in,” said Granthope, rising. ”I’ve said all that’s necessary at present, and if you decide to do what I want, we can talk it over later.”

The doctor grudgingly admitted her. She tottered in and took the chair by the fire gratefully. She had looked at Granthope when he first spoke, and now she kept her eyes fixed on him as he stood by the window.

Masterson went over to him and spoke in a lower tone. ”I got to have time to think this thing over,” he said. ”Then, if I accept your offer, we got to discuss ways and means, and so forth and so on. I won’t say yes, and I won’t say no, just at present. I’ll think it over and let you know, Frank.”

The woman started at the name. Her lower lip fell pendulous. Her eyes were still on Granthope.

”When will you let me know?” he asked.

”I tell you what I’ll do; I’m busy to-day, and I got an engagement to-night. Suppose I come down to your office after theater time? Say ten-thirty. Will that do?”

”I’ll be there,” Granthope replied. ”I’ll wait till you come. The outside door is locked at eleven o’clock. Be there before that.”

He took his hat and walked to the door, giving a look at Mrs. Riley as he

passed. Her face was now almost animated, as her lips mumbled something to herself. Granthope ran briskly down-stairs, and Masterson closed the door.

"Who's that?" Mrs. Riley piped querulously.

"That? Why, Granthope, the palmist," said the doctor, busying himself with some bottles on his table. He took one up and shook it.

"Granthope? No, sir! Don't tell me! I know better."

Masterson was upon her in a flash. "What d'you mean?" he demanded, taking her by the arm.

"I know, I know! You can't fool Margaret Riley!" she croaked.

He shook her roughly. "You're drunk!" he exclaimed in disgust.

"No, I ain't!" she retorted. "I'm sober enough to know that fellow; I've seen him before, I tell you."

"Who is he, then?"

"Oh, d'you want to know?" she said craftily. "What would you give to know, Doctor?"

"I'll give you Hail Columbia if you *don't* tell me!" he cried. "I'll give you a bloody good reputation, that's what I'll give! I'll give you the name of being a poisoner, old woman, and I'll take care that your neighbors know all about your three husbands, if you don't look out!"

"Oh, my God! Don't speak so loud, Doctor, please! I'll tell you if you'll promise to leave me alone. I didn't mean nothing by it."

"Let's have it then." The doctor's eyes gleamed.

"Did you ever hear tell of Madam Grant?" she asked. "I reckon it was before your day."

"Yes, I did. What about her?"

"Why, this young fellow you call Granthope, he used to live with her."

"He did!" The healer came up to her and looked her hard in the eye. "How the devil do you know that?"

"Why, I've seen him there, many's the time. I used to know the Madam well. Me and her was great friends. Why, I was there the day she died!"

"Were you? I never knew that."

"We used to call him Frankie, then. He didn't call himself Granthope at all. I expect he made that up."

"Is—that—*so*!" Masterson grinned joyously.

"Let's see—there was some money missing when the boy left, seems to me."

"Lord, yes, and a sight of money, too. Madam Grant was a grand miser. They say she had a fortune stowed away in the dirt on the floor. She run a real estate business, you know, and she done well by it. I expect that's where Frankie got his start. Strange I never seen him afore."

"You're positively sure it's the same one?"

”Didn’t I stare hard enough at him? Why, just as soon as I come in the door I says to myself, ’I’ve seen you before, young man!’ Then when you called him Frank, it all come back to me. I’ll take my oath to it.”

”Lord, I could kick myself!” said Masterson. ”To think of all these years I’ve known him and ain’t suspected who he was!”

”You won’t give me away, then, will you, Doctor?” the old lady added tearfully.

”I’ll see, I’ll see.” He returned to his medicine, thinking hard.

He proceeded with his treatment of Mrs. Riley, plying her all the while with questions relative to Francis Granthope and Madam Grant. Mrs. Riley knew little, but she embroidered upon what she had seen and heard till, at the end, she had fabricated a considerable history. Her fancy, under fear of the healer’s threats, was given free rein; and Masterson listened so hungrily, that, had there been no other inducement, her pleasure in that alone would have made her garrulous. She went away feeling important.

That afternoon, Doctor Masterson, loaded and primed with his secret, took his rusty silk hat and a Chinese carved bamboo cane and walked proudly up Turk Street to hold Professor Vixley up for what was possible.

The Professor welcomed him with a show of politeness.

”How’s Madam Spoll?” was Masterson’s first question, after he had spread his legs in the front room.

”Gertie’s pretty bad,” said Vixley. ”The doctors don’t hold out much hope, but you know the way they linger with a burn. I wonder could you do anything for her?”

”I ain’t any too willing, after the way she treated me last time I was here,” said the healer coldly. ”I ain’t never been talked to so in my life!”

”Oh, you don’t want to mind a little thing like that, Doc, it was only her way. Business is business, you know. Besides, if Gertie *should* be took from us it may make a good deal of difference, after all. I don’t just know what I’ll do.”

”I tell you what you’ll do,” said Masterson, gazing through his spectacles aggressively, ”you’ll take me into partnership, that’s what you’ll do!”

”Oh, I will, will I? I ain’t so sure about that, Doc. Don’t go too fast; Gertie ain’t dead yet.”

”I rather think I can make it an object to you, Vixley. I may go so far as to say I *know* I can.” Masterson leaned back and noted the effect of his words.

Vixley looked at him curiously and raised his eyebrows. ”Is that so? I didn’t know as you was in a position to dictate to me, Doc, but maybe you are—you never can tell!”

”I can just everlastingly saw you off with Payson if I want to; that’s what I can do!” Masterson rubbed in.

”How?”

”Through something I found out to-day, that’s how.”

”I guess I could call that bluff on you, Masterson, if I wanted to. We got him sewed up in a sack. You can’t touch us there.”

”Lord, I can blow you sky-high!” He arose and made as if to walk to the door. ”And, by the Lord Harry, I’ll do it, too! I’ve given you a fair chance, you remember that!”

Vixley took water hastily. ”Oh, see here, Doc, don’t go to work and be hasty! You know it was only Gertie who wanted to freeze you out. I don’t say it’s impossible to make a deal, only I don’t want to buy a pig in a poke, do I? I can’t talk business till I know what you have to offer.”

”Oh, you’ll find I can make good all right,” said Masterson, returning to his seat with his hat on the back of his head. ”See here; as I understand it, you’re working Payson on the strength of something about this Felicia Grant, he was supposed to be sweet on. Is that right?”

”Well, suppose we are, just for the sake of the argument. What then?”

”Now, they was a little boy living with her, and he disappeared. Am I right?”

”You got it about right; yes.” Vixley’s eyes sparkled.

”Well, then; what if I know who that boy was, and where he is now? How would that strike you?”

”Jimminy! Do you?” Vixley cried, now fairly aroused. ”I don’t deny that might make considerable difference.”

”I should say it would! I should imagine yes! Why, you simply can’t do nothing at all till you know who he is, and what he knows! And I got him! Yes, sir, I got him!”

”Who is he?” Vixley asked, with a fine assumption of innocence.

Masterson laughed aloud. ”Don’t you wish’t you knew?” he taunted. ”I’ll let you know as soon as we come to an agreement. What d’you think about that partnership proposition now?”

”Good Lord, ain’t I told you all along I was willin’? It was only Gertie prevented me takin’ you in before! Sure! I’m for it. Gertie’s in a bad way, and I doubt if she’ll be able to do anything for a long time, even if she should recover. Meanwhile, of course, I got to live. It won’t do to let Payson slip through our fingers. Let’s shake on it, Doc; I’m with you. You help me out, and we’ll share and share alike.”

”Done!” said Masterson. ”I kind of thought I could make you listen to reason. Now you can tell me just how the land lays with Payson.”

”Wait a minute! You ain’t told me who the kid is, yet.”

Masterson hesitated a moment, unwilling to give up his secret till he had bound the bargain, but it was, of course, obviously necessary. He leaned toward

his new partner and touched Vixley on the knee. ”It’s Frank Granthope!”

Vixley jumped to his feet and raised his two fists wildly above his head, then dropped them limply to his side. ”*Granthope!*” he cried. ”My God! Are you sure?”

”Positive. Mrs. Riley recognized him to-day at my office. She used to know Madam Grant, and see him down there when he was a kid. Why? What’s wrong about that?”

”Hell!” Vixley cried in a fury. ”It’s all up with us, then!”

”Why, what can Granthope do?”

”Do? He can cook our goose in half a minute. And if Payson finds this out, it’s all up in a hurry.”

”I don’t see it yet,” Masterson complained.

”Why, here it is in a nutshell. Payson has an illegitimate son by Madam Grant—he’s all but confessed it, and we’re sure of it. We had it all fixed up to palm off Ringa on him for the missing heir—see? They was big money in it, if it worked. But let Granthope get wind of the game, and he’ll walk in himself as the prodigal son, and we’re up a tree. He’s thick with the Payson girl already, and unless we fix him, he’ll make trouble. If we could only keep Payson from findin’ out who Granthope is, and if we could keep Granthope from findin’ out that Payson had a son, we might make it yet, but it’s a slim chance now.”

”It is a mess, ain’t it?” said Masterson, scratching his head, and studying the pattern on the carpet. ”Of course this son business puts a different face on it for me. But perhaps we can pull it off yet. Have you seen Payson to-day?”

”No—and there’s another snag. Did you see the paper this mornin’? The reporters have been around to-day, and I’m afraid they’s going to be trouble about that materializin’ séance. If they print any more, I’ll have to pack up and get out of town till it blows over. What in the world made Payson suspect anything, I don’t know! Fancy done her part all right. But I ain’t afraid of that. We can get him back on the hook again all right. All we got to do is to lay the fakin’ on to Flora, and she’ll stand for it. What I want to do next is to develop him.”

”Yes, I see you got one of them mirrors over there,” said Masterson, going up to it inquisitively. ”It’s slick, ain’t it? Let’s have a look at it!”

Vixley sprang in front of him and held his arm. ”For God’s sake, don’t touch it! Don’t touch it!” he cried fearfully. ”Leave it alone. I don’t want it started. I can’t stand the damned thing! I’m going to use crystal balls instead. That thing gets on my nerves too bad.”

Masterson, surprised, turned away. ”What did you get it for, anyway? I should think you’d got ’em again, by the way you talk.”

”There’s bad luck in it. I’m going to send it away. I’m afraid of it, somehow.”

Masterson laughed, and resumed his seat, to discuss with the Professor the

details of the plot. He did not seem much interested in the plans for the future, however, and seemed anxious to get away, yawning occasionally. He was now smug and confident, while Vixley seemed to have lost his nerve. The threatened newspaper revelations had cowed him. Madam Spoll was left out of the discussion; it was evident that her part of the affair was finished. Masterson left, promising his assistance if matters quieted down, and Payson could be brought under their influence again.

By dinner-time he had thought the matter over to his satisfaction, and he therefore enjoyed himself with beer and cheap vaudeville till half-past ten. Then he strolled down Geary Street and marched up to Granthope's office.

It had taken all Granthope's resolution to treat with Masterson, but it had seemed the only way, at present, to deal with the situation. Mr. Payson's part in the materializing séance had not yet transpired.

Masterson took a chair, crossed his legs and began:

"Well, Frank, I've been thinking over your proposition to-day, and I've decided that I've got to raise the ante."

"I thought that would be about your style," Granthope returned, "but I think I've offered you about all it's worth."

"Oh, it ain't only my help that's worth it, it's you that's worth it, so to speak. I'm getting on to your game, now, and I happen to know that you can afford to pay well; you see, I didn't happen to know so much about this Payson girl, as I do now. If you're tapping a millionaire's family, why, I want my share of it."

"I guess there's no use discussing the matter, then, if that's your theory. I can't possibly pay more than what I've offered."

"I'd advise you to hear me out, Frank," Masterson went on. "I said you could pay more, but I didn't say what I had to offer wasn't worth more, did I?"

"Why is it worth more now than it was this forenoon?" Granthope asked impatiently.

"It's worth more, because I've seen Vixley, and I've found out things that it's for your interest to know. I'm on the inside, now, and I'm prepared to make a better bargain."

"I see; you've sold me out, and now you want to turn over and sell Vixley out for a raise? I might have guessed that!" He turned to his desk in disgust.

"I don't care what you think. I ain't discussing high moral principles. I'm here to make a living in the quickest and most practical way. If you don't care to hear what I've got to say, I'll leave."

"How do I know you've got anything of value to me? Why should I trust you?"

"You can't expect me to tell you, and then leave it to you to make a satis-

factory price, can you?"

"Oh, I don't care what you've learned. We'll call it all off." Granthope rose, as if to end the interview.

Masterson seeing his caution had gone too far became more eager. "Let's talk this thing out, Frank, man to man. Suppose I tell you half of it, and let you see whether it's as important as I say. Then we'll have a basis to figure on."

"All right, but make it brief. I'm getting sick of the business." He sat down, tilted back in his chair and waited, gazing at the ceiling.

Masterson spoke crisply, now. "Suppose I tell you that Payson has confessed that he has a son?" He shifted his cigar in his mouth and watched the bolt fall.

As the words came out, Granthope's face, which had shown only a contemptuous, bored expression, changed instantaneously. It was, for a moment, as if a sponge had been passed over it, obliterating all signs of intelligence, leaving it to blank, hopeless bewilderment. Then his mind leaped to its inevitable conclusion, the whole thing came to him in a sudden revelation; a dozen unnoticed details jumped together to form the pattern, and there it was, a problem solved: horror and despair. He was Clytie's half-brother! He sat enthralled by it for a moment—he forgot the leering scoundrel in front of him—he saw only Clytie—inaccessible for ever.

Then, still without a word, he rose like one in a dream, sought for his hat, went out the door, and ran down-stairs. As in a dream, too, Masterson's astonished, entreating, indignant exclamations followed him, echoing down the hall. Granthope paid no attention, he had no thought but for Clytie—to see her immediately, at any cost.

He swung aboard an O'Farrell Street car, found a seat in the corner of the open "dummy" portion, and strove with the tumult in his soul. The torturing thought of Clytie for ever lost to him coiled and uncoiled like a serpent. He did not doubt Masterson's revelation, nor could he doubt its obvious interpretation in the light of the many revelations that had been cast upon Mr. Payson's past. Yet it must be corroborated before he could wholly abandon himself to renunciation. He tried to keep from hoping.

He was Clytie's half-brother! His mind wrestled with it.

The car filled at the Orpheum Theater, taking on a load of merry passengers, who crowded the seats inside and out till the aisles and footboards were packed. The bell clanged as they drove through the Tenderloin, rolled round the curve into Jones Street and took the steep hill, climbing without slackening speed. It rounded two more corners, wheels creaking; and as it passed, the broad area

of the Mission and South San Francisco was for a moment revealed in the gap of Hyde Street, a valley of darkness, far below, gorgeously set out with lights, like strings and patterns of jewels. At California Street a crowd of passengers, mostly Jews, overdressed, prosperous, exuberant, transferred for the Western Addition. The car went up and up, reached the summit and coasted down the dip to Pacific Street. Another rise to Union Street, where another line transferred more passengers towards the Presidio. Then, with only one or two inside, and the conductor lazily picking his teeth on the back platform, they climbed again up to the reservoir. Here a long incline fell giddily to the water and the North Beach. The car rolled to the crest, ducked fearfully, and boldly descended the slope.

He was Clytie's half-brother! The thought of it was darker than the night about him.

Ahead, the black stretch of water, the flash of the light on Alcatraz, and a misty constellation in the direction of Sausalito. To the left, a huge shoulder of Russian Hill swept back from the northern harbor in a wave toward the south. It was sprinkled with artificial stars—the gas-lamps, electric lights, and illuminated windows of the town. One street, directly opposite, was a line of topaz brilliants, loosely strung, scattering over the hill. Fort Point light, two miles away, flared alternately a dash of pale yellow—and short pin-pricks of red. Farther away, Point Bonita was flaming, regular as a clock, a periodic spasm of diamond radiance. Electric cars, like lighted lanterns, were painfully climbing the Fillmore Street hill. All about was a sparse settlement of wooden houses, thickening as it rose to the palaces of Pacific Avenue crowning the summit. A dark space of grass and trees lay ahead—the Black Point Military Reservation—the bugles were calling through the night.

It was past eleven o'clock when Granthope ran up the steps into the Paysons' front garden, walked rapidly up the path and stood for a moment outside the door. There was a light in Clytie's workroom; he threw a handful of gravel against the pane, and waited.

The curtain was drawn aside, the window raised, and Clytie looked out boldly. She saw him, waved her hand, and disappeared. A few moments later she opened the front door quietly. She wore a soft, clinging, blue silk peignoir; her arms were half bare, and her tawny hair was braided for the night. She came out with a look of alarm.

"Oh, Francis, what is it?"

"Did I frighten you, dear?"

"Oh, I knew it was you, immediately. But what has happened to bring you here?"

"Is your father at home?"

"No—he may be back at any moment, though. But come in!"

He removed his hand from hers resolutely, though her touch thrilled him with delight. ”Wait!” he commanded. ”First, can you get the keys to that trunk?”

”Trunk?” she questioned, puzzled.

”Yes, the trunk you told me about—with the wedding-clothes in it—I must see it!”

”Now?” she asked wonderingly.

”Yes, immediately. Please do as I say, and don’t ask why, yet. Everything depends upon it. Hurry, before your father comes!”

The unusual air of command brought her to her senses. She went into the house. ”Wait here in the hall; I’ll get a light.”

She was gone but a moment, and returned with a candle in a brass candlestick. Then, without a word, she led the way up the stairs. They passed silently through an upper hall where an open door revealed a glimpse of her bed-chamber, all in white, as exquisitely kept as a hospital ward. Here she left him to get her father’s keys. They came to a flight of steps, leading upward. She waited for him to go first and lift the trap-door at the top. When he had disappeared into the gloom above, she followed him, handed up the candlestick and took his hand to a place beside him.

The garret stretched the full length of this wing of the house. At the far end a dim light came through a gable window, in front of which the bough of a tree waved. The candle cast wavering, widening shadows of the rafters against the sloping roof, and picked out with its light the rows of trunks, boxes and pieces of furniture on either side of the floor. It was damp and cold; there was a musty odor of old books.

She led the way to the end, where, under the window a large, black trunk stood upon the floor. Granthope’s heart leaped with hope. But, in another moment it stood still as death. She had handed him the key, and he had thrown open the lid. There, inside, was a smaller trunk, covered with cow-hide, with a rounded top and a lip of pinked leather, studded with brass nails. There were the letters, ”F.G.”

He needed but one look to recognize it as Madam Grant’s. But still, it was a common pattern of the old-fashioned ”hair trunk” and he must be sure. The lock had been broken, and no key was needed to open it. He threw open this lid, also. Clytie bent over him holding the candle, so near that she touched his shoulder. Neither had spoken.

There was the same collection of papers, letters and account-books, the same little mahogany box. How well he recalled his first sight of it all! How heavy that tray had seemed to him, as a child! Now he raised it with ease. Below, the same revelation of yellowing satin and old lace—even the same tissue paper, shredded to tatters, wrapped about the packages. The boxes of silk stockings and

handkerchiefs were there as well. He thought of the package of bills that had lain in one corner—he knew the place as well as if he still saw the money. Lastly, he groped for the white vellum prayer-book. He found it, and drew it out. Opening the cover, he looked once at the fly-leaf, then handed it silently to Clytie. Written there was the name "Felicia Gerard." He turned his face away from her.

She looked at the book and then at him, still bewildered.

"What does it mean, Francis? Tell me; I can't stand it a moment longer! This is Madam Grant's trunk, of course—I see that. But how came it here? Why should my father—"

She set the candle upon a box and put her arms tenderly about his neck, her face close to his, to soothe his agitation. Her smooth cheek against his was rapture. He could feel her body, warm and soft, through her thin peignoir, and the contact inflamed him. He unclasped her arms with a sudden violent gesture and sprang up in an agony of despair.

"Don't touch me!" he cried. "Never again!"

She looked at him, terrified at his tone. His panic passed in a wave from him to her, and was the more unbearable because she did not yet understand the cause of it.

"What is it? Tell me!" She faced him, and extended her hand.

He retreated from her.

"It's Mamsy's trunk," he said, trying to control his voice. "Oh, don't you see?"

"I'm too frightened to think!" she cried, clasping her hands. "I can't think. Tell me quickly, or I shall faint!"

"Doesn't your intuition tell you?" he asked bitterly. "Why should it fail you now, when it should be stronger than ever before?"

"It tells me nothing, except that you are killing me with suspense. Oh, but I know you are suffering, too! Let me share it. Francis, you don't doubt my love for you, whatever happens, do you?"

He caught her hand again and dashed it away.

"Oh, you should see!" he cried. "It's so plain, now! I am Madam Grant's son—and my father—is your father! I am your half-brother! It's all ended between us, now!"

"How do you know?" She was trembling. "How does this prove it? It is Felicia Grant's trunk, of course—but we knew already that my father had an interest in her—he must have bought this trunk at the auction when she died—but why does it prove you are his son? Why should you think that there was ever such a relation between them? It's horrible!"

"I found out to-night, an hour ago, that your father had a child by her—he has confessed it to Vixley and Madam Spoll. They got it out of him, somehow.

That's how they have got a hold on him—and who else should this child be but I, who lived with her? It accounts for his tenderness for these things, for his scrapbook, his going down to the Siskiyou Hotel—everything! Oh, it's certain! It is hopeless!"

She stood gazing at him, bewildered.

"If he had an illegitimate child it must be you, of course. But it is strange I never heard of that!"

"It was all so long ago—before you were born—that it happened. Madam Grant had no friends—except, perhaps, your mother—and it could have been kept a secret easily enough."

She gave a low moan and sank down upon a box limply. Her eyes were fixed on the candle flame; she seemed to be studying some possible way of escape. She looked up at him once, and then down again, for his eyes were desperate. He stood watching her, and for some time neither spoke. He put his hand to his head, stroking his hair over his ear mechanically, while his mind whirled. Below a door slammed. She rose, shaking back her hair, her eyes half-closed, her hands on her breast.

"I understand, now," she said slowly. "It must have been that which drew me to you at first. But if you are my brother, surely I have the more right to love you! Oh, Francis, I do love you! What does it matter how, so long as you are dear to me?" She rose, and put out her hand again, but, at the touch he shrank away from her.

"Oh, no, I can't stand that! It's all over, that tenderness. I can't trust myself with you. It's not a brother's love I feel for you. It's so much more that you will always be a fearful temptation to me."

"Can't you overcome that?" As she held the candle before her, her face had never appeared more noble; for a moment she seemed as far away from him as she had been at first, alone on spiritual heights to him inaccessible.

"Can you?" he asked.

She dropped her eyes. "If we had found this out before, it would have been easier."

"Ah, if we only had! Then you would have come into my life as a sister. How proud I would have been of you! How grateful for all you have done for me! But it is too late, now, to accept you on such terms. I have kissed you—not as a brother kisses his sister. I can never get that desire out of my blood!"

She shuddered and turned away from him. "Yes, you are right, I know. I am a woman, now; you have awakened me. There is nothing for us to do but part. It is hideous to be the playthings of fate."

"Well," he said grimly, "if I have made you a woman, you have made me a man! I can at least live cleanly and self-respectingly. Of course I can't see you

again—not, at least, for a long time—not till we get over this—"

She looked up with the veriest shadow of a smile. "Oh, I shall not get over it! There is no chance of that! Right or wrong, I shall always feel the same toward you, always long for you. Isn't that a fearful confession? Yet, how can I help it?"

"Then it is for me to protect you all the more. I can live so that you need not be ashamed of me. But not near you."

She sat down again. Her head drooped like a heavy flower, her hands fell listlessly into her lap. A sudden draft distracted the candle and sent her shadow, distorted, to and fro upon the roof. Then footsteps were heard on the floor below, and a door slammed again. She looked up to say:

"Father has come home. Shall we tell him, now?"

[image]

Her head drooped like a heavy flower

"Must we?"

"I would rather wait. I can't stand anything more, yet. I want to think it out. I am too puzzled and I am fighting against this too hard, now. Let me get hold of myself first. Perhaps we can get down without his hearing us, if we wait a little while. He has gone to his room."

"That's the best way, if we can. There'll be a scene—and I am not ready for that, either. I will tell him later—or you may."

"No, it should be you. How can I talk to him?"

"I can't tell how he'll take it. I'm sure, now, that he has been looking for me—for Madam Grant's child—for some time, and Vixley was undoubtedly leading him on, promising to find his son. But now, when he knows it is I, after the way he has treated me, how will he feel?"

"Oh, be sure he will be kind!"

"It doesn't matter much. I shall not trouble him. I shall go away, of course."

"Oh, I can't bear it! I *can't* give you up! Oh, I'm sure it isn't right. I can't believe it, even yet!"

"Let's go down!" he said sharply. "I can't stand it any longer. My blood cries out for you! When I think that I have held you in my arms—"

"Yes, come! Don't speak like that or I shall forget everything else."

He took the candle and lighted her down the steps, then followed her quietly. Together they crept along the hall and down the stairway to the lower hall. As they got there, the cuckoo-clock hiccoughed, five minutes before the hour.

She stood for a moment looking at him, her eyes burning. Her peignoir fell

in long, graceful lines, suggesting her gracile figure. One braid had fallen over her shoulder across her breast to below her waist. Her beauty smote his senses.

"To-morrow is Saturday," he said. "I shall come up to see your father in the afternoon. You had better be away, if you can."

"I shall be away," she said dully.

"I'll have it out with him—settle it beyond all doubt, and then—"

"And then?"

"I shall try to show you what you have made of me. I shall not see you till we have conquered this thing!"

"Oh, Francis, if I could only feel that it is wrong—but I *can't*. It seems so right, so natural. I shall not change. I have given myself to you, and I can not take myself back. If there is fighting against it to be done, you must do it for both of us. You must decide."

"I shall take care of you, Clytie. That will be my brother's duty."

"Yes," she said, drooping, "you must help me, I can't help you any more. I have done what I can, but you have passed me now, and you are the master."

"I must begin now, then, and go. Good-by!"

She gave him her hands, and he took them for a moment, then flung himself away before their delicacy could work on him. With a sudden smile, he turned to the door and was gone.

She stood, limp and weak, watching him till the door closed. Then the cuckoo-clock broke the silence with its interminable midnight clatter, persistent, maddening.

CHAPTER XXI
THE SUNRISE

Clytie met her father, next morning, showing no trace of what she had suffered during the night. He himself had enough to think about without noticing her demeanor.

On Saturday the papers had, after considerable investigation of the matter, called public attention to the doings of spiritualistic mediums in San Francisco, and were full of exposures. Vixley's record was given, and it was sensational enough to make it advisable for the Professor to leave town till the scandal blew over. Flora Flint was reported to have fled at the same time, and, it was pre-

sumed, in the same direction. Other mediums not concerned in this affair were interviewed, and pseudo-confessions extorted from their dupes. The Spiritualistic Society protested in vain that none of the mediums exposed had ever been in good standing with that body of true believers—the wave of gossip drowned its voice. San Francisco was the largest spiritualistic community in the United States, probably in the world, but, for a while at least, it would be less easy for clairvoyants and psychometrists to earn a living. This outburst was one of the periodic upheavals of reform, but the talk would soon die down and business would be resumed in perfect safety by the charlatans. There would be a new crop of dupes to cajole.

Clytie and her father both avoided the subject. Breakfast passed silently, and at nine o'clock Mr. Payson left the house. Clytie went about her work automatically; answered a few letters, listlessly rearranged her jewelry in its casket, sorted the leaves of a book she had taken apart to rebind, cut the pages of a magazine, set her tools in order on the bench. From time to time she went to the front window to look out, returning to stand for minutes at a time in the center of the room, as if she had forgotten what she had intended to do. At ten o'clock she lay down upon the couch in the library and fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion, the first rest she had obtained since midnight.

She was awakened by the door-bell, and had barely time to hurry into her chamber before the door was answered. There, word was brought to her that Mr. Cayley wished to see her. She bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, put on her Chinese *sa'am*, and a jade necklace over her house-frock and went down to him. Her face was resolutely set, her eyes had a cold luster.

"How d'you do, Blan?" she said, holding out her hand to him. "I'm so glad to see you!"

It was a warmer greeting than he had received for some time, but he did not appear surprised. He drew off his gloves, looking admiringly at her.

"I didn't feel like work, to-day, so I thought I would run out and see you."

"You certainly are devoted! I shall have to reward you by being very nice."

He smiled. "I'm glad you're beginning to appreciate me."

"Meaning that in the dictionary sense of the word, or the common interpretation?" she said, seating herself.

"Both. They're the same, in my case. If I had suspected that you were going to be so amiable—"

"I'm always ready to be that—if you'll let me."

This was enough unlike her ordinary manner toward him to make him give her a look-over for an explanation. "All right, I'll take you up," he said. "Just how amiable are you prepared to be?" He sat down opposite her.

"That's for you to find out!"

”Well. I’ll try to discover the line of least resistance.”

”Oh, you needn’t be so elaborate, Blanchard. You never really need more than half the subtlety you waste on me. I’m quite a simple person!”

”Still waters—” he began.

She lifted her shoulders and her brows.

”Run cold!” he finished, and caught a smile.

”I wonder if I *am* cold!” she said.

”Granthope didn’t succeed in firing you?”

She showed no evidence of pain except that the two lines appeared in her forehead suddenly. Then she shook her head as if to cast off some annoyance.

”Oh, you’re quite off the track, there. Don’t make it harder for yourself than necessary. What did you come to-day for? Tell me!”

He laughed comfortably and said, ”Reconnaissance.”

”I thought there was a reason. Well, reconnoiter away! Your precautions are infinite!” Her chin went up.

”That’s one of the qualities of genius, I believe. I think in the end I shall justify my system.”

”You haven’t produced any psychological condition yet, then?” She looked at him with her eyebrows raised. No smile.

”Not quite.”

”Hasn’t it ever occurred to you that”—her eyes sought his with a quick glance, and drifted away—”that such a condition—might come without your having produced it yourself? Accidentally, so to speak?”

”I confess I haven’t been modest enough to anticipate that.”

”I thought you were a diagnostician, as well as a physician!” She threw another quick look at him, withdrawing her eyes immediately.

”Prognosis is my specialty.”

”Oh, I shall take care of myself.”

”There’s no defense like a vigorous attack.”

”I’m not going after you,” she protested.

”But *is* there a psychological condition, Cly?”

”That’s not fair. You ought to be able to tell, yourself—it’s your own theory. The trouble is that you’re too theoretical. You’ve left me quite out of the question and tried to do it all yourself.”

She put her head on one side with unaccustomed coquetry. There was a new glitter in her eyes which seemed to baffle him. For the first time she had the upper hand of him at his own game. He was like a man who had started to lift a heavy weight and had suddenly found it unexpectedly light. The reaction threw him over.

”Are you willing to help?” he asked.

”Ah, if you had only begun that way!”

”Clytie—do you mean—”

”Oh, I don’t mean anything.” She got up and took a turn about the room restlessly as she spoke. ”It’s my turn to be theoretical, that’s all.”

He leaned toward her very seriously. ”Clytie, I’m terribly in earnest.”

”I’d like more proof of it.”

”Would you? What proof can I give?”

”There you are on the other side, now, making me do more than my share. I don’t intend to teach you, you know!” She walked away, her hands behind her back.

”Could you, if you wanted to?”

”Oh, I think I might show you a few things. I have my ideas—most women have, you know. Perhaps I’m not quite so cold as you think.” She shut her eyes a moment and trembled. ”But there’s plenty of time.”

He let that go, gazing with curiosity at the spots of red on her cheeks. It was not a blush; the color was sustained. She never looked at him steadily, giving him only a flashing glance, now and again. Her nostrils were expanded, her head was held majestically erect. There was, indeed, plenty of time for him, and he took it coolly. He betrayed still a puzzled interest—that of a hunter whose quarry was fluttering so that he could not get in his shot.

”You’re looking very beautiful, to-day, Cly.”

”To-day?” She emphasized the word.

He laughed. ”That’s the time I put the mucilage brush in the ink-bottle! Queer how hard it is to give a girl a compliment that she’ll accept.”

”I beg pardon—it was ungracious of me. Try me again.”

”No, I was clumsy. But compliments aren’t my business. I’m not a palmist, you see.”

Again she drew back her head with a shake. ”I think I told you that Mr. Granthope is my friend?” Her voice trembled a little.

She walked to the fireplace and stood there, leaning her back against the mantel, tapping her heel against the fender.

”I told you he wouldn’t last long,” Cayley went on. ”He’s come down like the stick of a rocket. I suspected he’d be leaving town before the month was out.”

”Leaving town—what d’you mean?” She was keen, now.

”I had to go up into the Geary Building this morning, and I saw his boxes outside the door as I passed. I took it that he’s leaving. You ought to know, I should think—if he’s your friend!”

She walked up to the window and back before answering. Then she came up to him with:

”You needn’t be afraid, Blanchard; I’m not going to elope with him.”

”That’s good. It gives you a chance to elope with me!”

”Oh, it’s all planned, then? How exciting!”

”I was invited up to the tavern on Tamalpais and bring a girl for over Sunday. Mrs. Page is the chaperon—she calls it a ’sunrise party.’ Will you come?”

She lifted her eyebrows. ”Mrs. Page? Chaperon?”

He smiled. ”Oh, you needn’t worry; she’s all right. Not exactly your class, but you needn’t mind that—you’ll make it proper by going yourself!”

”You really want me to go—with Mrs. Page?”

”Why not?”

”It sounds a bit gay—you know I’m not exactly accustomed to that sort of thing—”

”You mustn’t believe the stories you hear of her.”

”I’ll go—and find out!” she exclaimed suddenly. ”Yes, I’ll go; what time does the boat go?” Her mood had grown almost eager.

”We can just catch the one forty-five. I’ll ring them up and let them know we’re coming.”

”No—I want to see her face when she first sees me. Mrs. Page!” she laughed to herself grimly.

”Cly, what’s the matter with you to-day?” he demanded, turning upon her suspiciously.

She opened her eyes very wide. ”Why?”

”Oh, you’re different.”

”So are you!” Another quick glance at him.

”How?”

”Nicer.” How she drew the word out!

”Really?”

”Why, you’re actually letting me go with Mrs. Page. You never would, before.” She laughed in his face, but the ring sounded metallic.

”Oh, well—I didn’t think you wanted to. I didn’t think you and she would—get on.”

”Oh, you’ll see how we’ll get on! Blanchard, you never suspected I had any spirit, I suppose?”

”Where did you get it?”

”Guess!”

He dared not; but appeared to take the credit to himself. He began actually to take fire. Clytie was a revelation in this tantalizing mood. Where had her classic reserves gone? What had inspired her? Now she was like other girls—most alluringly like those he had ”educated.” Perhaps, after all, women were all alike, as he had long maintained, in theory. All this was evident in his pursuit of her—but even now it was a cautious chase. He made sure of every foot of the

way.

"I wish we weren't old friends," he said. "It is a handicap, isn't it? If I didn't know you so well—"

"Oh, I'll show you things you never knew!" she interrupted, playing up harder and harder. "Don't be afraid of my resources. I have a trick or two up my sleeve. We'll forget we were friends and get acquainted all over. Come, be a Martian—burst a new brain cell, as I have!" She gave another dry laugh.

"It will be dangerous," he warned.

"Pooh!" She snapped her fingers at him.

He seized her hand and tried to hold it.

"Not yet!" she said, and shook her finger fantastically.

So, like a wounded bird, she lured him away from her nest. The luncheon-bell rescued her. She could not have lasted much longer. During the luncheon, she kept him skilfully at arm's length, and before they had finished, Mr. Payson came in and surprised them—and himself.

When Clytie went up-stairs to prepare for the trip he put his hand cordially on Cayley's shoulder.

"Well, I'm glad to see you and Clytie on such good terms. It looks like old times."

"I think perhaps the modern method is going to succeed," Cayley said with a satisfied smile. "Cly's been nicer than she has been for weeks. I hear Granthope's disposed of."

"Oh, I guess I finished him. I gave him a piece of my mind, and her, too. Cly's got too much sense not to see through him. I hope you'll win her, Blanchard. I'm getting to be an old man, and I want to see her happily settled. This exposure has hit me pretty hard, and if Clytie had taken up with that palmist on top of that, I don't know what I'd do. Go in and get her, Blanchard—I'm glad she's consented to go off on this trip. It'll do her good. It ought to give you a good chance."

"You can trust me for that! I think the time has about come to force the game. I may have something to say to you by the time we come back."

"I hope so, indeed!" said the old man.

Clytie came down with her bag and kissed her father affectionately. "Are you going to be at home this afternoon?" she asked him.

"Why, yes, I thought of it. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She hesitated. "N-no, only if any one should call—never mind—only there's no knowing when we may be back," she added, looking at Cayley. "Blanchard has threatened to elope with me, you know! I'm terribly afraid he won't keep his promise, though." She took his arm and ran him down the steps madly, tossing her father a kiss from the path.

Mr. Payson watched them complacently, as Clytie hurried her escort

through the gate. They had plenty of time to catch the boat, and her haste was unusual. She had hinted that the clock was slow, but his watch assured him that that was not so. He shook his head.

They had not been gone fifteen minutes when word was brought up-stairs to Mr. Payson that a gentleman was waiting to see him. The visitor would not give his name. The old man went down.

At sight of the caller, his face set hard and grim. His shaggy brows drew over his spectacles. He stopped suddenly, but, before he could speak, Granthope had come forward.

"I must beg your pardon, Mr. Payson, for not sending up my name, for coming here at all, in fact; but it is absolutely necessary for me to see you this afternoon. My business is important enough to be its own apology."

"Sit down, sir!" said the old man, taking a chair himself, and speaking with deliberation. "I will listen to what you have to say, but let it be brief. After our last interview it must be important, indeed, to bring you to my house after my expressed request that you should stay away."

Granthope remained standing. "It is an extraordinary thing that has brought me; but if it were not as important to you as it is to me, you may be sure I wouldn't have consented to come."

"Let me say right here, young man, that I suspect your business is nothing more or less than blackmail, in some form. It is what I expected. But I tell you in advance that it will be no use, and, at the first hint of extortion, I shall notify the police!"

Granthope smiled. "I could hardly call it blackmail," he said. "I've never included that in my list of tricks."

"What the devil is it, then? Out with it! If it's bad news, let me have it point-blank, without beating about the bush. I have seen enough of your sort to know that you wouldn't come here except for money, whatever you say. But I'm a little wiser than I was three months ago, I can tell you! I've had my lesson, and you'll get nothing out of me." He grew more and more excited over his grievance.

"You remember that I warned you against that gang?" Granthope interposed.

"Yes, and they warned me against you, too! Birds of a feather! Only I suspect you of being a little shrewder."

"Mr. Payson," Granthope said earnestly, "I can't bear these insinuations! Give me a chance, at least, before you condemn me. I'll tell you in four words what I came for, before you say anything more that you will have to regret. I have good reason to believe that I am your son!"

The old man rose from his chair and shook his finger in Granthope's face. "That's all I want to hear!" he thundered. "Leave my house immediately, sir!

My son, are you? I thought so! Good God, wasn't it enough for Vixley and the Spoll woman to try and work that game on me, that you have to come and begin where they left off? After I had found them out, too! Do you take me for a damned fool? Why, you people don't even know when you're shown up! You get out of my house before I kick you out!" He strode to the door, lowering, and held it suggestively open.

Granthope stared at him in astonishment, with no thought of moving. This was the last thing he had expected. At first his surprise was too great for his hopes to rise. He thought of nothing but the angry man in front of him, wondering why he should deny the truth so vindictively.

"Do you mean to say that I am *not* your son?" he said, with a queer perplexed hesitation.

"I ask you to leave my house, sir! Do you think I'll permit myself to discuss such a subject with you?" Mr. Payson's scorn was towering.

Granthope still stared. What did it mean? He spoke again, earnestly, trying his best to keep calm. "Do you deny that you have a son, sir? I beg you to answer me."

"What the devil should I deny it for? What business is it of yours?" the old man roared. "Why should you come here asking me such outrageous questions?"

"Mr. Payson," Granthope tried again, "I told you that I had reason to believe that I am your son. You must admit that that gives me an interest in the matter. I have never known who my parents were. You needn't be afraid of my forcing myself upon you against your will, or attempting to get money from you—that is not my motive. But I have a right, for my own sake, to know the truth, and I demand that you answer!"

The old man quailed before his look and his seriousness, and began to be impressed with his sincerity. "Very well, then, I will answer you. No, sir, you are not my son, because I never had one, to my knowledge, at least. Does that satisfy you? Vixley and the Spoll woman tried that game on me and failed. Now, I'll ask you to leave me alone in peace. I have had trouble enough!" His first burst of anger having burned itself out, he weakened under the strain.

Granthope was for a moment at a loss for words. He was not prepared for this denial—he must begin all over again. He stood with his hands folded for a while, and then said:

"Very well, Mr. Payson. I will tell you now what I know, and you may judge of yourself whether or not I was justified in coming."

The old man's countenance was irresolute; his mouth had relaxed. He faced Granthope silently.

"Did you ever know Felicia Grant?" said Granthope next.

Mr. Payson exploded again. "Oh, you've got hold of that, have you? I

thought as much. So you've been in league with that gang all along! I see; all this pretended enmity was only a part of the game! Very, clever, sir, very clever!" He began to walk up and down, bobbing his head.

"I lived with Madam Grant when I was a child," Granthope persisted calmly.

"What's that?" Mr. Payson went up to him, now, and took him by the arm. "For God's sake, man, don't lie to me!"

"I lived with her for three years. I was with her when she died—"

"You!" the old man exclaimed. He stared into Granthope's face as if he could surprise the truth from him. "If I could be sure of that!" he cried in distress. "For God's sake, don't play with me!" he implored. "I have no faith in any one any more. How can I believe you?"

Granthope dropped his voice to a soothing pitch and took the old man's hand in his with a firm clasp of assurance. "My dear Mr. Payson," he said, "I can give you plenty of proof of it, if you will only listen to me. I came to her, where from I never knew, as a child of five. She took me in, and I lived with her till she died. She was like a mother to me—I would be glad to hear that she was really my mother, for I loved her. I have come to you because I thought that she must have been that, and you my father. But I would be the happiest man alive if you could assure me that there is no relationship between you and me. What I know of you, I found out through Masterson—and he may have lied, but it seemed probable that it was true. I beg you to tell me the truth, for if you are my father it means more to me than anything else in the world."

"I think I can believe you now," said Mr. Payson, still with his eyes fastened on Granthope. "You seem to be honest, though I have about lost my faith in human nature. So I will be honest with you. But I can only repeat what I told you before. You are not my son. I never had a son."

A wild hope sprang up in Granthope's heart; though as yet it seemed impossible. "But you knew Felicia Grant?"

"Yes, indeed; I knew her well."

"Your picture was in her room—an old newspaper cut—"

The old man grasped his hand again with both his own. "Ah, I know you are the boy, now!" he exclaimed. "I have looked everywhere for you! Thank God, I have found you before it was too late! Do you know how I have longed for you for twenty years?—for the boy who stood by Felicia through that long, terrible time, when I could do nothing—nothing? Granthope, I don't care *what* you have been—charlatan or fakir or criminal, there's a debt I owe you, and I shall pay it! Oh, you don't know! You don't know!" He stopped and held out his hands pathetically. "Why, it was to find you that I first went to Madam Spoll! I don't know how I can apologize or make up for the way I've treated you—you, of all men in the world!"

”But I can’t understand yet,” said Granthope, touched at the old man’s atonement. ”I heard—from Vixley, it came—that you had acknowledged—you must forgive me—to an illegitimate son. Can you blame me for thinking that it must be I?”

The old man dropped his head on his hand. ”I see, now,” he said drearily. ”Oh, it must all come out, I suppose. I owe it to you to tell you, at least.”

”You need tell me nothing more than you have told,” Granthope said eagerly. ”I didn’t come here to pry into your secrets, Mr. Payson, or to make use of them.”

”Oh, I know, now! But it is hard to speak. And I don’t know even whether I have the right to tell or not. It’s not my secret alone. But tell me first what else you know.” He took a chair again and motioned for Granthope to sit down.

”I know that Madam Grant had a wedding trousseau that she kept in a trunk, and that the same trunk with the same contents, is now up-stairs in your garret.”

”How can you know that?”

”I saw it last night. Your daughter showed it to me.”

”Clytie—she showed it to you? You were here? How could that be?”

”It means, Mr. Payson, that I love your daughter—that we love each other. There is no time to explain how that came about, now, but I hope to prove to you that I am worthy of her. We have met often since you forbade me to come here. We were tacitly engaged, when I got this information—that you had a child—and that Felicia Grant was the mother. There was only one solution of the mystery—that I was that child, and that Clytie and I were half-brother and sister. We had to be sure before we broke off our affair, and I came up here to identify the trunk she had seen. I had to tell her what I thought was the truth, and last night we parted—for ever. You may imagine now how I long to believe what you say, yet how impossible it seems!”

”Clytie knows—that I had a child, by Felicia?”

”I had to tell her—I could not let things go on—”

”Ah, now I see how Madam Spoll went astray—I confessed to a child—I wanted to find the boy—she thought the two were the same—she jumped to the conclusion that I had had a son.”

”And you had no son?” Granthope said, still mystified.

”No, I had a daughter. Do you see, now? I hoped to hide it from Clytie for ever. I thought I had hidden it successfully, and it was better for her, so. But now, if she knows so much, she must, of course, be told all. It is right that she should know. Poor child! But you knew Felicia—you know that she was no common woman—that ours could have been no common affair!”

”I know that well. And you needn’t fear for Clytie, Mr. Payson. I don’t

think it will be even a shock for her. It isn't as if she had known Mrs. Payson well."

The old man leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. "Ah, they were two wonderful women, Granthope! I could scarcely know which was the more so—which was the more magnanimous and true!" He was quiet a while, then he added: "Do you remember Felicia well?"

"No, not well. I was young then, and the memory has faded. But she seemed to be very beautiful to me, though her face would often grow suddenly strange. She was kind to me. She seemed to be extraordinarily well educated, too—different from any one else I have ever known."

Mr. Payson rose and saying, "Wait a moment, please!" left the room. He returned after a few minutes with a small photograph, faded with age, but still clear enough to portray the features of a beautiful woman, apparently of some twenty years or so. The face was frank and open, the eyes wide apart under level brows, looking directly out of the picture. The mouth was large, but well-formed. The face had a look of candor and serene earnestness that was engaging.

"That was taken in 1869, when I first knew her. You can see, perhaps, how I must have felt towards her. There is enough of Clytie in that face for that, I suppose. But I doubt if you are capable of the passion I had for that woman!"

As Granthope held the portrait in his hand, watching the face that grew every moment more familiar, the old man went on:

"I can tell you only the outline of the story now. Felicia Gerard, when I first knew her, was working with Mrs. Victoria Woodhull—a wonderful woman—have you ever heard of her?"

Granthope told him of the newspaper clipping Clytie had found, and how they had, in the library, looked up the history of Mrs. Woodhull, who had been a prominent figure in the East thirty years ago. It was more unusual, then, for women to compete with men in business affairs, but she, with her sister, had carried on a successful banking firm on Wall Street. What had interested Clytie most, however, were the stories of Mrs. Woodhull's early experience as a medium, and the fact that she had been calumniated, persecuted and ostracized on account of the false interpretation of her views upon social questions.

"You may imagine the effect that such a person would have upon such a spirited girl as Felicia," said Mr. Payson. "She was carried away with her enthusiasm and energy, and the conflict inspired her. I followed them from city to city, urging Felicia to marry me, but, having adopted the radical social theories of that cult, she was firm in her refusal not to bind herself or me to an indissoluble union. Well, I could get her in no other way than by accepting her as a partner who should be free to leave me the moment she ceased to love me; you may be sure that her action was inspired only by the highest ideality. We settled

finally in New Orleans where, for some time, we were absolutely happy. But New Orleans was, and is, I believe, a more conservative sort of community than most American cities. People shunned us, and talked. At last, isolated and away from radical centers, she consented to a marriage ceremony, and went to work to prepare her trousseau. We were to be married in San Francisco."

The old man's face had grown wistful and tender as he spoke. He pulled off his spectacles to wipe them, and looked up at Granthope with a sort of pride in the story, in the beauty and pathos of it evoked by his memories. Then he rose, and walked up and down the floor, his hands behind his back, and his mellow, unctuous voice ran on. To Granthope, who had known the woman, and loved her, the story thrilled with romance.

"It was curious that she insisted upon a formal wedding. It was a reaction, I suppose; she had returned to the normal instincts of womanhood. I was only too willing. Well, it was in New Orleans that the crisis came. We were living in an old Creole house on Royal Street—it had been Paul Morphy's, the chess-player—Felicia saw his spirit in the end room, where he died, one night. There was an old gallery around the courtyard and garden, with magnolia trees, where we used to sit in the evenings. Heavens! what nights we have spent there!

"She had told me that her grandmother had been insane. It was Felicia's horror, her dread. The spirits had told her that she would go mad, too. That was, I suppose, the real reason why she had refused so long to marry me. But she had almost forgotten about it by this time. We were happy enough to forget everything!

"Are you interested, Granthope, or does this bore you?" he added suddenly, turning. "I'm an old man, after all, and I have an old man's ways. The past is very real to me."

"Go on, please!" said Granthope huskily.

"It happened just before Mardi Gras. We had decided to stay over, and see the fun. That Monday, when I came home, Felicia was gone. She had left a note, saying that she would never see me again—I'll show you that—and a lot of other things; they will help you to understand Clytie. It seems that day she had gone suddenly out of her head and had wandered across the street to another house, where they kept a leper girl shut up in a room on the gallery. They carried her home, raving rather wildly, and she came to her senses in an hour or so, but she was terrified by the attack. She saw that she would probably be subject to such attacks in the future; that they might become worse; that it was not fair to me to marry. I don't need to tell you, I hope, that it would have made no difference to me—I would have been glad to give my life to attending to her through thick and thin. But she didn't wait to put it to me. She left, with all her clothes, even the trousseau. She left no address, nothing by which I could trace her. That was her

way, the only fair way, she thought. It must have taken some courage. It was, I think, the bravest thing I ever saw done.

"Let me see that photograph a minute, Granthope. What a lot of hair she had! I've seen it to her feet. Cly has fine hair, but not like her mother's. The same eyes, you see—full of dreams, but they wake up, sometimes, I tell you! You may find out, sometime. Level brows and a fullish lower lip. Do you know what that means? I do.

"I didn't see her again for over a year. I hunted everywhere she had ever been; Boston, Toledo, New York, everywhere! Finally I gave it up in despair, and went abroad, trying to forget part of it. There I met my wife. I married her in sheer despair; but I found out how fine she was when I told her the story. I didn't think that there were two such women in the world! I have a beautiful painting of her, done while we were in Florence, but I never dared to put it up, on account of Clytie. It didn't seem right. But you'll see it in the dining-room to-morrow, I think.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. We came to San Francisco for business reasons. Before I had been here a week I happened upon Felicia down-town—she had followed Mrs. Woodhull's example and had gone into business herself—real estate. She did well at it, too. But at sight of me she flew off the handle. Every time I saw her it affected her in the same way. Good God! Can you imagine what it must be to know that the only way you can help a woman you love and pity is to stay away from her? I couldn't do anything, but my wife went to see her and seemed to be able to pacify her. She found out that Felicia had a child—then a few months old. The first I knew of it, the baby was here in the house, and my wife told me that we would adopt her. No one ever knew that Clytie wasn't our own child. No one knows but you and I, to this day, I think.

"It was a fearful injustice to her, I suppose. Do you think she can forgive me?" The old man was pathetically humble and looked to the young man as to a guardian.

"Mr. Payson," said Granthope, "have you lived all this while with her and not known that? I have known her only two months, and I am sure of it!"

"So you think you love her, do you?" Mr. Payson looked at him curiously.

"I do, sir. And I think that she loves me."

"Felicia's adopted boy!" the old man said to himself, "and Clytie! And to think that I had wanted her to marry Cayley!"

He broke off to stand, staring at Granthope, without a word. Then he exclaimed: "By Jove! I had forgotten. Cayley was here to-day—Cly's gone off with him, up to Mount Tamalpais, to join a party there. Now I recall it—there seemed to be something between them. You are sure she cares for you?" he demanded.

"Last night she did—and we parted, thinking never to be able to see one

another again."

"And I did my best to make that match—I encouraged Blanchard all I could. I threw her at his head! I found them here at luncheon. He's been trying for years to get her to marry him. You don't think it's possible that she would do anything rash, do you?"

Granthope's heart sickened. "In what way? How?"

"She said—what was it—the last thing. She said that he had threatened to elope with her, and perhaps they mightn't come back for some time. I thought it was a joke, but now I think of it—"

Granthope sprang up. "What time did they go?" he asked.

"Just before you came—they took the one forty-five."

"We can't reach her by telephone—they're not there yet. What time does the next train go?"

Mr. Payson turned to an *Argonaut* and looked at the time-table on the last page. "Saturdays—four thirty-five," he said.

"I must go after her!" Granthope cried, almost desperate. "Don't you see—don't you know women well enough to understand what a state of mind she must be in, now? After our scene last night, the despair of it would drive her to almost anything reckless, anything to make her forget! It seemed wicked, monstrous, for us to meet again—it seemed irrevocable, final. If Cayley has been pursuing her, as you say, she may accept him in sheer desperation!"

"Go up there," said the old man. "Go up, and tell her everything. It is better for you to tell her. Cayley will resent your appearance, but don't mind that—get rid of him at any cost. You will have to manage him. If Clytie is in love with you, I'll stand by her in whatever she says. Don't think I'm a doting fool, Granthope, that I veer with the wind, this way. I wanted her to marry Cayley, because I thought she'd never know this, and he was a man of honor and intelligence. But I didn't know that Felicia's boy was alive."

Granthope left in a tumult of doubt. He knew little of Cayley, save that he was subtle and indefatigable with women—and that he was unscrupulous enough to have betrayed his friend to Vixley. But how far Clytie's revulsion of feeling would have carried her by this time, he dared not think. She was in a parlous state, and ripe for any extreme impulse.

The trip to Sausalito was almost intolerable. On the train to Mill Valley, his anxiety smoldered till his spirit was ashes. His mind fought all the way up the mountain track, faring to and fro, sinuously, as the line wound, in tortuous loops, gaining altitude in tempered grades. As they rose, the bay unfolded, shimmering below, curving about the peninsula of San Francisco, where, amidst the pearl-

gray, the windows of the city caught, here and there, the level rays from the vivid west. The air was cool and salt. As they rounded a spur, the Pacific burst upon them, miles and miles of twinkling sparks on the dullness of the sea floor. A bank of fog hovered upon the horizon. Just above it the sun poised, then sank, bloody red, tingeing the cloud with color and sending streamers to the zenith. Still his mind urged the train to its climb. It was as if he put his shoulder to the car to impel it upward in his haste, so intense was his expectancy. So, at last, the train rolled up to the station by the Tavern.

There was a crowd waiting upon the platform, and his eyes sought here and there for Clytie. There she was, incongruous with the party—Cayley, easy, jocose, elegant—Mrs. Page, full-blown, sumptuous and glossy, abandoned to frivolity, her black hair blowing in the wind—and Gay P. Summer, jaunty, pink-and-white, immaculate in outing attire. There was another lady whom Granthope did not know. He walked rapidly up to them, calm, now, and confident, equal to the situation, whatever it might be.

Mrs. Page pounced upon him with a little scream of delight, and towed him up to the group. Clytie's narrow eyes widened in surprise, and she turned paler as she looked at him in vain for an answer to her signal of distress.

"Why, Mr. Granthope!" Mrs. Page shouted. "Did you *ever* in your life! What fun! Aren't you a duck to come—you're *just* the man we want! If I had *imagined* that you could be induced to come up here, I would have let you know! But then, probably, you wouldn't have come! We needed another man so badly! I'm *so* glad! I think you know all of us here, except Miss Cavendish, don't you? Miss Cavendish, let me present Mr. Granthope. You know I've told you about him."

Miss Cavendish smiled, looked him over with undisguised amusement, and with a gesture passed him over to Clytie. Clytie gave him a cold hand, looked him steadfastly in the eyes, then dropped hers and waited for her cue.

"It's very good of you to take me in, Mrs. Page. I hope you don't mind my inviting myself. I only just ran up for the night, and I don't want to interfere with your plans at all."

"Oh, don't say a word! We were *dying* for another man. We're all delighted. Now we're six, you see—just right. You can flirt with the chaperon."

"Come and have a drink, first thing," said Gay P. Summer, taking upon himself seriously the conventional obligations of host. "You must be cold, Granthope, without an overcoat. We'll be back in a minute, Violet. Come on, Cayley!"

He led the way into the bar. Granthope followed with Cayley, watching for a word in private. "I want to speak to you alone," he tossed over his shoulder. Cayley nodded.

After the formalities were over, Granthope remarked: "Well, I think I'll go

in and get a room, Summer. You go out and get the ladies while Cayley and I go up-stairs a minute."

Gay P., suspecting nothing, left the two men alone. Cayley took a seat on a small table and waited. Granthope lost no time in preliminaries.

"Mr. Cayley," he said, pulling out his watch, "what time does the next train go down the mountain?"

"There's one soon after nine, I believe—why?" Cayley answered.

Granthope looked at him without visible emotion and said nonchalantly, "I think you'd better take it."

A hot flush burned in Cayley's cheeks, and he drew back as if ready either to give or to receive a blow. "Did you come up here to tell me that?" he said harshly.

"I did—that amongst other things."

"Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me? If you are, I think I can accommodate you. Come outside."

"No, I came up here to avoid one. If I had met you anywhere else, I suppose you'd be knocked down, by this time." Granthope's tone was unimpassioned, matter-of-fact.

"This is getting interesting," said Cayley, now as suave as his opponent. "May I ask you to explain?"

"I had a talk with Doctor Masterson this morning. You may not be acquainted with him—he's a friend of Professor Vixley's, whom I believe, you *do* know."

Cayley's color went back, and his attitude relaxed from defiance to something less assertive.

"He told me a few things about you, Mr. Cayley," Granthope went on firmly. "I don't intend to repeat them. But what I do intend is that you shall make whatever excuses you see fit to Mrs. Page and the others, and leave here on the next train. Do you understand perfectly, or shall I go into details?"

"Oh, I won't trouble you, Granthope," Cayley drawled. "I don't think the crowd would be very amusing with you here, anyway. I'm much obliged to you for giving me the opportunity to leave, I'm sure."

He smiled, Granthope smiled, and the two separated. Cayley walked up to speak to the clerk in the office, and then sauntered toward the ladies on the porch. Granthope was given a room, and went up-stairs.

When he returned the party was talking on the veranda, and there was no chance to speak to Clytie alone. What he could do to reassure her by his glance, he did, but she was evidently so much at a loss to account for his appearance that she had placed some alarming interpretation upon it. She did not speak, but her silence was unnoticed in Mrs. Page's volubility. As they stood there, a bell-boy

came out and notified Cayley that there was a telephone call for him. Cayley apologized and left to go inside. Granthope watched him with satisfaction.

Clytie moved off down the veranda a little way, and Granthope, seeing his opportunity, followed her.

He had time but to say, "It's all right, Clytie—it's all right!"

She looked up at him in wonder, and at his words life and hope came back to her and shone in her eyes. She did not understand yet, but the message was an elixir of joy to her. On the instant Gay and Miss Cavendish joined them, chattering.

"Oh, Mr. Granthope," she said, "Mr. Summer and I have been wrangling all this afternoon over a discussion, and we want your decision. You ought to know, if anybody does. Which knows most about women—the man who knows all about some woman, or the man who knows some about all women?"

Granthope laughed. "I think they'd be equally foolish. No man *knows* anything about any woman."

"Of course that's the proper answer," said Miss Cavendish. "We're all mysteries, aren't we?"

"Even to ourselves," Clytie offered.

"Oh, yes, women understand other women, but they never understand themselves."

Gay P. Summer put in, "I don't think any man ever understands women who hasn't had sisters. I never had one."

"That's true," said Granthope. He saw his chance, and turned to Clytie. "I never had a sister, either," he said deliberately, catching her eye.

Clytie's eyebrows went up. He nodded. It was question and answer. She moved toward him a little, unnoticed, and his hand touched hers.

Mr. Summer added: "I don't care, though, I prefer to have women mysteries. It's more interesting."

Mrs. Page came up in time to hear the last words. "Oscar Wilde says that women are sphinxes without secrets," she contributed.

"I wonder if any woman is happy enough not to have a secret," Clytie said.

"I hope that yours will never make you unhappy," Granthope replied; and added: "I don't think it will." He pressed her hand again, unobserved.

At this moment, Cayley returned.

"Something doing, Mr. Cayley?" said Miss Cavendish mischievously.

"Yes, unfortunately. It's a matter of business and important. I've got to see a man to-morrow morning in the city. It's too bad, but I'll have to go down to-night, after all."

"Why, the *idea*!" Mrs. Page cried indignantly. "You'll do no such a thing! It's outrageous! We can't *possibly* spare you, Blan; you'll spoil the party!"

”It’s my loss. I’ve got to go, really!” said Cayley. He turned to Clytie. ”I’ll have to turn you over to Mr. Granthope, I’m afraid. I don’t want you to miss the time, of course.”

Clytie looked at Granthope, puzzled.

”*You* shan’t go, anyway, Miss Payson!” Mrs. Page insisted. ”Why, we’re going to get up and see the sunrise to-morrow morning! That’s what we came for. *Please* don’t break up the party,” she begged.

Clytie smiled subtly, and hazarded another glance at Granthope.

”I really came up to bring Miss Payson home,” he said, ”but of course I’ll leave it to her. The fact is, I’ve brought her a message from her father.”

”Oh!” Mrs. Page exclaimed, ”I do hope it isn’t bad news.”

”On the contrary, it’s good, I think. Nevertheless, I’ll have to break it to her gently. And with your permission, I will, now.”

A look at Clytie, and she walked off with him up toward the summit of the mountain.

”What can it be, Francis?” she exclaimed. ”I’m all at sea. But of course I understood from what you said that it was, somehow, all right.”

”Clytie,” he said, ”it *is* all right—we’ve passed the last obstacle, I think. But it’s hard to know how to tell you. If you’ll let me tell it my way, I’ll say that, of all the women I have ever known in my life, the two whom I have loved best were—”

”Me—and—?” She held his hand tightly.

”You and your mother.”

She seemed to be in no way surprised, new as the thought was to her. It only struck her dumb for a while. Then she said:

”I must telephone to father at once. Oh, I must reassure him!”

”Shall we go back?” he asked.

She stood for a moment deliberating. Then she put her arm in his. ”I’ve seen the stars and moon,” she said, ”I’ve seen the lightning, I’ve seen the false dawn. Let’s stay, now, and see the sunrise!”

They walked, arm in arm, to the summit of the mountain, and sat down upon a rock to gaze at the city, far away.

There it lay, a constellation of lights, a golden radiance, dimmed by the distance. San Francisco the Impossible, the City of Miracles! Of it and its people many stories have been told, and many shall be; but a thousand tales shall not exhaust its treasury of Romance. Earthquake and fire shall not change it, terror and suffering shall not break its glad, mad spirit. Time alone can tame the town, restrain its wanton manners, refine its terrible beauty, rob it of its nameless charm, subdue

it to the Commonplace. May Time be merciful—may it delay its fatal duty till we have learned that to love, to forgive, to enjoy, is but to understand!

EPILOGUE

It was quiet at Fulda's. The evening crowd had not yet begun to come. The Pintos, however, had arrived early, and were at their central table talking in low, repressed voices. Felix, at the front counter, looked over at them occasionally under his eyebrows, as if there were something unusual in their demeanor.

Mabel sat erect, her hands in her lap, looking straight before her, speaking only in monosyllables. Elsie's smile had diminished to a set, cryptic expression. She looked tired. Maxim leaned his heavy, leonine head upon his hand, and drew invisible sketches with his fork upon the table-cloth. Starr and Benton talked in an undertone.

"I didn't go over," said Starr, "I simply couldn't."

"Well, somebody had to see, so I went."

"Was it—bad?"

Benton shook his head. "No, lovely. Wonderful. One wouldn't think—"

Mabel looked across at them. Starr lowered his voice.

"Just ten days, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to hear?"

"Why, I was at the *Bulletin* office when word was telephoned in. There was something about the description that struck me—I began to worry—then I went over with a reporter."

The door on Montgomery Street opened, and Dougal came in. He moved like a machine. His face was hard, his eyes glassy, as if he had not slept for many nights. He sat down like an automaton, pulled off his hat and let it drop carelessly to the floor.

"Where have you been?" Elsie asked him.

"I don't know. Just walking. Anywhere."

"Did you—?"

"Yes. I *had* to. I couldn't stand it not to."

Benton, the most composed of them all, pulled himself up in his chair. "Let's have something to drink," he suggested. He called the waiter and gave his order.

A bottle was brought and the glasses filled. They seemed to awake, around the table, and each one took a glass. Benton raised his. They all drank in silence. Mabel, her eyes dimmed, held up two fingers. Elsie smiled.

"That's right!" she said, and held up hers. Mabel gulped down something in her throat.

"Well," said Benton, throwing off the mood, "we might as well have dinner." He took up the menu and looked it over.

They all ordered languidly. The talk began in a desultory fashion, and the group became almost normal—all except Dougal, who stared steadily across the room to where, under a drawing was a scroll bearing the words from *Salome*: "Something terrible is going to happen,"—and Mabel, who did not speak and watched her plate. The restaurant, meanwhile, had begun to fill up. Dishes rattled, voices chattered, new arrivals appeared every few minutes.

Dougal looked up from his plate listlessly. "I saw Granthope and his wife on the Oakland boat yesterday," he said. "I guess he's going East; they had a lot of luggage."

"Did you speak to him?" Benton asked.

"No. I started to, then decided not to break up a honeymoon party. But I heard her say something queer. I've been wondering about it." He stopped, as if he had forgotten all about them there at the table. Then he continued in a slow labored voice: "It was the queer way she said it—the way she looked, somehow."

"What was it?" Starr asked.

"We were just opposite Goat Island." He paused and took a breath. "She said—"

They all waited, watching him. He tried it again. "She said—'Doesn't the water look cold!'—then she kind of shivered and said—'Let's come inside'—we were just opposite Goat Island."

Maxim repeated the words: "'The water looks cold'—Oh, God!" he exclaimed softly.

There was a silence for a moment, then Starr said:

"D'you suppose she knew?"

"How could she?" Benton asked. "Nobody knew till this noon, did they?"

Elsie spoke: "Of course she knew."

Mabel nodded her head slowly; her breast was heaving.

There was a pause for a moment. It was broken by Benton, who sat facing the door.

"There's The Scroyle!" he exclaimed. "Who's that with him?"

"Oh, that's Mrs. Page," said Elsie, narrowing her eyes.

Gay P. Summer, jimp and immaculate, with trousers creased and shiny shoes, with the latest style in mouse-colored hats, entered with his lady, and

looked jauntily about for a good table. He found one near the Pintos. Having seated his partner, he leaned over toward her and whispered for a few minutes. By her immediate look in their direction, there was no doubt that he was informing her of the fame of the coterie at the central table, and boasting of his acquaintance with it. Then he arose.

"By Jove!" said Benton. "He's coming over here! What d'you think of that!"

Gay approached dapperly, bowed to all, and laid his hand on the back of Dougal's chair. Dougal leaned forward and avoided him.

"Good evening, everybody," said Gay affably. "The gang is still alive, I see!" He smiled inclusively. Nobody answered.

"I should think you'd want to find another restaurant, now," he continued. "This place is getting altogether too dead. It's only a show place now. All the life seems to have gone out of it."

"That's right," Maxim murmured.

"Funny how places run down,"—Gay was forcing it hard—"why, I know several people who won't come here any more. It isn't like it used to be, anyway, nowadays." He grew a little nervous at his apathetic reception, but went on. "Say, I've got a lady over there I'd like to introduce to you people. She's a corker. Suppose I bring her over. You need another girl."

Benton shook his head. "Not to-night, Gay. Sorry. Executive session."

Gay looked round the table, noted the two empty places and started: "But couldn't—"

"No," said Benton, "we *couldn't.* Some other time."

Gay, about to move away, looked at Dougal. "Say," he said, "what's become of Fancy Gray? Are you expecting her to-night?"

At the sound of the name Mabel dropped her head on her arms and began to cry aloud. Her shoulders worked convulsively.

Elsie put her hand round her neck. "Oh, stop, May!" she whispered. "Don't cry—please!"

Dougal looked at Mabel. His small eyes gleamed as bright and dry as crystal.

"Don't stop her, Elsie! If anybody *can* cry, for God's sake, let them cry!"

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