Unsought Adventure

By

Howard Angus Kennedy

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UNSOUGHT ADVENTURE

BY
HOWARD ANGUS KENNEDY

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A
ISOBEL-FÉLICE

CŒUR DE RUBIS

ÂME DE SAPHIR

CONTENTS

Unsought Adventure

UNDER THE TREES BY THE RIVER

"I have sought for adventure; yea, with the horses and chariots of a king; yet greater than all my adventures have come to my herd-boy unsought. . . .

"In the twilight, weary of courtiers, I fled from my palace. On the banks of the River I walked between Ali the Man of Adventure and Hassan the Cynic. And Ali told of strange events, all outward things and deeds; but Hassan, scorning outward things, laid bare the windings of the common soul. Then said I:

"Adventures come not to the adventurous alone. I am curious to know how Hassan's common minds would act in Ali's strange events. The thread of life is spun of married strands, of thought and action intertwined: divorce them not. . . .

"There be mysteries of matter, and there be mysteries of Man transcending all. Strange is it when a treasure, dead and buried, stretches forth unseen hand from unknown hiding-place and cracks the whip of fate; and stranger when at a touch the honest man turns thief. . . .

"Three things have I marvelled at, yea, four have I graven on my tablets of remembrance; a proud young man's humility; a humble girl, her pride; a wanton mother's yearning for the son she has betrayed, and a simple rustic house-wife on the judgment throne.

"Of these then will I speak as I have seen, twining the action with the thought in many-colored thread of life; not by the pattern you or I might frame, but as it truly flowed from Fortune's wheel.

"Not for high show of cunning art I speak, to court sophisticated lips and hear the palace cry 'The king of men is king of words!'—but walking free with friends by moonlit stream, free as the naked air that plays among the trees. The censure of the proud,—as who should say 'The king puts off his robes!'—to me is only praise.

"Not in the guise of a king, despising simple folk, their words and ways, but

wandering friendly in the haunts of men I learned the lessons of the heart."

—Autobiography of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid.

ADVENTURE OF THE ELUSIVE TREASURE

THE TRIANGLE

The triangle sat drinking tea, and hatching undreamed-of adventures.

Not the common or roof-garden triangle, prelude to scandalous divorce, nor its chorus the five o'clock tea, when society feeds on large triangular scandals and small triangular sandwiches.

A perfectly proper triangle, drinking strong black tea from strong white cups. The latter end of a mid-day lunch in a heavily furnished dining-room.

An equilateral triangle, all three sides alike: in figure, moderately slim, and well set up; complexion, fair; eyes, blue; hair, red, or reddish; noses, tending very slightly to j-form; and teeth, in good repair. A family triangle, in fact: one good-looking young woman, Isobel Galt; two not ill-looking young men, her brother and second cousin, both named though not both now called John. To avoid confusion one had to be called Jack. The master of the house had a peace-preserving habit of deference to his cousin's taste, and therefore answered to the name of John.

To say that conversation generally languished at their mid-day meal would exaggerate the vocal activity of the triangle. They did not "converse." Isobel and John conversed at breakfast, three or four hours before Jack ever came down. At lunch and dinner they only ate, to a steady accompaniment of talk from Jack. Not being in love with their own voices, they had no objection to his monopoly. Isobel, if compelled to speak, would generally have disagreed with her brother's opinions, and she hated controversy. John, more tolerant of Jack's irresponsible views on things in general, allowed himself to be rather amused. Besides, listening without talking gave him time for the better mastication of the rigorous diet imposed by doctor's orders.

At this particular lunch however Jack's solo was syncopated, lacking in continuity, broken as it were by awkward intervals of static. With effort he pumped up a very occasional remark.

John and Isobel, having sat down in their usual receptive attitude, were vaguely disquieted. Unprepared to fill the gaps, they sat, drank tea, and thought.

Of adventures? Not at all. They had no idea they were hatching adventures, not the faintest desire to hatch them, no notion that the eggs were even laid. Yet when Isobel broke the silence with "A penny for your thoughts, John!" those thoughts crystallized suddenly into a phrase he could never forget, —"The Great Adventure." He never spoke of it, but he knew how soon he had to face it.

"Adventures," he answered quickly, with a careless smile.

“Adventures are only for the adventurous, I’ve heard.”

“I doubt that. Some are born to adventures, some have adventures thrust upon them. You never can tell.”

“You’re not yearning for adventures yourself, I hope,” said Isobel.

“Not the least little bit. A quiet life for the rest of my days, that would suit me to a dot.”

“Me too,” she said, nodding,—half from pity, to make him feel such a wish was no mere symptom of an invalid, but partly also expressing a genuine mood of her own.

“Oh, you oughtn’t to feel like that,” he said warmly. “You must be ready to swim the Straits of Dover by now,

ADVEN-TURES BY PROXY

ride a Derby winner, command a battleship,—anything, after the dull life you’ve had for a year and more in a New York office.”

“I don’t find it dull. If you sat between two such girls as Lottie and Maisie, you wouldn’t either. The curious thing is, though they call it dull themselves they make it lively for me,—whenever I let them.”

“It’s a dull old house you come back to every night, anyway,—sitting in a library crammed with dull old books, playing crib and chess with a dull old cousin.”

She laughed gaily. “That was a great adventure yesterday when my red knight came tilting across country to carry off your queen, cocksure as anything, and the white bishop jumped up and bowled him over! As for books, why, they’re full of adventures.”

“If you read them. But that’s only other people’s adventures.”

“I make them my own. I’ve read a lot, and at home I always used to get on horseback or aboard ship with the book-people and have their adventures too, in imagination. I do still. Once I’ve read a book I only have to open it, sometimes only look at the title on the shelf, or even just think of it, and I can enjoy all the adventures in it over again,—as I do with my own real experiences, when I bring back in imagination the time I used to ride and swim so much.”

“You wouldn’t get much of that sort of thing out of the thousands of old books that father lined that library with, from floor to ceiling, bless his heart; it’s just as he left it.”

“Some of them look exciting enough: ‘Adventures of a Turkish Spy in the Courts of Europe’, ‘Adventures of Dr. Syntax in Search of a Wife’,—I suppose the Turk had a dozen, but none to spare,—‘Les aventures d’un capitaine de flibustiers dans la Nouvelle France’, otherwise Old Canada, where you were born.”

“Yes, father always picked up anything he thought he could afford about

old Canada, though he never tried to collect first editions, and nothing else seems to count much nowadays."

"I must dust them off and see what they're like inside, one of these days, if I get really dull. But think of the adventures the really old books must have gone through themselves, in the wild centuries since they were printed; when robber barons sacked each other's castles, for instance, and carried off the books they couldn't read, to endow a monastery by way of atonement for the blood they had shed!"

"Great imagination!" murmured Jack,—his first contribution in ten minutes.

As a rule it was Isobel who dismembered the mid-day triangle, having to get back to the office by two. This time Jack was first to leave the room, after his second cup.

John looked uneasily at Isobel. "What's wrong with Jack?" he said. "Under the weather? It's bad enough." Indeed, the house fronts across the street were barely visible through the rain.

"I've no idea, John. Maybe he'll tell me."

"Hope I haven't done anything to offend him."

"You couldn't. You're too considerate, if anything," she said as she passed out of the door.

Left alone, John Galt pushed back his chair and walked to the window, frowning. He looked out, but saw nothing,—nothing visible, nothing but his own furious thoughts. Isobel had offered a penny for them. What would she have given him to take them back, if he had told them?

How she would pity, and sympathize! He shivered.

THE PITY OF BEING PITIED

An object of pity? To avoid that, he had carefully concealed his approaching fate. There were other reasons, to be sure, for selfishness was the least of his failings. If he himself could no longer enjoy life, he certainty would not lessen cousin Isobel's enjoyment of it. He had invited these English cousins over to share his home for his own sake, left solitary on his father's death, but Isobel in spite of him persisted in feeling grateful, as if it was for their sake too,—which indeed it was.

The girl knew of course that he had to be particular about his food,—he could not eat in secret, worse luck,—but he always made a joke of that ridiculous diet, and persuaded himself that his cousins had no inkling of the ghastly cause. If Isobel discovered the whole truth, her tender heart would be torn with anxiety, though she would be too careful of his feelings to express her own in many words.

He turned impatient from the window, and stood before the fire-place. The

row of silver cups and trophies on the mantel-shelf, relics of school and college pride, were doubled by reflection in a Victorian expanse of mirror. He had wanted to stow them away out of sight, these constant reminders of exuberant strength now gone for ever; but Isobel had protested, not knowing.

That towering trophy emblazoned a three-fold victory,—the half-mile, the long jump, and the shot-putting,—all of them records at the time, and rarely beaten since. He smiled. He was racing now to his death, and nothing could check his speed. The jump at the end—well, it would not be a long one, for he could easily cut it short.

Yes, easily. Crossing in the ferry to Staten Island, where his father had left a bit of real estate,—standing carelessly by the rail,—a convenient fainting spell,—a fall overboard; quite natural, it would seem. No slur on the family name.

He pictured the little incident; saw himself slipping, toppling over the side. But then he pulled himself up straight, proud and defiant. A whole gallery of youthful pictures rose before him now. At school, among the crowd of youngsters from every other European race, his chief pride had been to show what a chip of the old original block was made of. That had spurred his somewhat jog-trot ambition to win prizes even for book-work, which appealed to no other craving in his boy nature. He had not only won but suffered for his pride. When a bully had twisted both arms behind his back, till he fainted with agony, he had clenched his teeth and uttered not one cry. And later on, at college, had he ever grudged the Spartan training that led to victory, or plunged into luxurious reaction when the victory had been won?

Would he play the coward now, and quit the race because he could not win?

There was another inheritance he was proud of, too,—more intimately human than the glory of the tribe,—the level-headed good sense of his family. Of his father's family, that meant. He realized unwillingly that he was the son of a mother as well, a mother mysteriously vanished and almost forgotten in the distant past. But if he had to admit that some erratic strain might have mingled in him with the steady blood-stream of the Galts, he was all the more determined to resist every impulse of surrender and prove himself as immune to weakness as the strongest of his strong paternal line.

No, it was not what others thought of him that mattered, only what he thought and knew of himself. It was not for praise that he would play the man, for no one else would be aware of his temptation to weakness. Yet he was mightily fortified and cheered by the knowledge that he would be earning, though he would never claim, the warm approval of—Félice and Isobel. . . . He might possibly have put Isobel first, if he had had any future to plan for; but the future had been settled without his planning. The one ray of sunshine he

hoped for now was a vision of Félice beside him at the end.

SISTER ISOBEL SPEAKS OUT

Isobel's brother came out of his room when she knocked. He shut the door quickly behind him, but not before she had seen an open trunk, a black bag and suit-case, and clothes piled up on chairs.

"Are you going away, Jack?"

"If you must know,—yes. Back to England."

"Got something regular to do there? I hope to goodness you have; though you might have got a job here if you'd tried."

"Nothing to suit me. I'll get something over there, right enough. Can't stand this sort of thing any longer."

"Well, you might have told John, after all he's done for us."

"Sorry. But that's just it: we've been sponging on him for a year and more, and—"

Isobel fired up. A marvelous fine girl when roused, Jack said to himself.

"Sponging? Speak for yourself, Jack. I pay my own way. I tried to make him take board, but he wouldn't hear of it,—said it was worth more than my board to have me keep house, which was true enough."

"Well, and he said it was worth more than my board to have me for company, didn't he, when he asked us over on a visit as his only relations? But what does he want with company now, when he can't go out nights for fear of his lungs or something?"

"When a man has to stay in, that's when he needs company most. All you care for his company, then, is to have him take you everywhere and pay for both, is it?"

"Thank you! Anyhow, he can't pay as he did, even if he could knock around as he used to. He isn't as rich as we thought him. Not now, anyway. He thinks of selling his father's library, but that won't last long. It's mostly trash."

"Mostly, perhaps, though there's one book worth hundreds of dollars if he really has to sell it. He doesn't want to, for his father meant to give it to some public library. But how do you know he thinks of selling? Been asking him for money again? That's one thing he always avoids telling me, but if he has lost money you've helped him to do it, borrowing—you call it borrowing—for the horses, and flutters on Wall Street I guess, besides your clothes and everything else. And now that you think you've got all you can out of him—"

"Well, you haven't. If you play your cards well, and do your hair better, you can get—everything."

Her hand flashed out at his face. With a stinging red cheek he backed swiftly into his room and shut the door. He therefore missed the pleasure of observing both her cheeks take on the flaming hue she had given one of his.

"You cur!" she said. "The sooner you get out of this house, the better!"

He made no answer, but hurried to powder his face. She turned and went down. Then he opened the door again and listened. "I was a fool to rile her," he admitted to himself. "Wonder what sort of a black eye she'll give me with Cousin John? He might have come across with something worth while, as a parting gift, if I'd played the grateful cousin on him. Oh well, what's the odds?" All the same, he crept halfway down the stairs, then stopped and listened.

No, she did not even enter the dining-room. Putting on her coat and hat in the hall, she just opened the door an inch to say: "I can't wait, John. See you at dinner."

A GREEN AND GRAVEN INSULT

"Half a minute, Isobel," John called out, plunging into his boots. "I'm coming with you. I was going to a matinée anyway." So they went out together.

"That's a relief," thought Jack. "He might have asked me to go with him. . . . Well, she can say what she pleases. I'm never likely to see him again. I'll spend the evening out, and slip off before they come down in the morning."

He pulled out his pocket-book, and his jaw dropped. All he could find, besides the small change in his pocket, was one petty, paltry, miserable hundred-dollar bill. To petty, paltry, miserable folk like you and me it might be something, but to expansive and expensive Jack it was nothing. Worse than nothing. It was a green and graven insult. It wouldn't pay for his steamer ticket.

"Oh hell," he groaned, "I forgot last night's game. I lost the hundred he gave me yesterday. And I could have doubled it, if I'd taken a drop less. 'The last he could spare me for some time, he regretted to say',—damn him! Have I got to play the grateful and penitent cousin after all?"

UNDER ONE UMBRELLA

One umbrella between two is both a shelter and an opportunity. It is highly agreeable to both if they are inclined to propinquity. John and Isobel, for example. Yet to Isobel that afternoon, with Jack's words echoing in her ears, the pressure of John's arm was simply painful. She would rather have got wet.

John had never shown signs—none that she had recognized, at any rate, but then she had never dreamed of looking for them. The triangle had just been a happy family,—as happy as Jack's irresponsibility would permit. Now that the wretch had put it into her head, the possibility would always have to be watched for—yes, and guarded against. Left alone with the good-natured John, who certainly liked her as a cousin, her opportunities of drawing him into a closer relationship would be only too obvious, even to John himself.

A few years ago, such a *ménage à deux* would have brought scandal buzzing about their ears. She could smile at that danger now. Mrs. Grundy's venomous fangs had been drawn, the shrill old scandal-monger's voice had sunk to a whisper. None the less, to Isobel the situation would be intolerable. She cared nothing for what a few silly people might think, but everything for what she herself would always be thinking.

"Jack's going to England," she told her cousin, as briefly as possible. "He's sailing to-morrow. He expects to get a job there, and I daresay it's better for him. He's doing no good here."

"I suppose you're right," said John. "Only you're not going with him, Isobel?"

"No, but—of course I can't stay on after he goes."

JOHN HAS A BRIGHT IDEA

"Why not? Aren't you one of the family? It's just as much your home as mine,—that's the way I feel about it. It won't be the same place. In fact, I don't see how we can get along without you, Isobel."

"I'm, afraid it's impossible."

"See here, it isn't what people might think that worries you, surely. That's all out of date. People don't think evil of everything innocent any longer. And it's not as if we lived all by ourselves in a tiny apartment. It's a musty old place, but it has its advantages that way,—roomy enough, in all conscience,—and a couple of servants too. Olga, now,—we'll promote her to the rank of chaperon. She'll be tickled to death. And, seriously, I should feel lost without you, Isobel. I should go moping mad,—especially now I can't get about quite so much as I used."

She wished he could see. Why, she could trap him into an engagement

right there under that umbrella, if she wanted. As he did not see, and she could not tell him, she took refuge in the contemptible untruth.

"You may not care what people think, but I do," she said. "I'm very sorry, but it can't be done, John."

They had only a few blocks to go, and he had to think fast.

He walked on, silenced but unconvinced. Then a bright idea struck him. "The very thing!" he said to himself. What he said to her was—"Of course, if you feel that way. But it won't be necessary for you to leave, after all. I'm going off myself to-morrow, for a few weeks at Palm Beach or thereabouts,—the doctor's been begging me to. And then I'm going to spend the summer just tramping around the countryside,—up through Vermont to the old home in Canada, I shouldn't wonder, with a dog and a raincoat. That's what I need to set me up. It's the only thing. And of course you'll have to stay and look after the house till I come back. Then, if you must go you must, and that's all there is to it."

"I don't believe you had the slightest idea of going, before you put up that umbrella."

"You're a mighty unbelieving sort of person, Isobel! But it don't matter one row of beans what you believe. I'm going and you're staying, that's flat,—unless," he added with a mischievous smile, "unless you prefer to go with me."

She laughed that off. "Well, I'll think it over," she said, "at the typewriter. I hope I won't address the company's letters to Palm Beach or Canada, thinking!"

At the door of the office building, he insisted on her taking his umbrella. He would get a taxi to the theatre. On second thoughts, as he stood back alone in the portico, washed up against the wall by the tide of returning lunchers, he had his doubts about that theatre. If he was going off in the morning—and of course he must, having said so—there was business to be done in preparation, ways and means somehow to be arranged, not to mention his packing.

THE HONEST BOOKSELLER

The day before his store was burned, Sam Johnson was an honest man. “Samuel Johnson” was the name over the windows, and the incorruptible spirit of the great Samuel Johnson pervaded his namesake’s establishment.

The world of his acquaintance called him simply Sam, and he encouraged the familiarity: it flattered his secret belief that he was by nature friendly, a good mixer, though in fact it cost him constant effort to keep up that expansive character. Living up to his name for incorruptible honor, on the other hand, was easy. He might almost be said to revel in honesty, if revels of any sort can be imagined in his regulated life. He loved to hear men call him Honest Sam.

“I know I can trust you,” said the pale young man, taking out of a large black bag a brown paper parcel marked on one end with a red circle, and laying it on the bookseller’s desk in the private office. “Look this over, and say what’s the best you can give for it. Everyone tells me that you—” a fit of coughing seized him here—“that you can be trusted to do the right thing and not take advantage of a man’s ignorance. I know this is a valuable book,” he went, on as he untied the string,—“the best bargain father ever got, I reckon.”

“Your name is—?”

“John Galt.”

The bookseller’s eyes opened wide.

“I know what you’re thinking,” the young man said. “My father did talk of sending the gems of his collection to some public library, but luckily for me he never put it in his will. I’ve about run through everything, including myself”—with a pitiful smile he tapped his chest—“everything except a lot of shares that are too low to be worth selling. If they buck up and declare a dividend soon, I can get along, but if not I’ll have to sell the books. The doctors say I may live another six months, and I must have something to live on.”

He had folded back the covering paper, and revealed a large book in two volumes. The gorgeous inlaid binding was old, but unbroken, almost unscratched. Sam Johnson opened the book—and gasped.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked.

“I can see it’s an old Bible,” said Galt, “but it’s not in English, and that curious type is hard to read.”

“Did your father never talk about it?”

“No, I wasn’t much interested in books. It’s been lying wrapped up in that parcel on a high shelf in the library ever since I can remember. I knew it was worth a good deal, and once I asked him if he wasn’t afraid of burglars. He laughed and said ‘No,—but don’t you say anything about it, or I might be’.”

“Burglars!” the bookseller exclaimed. “If they had only known, all the bandits within a hundred miles would have swooped down on you. They’d have attacked your old house front and rear and carried off this treasure from under your very nose. It’s lucky your father knew how to keep a secret. Most collectors would have been so proud of such a possession, they’d have let the whole world know,—after they’d got it safely stowed away in a burglar-proof vault.”

“Then you think no one but Dad knew of its existence?”

“Yes,” said the bookseller, smiling, and looking the young man straight in the face. “One man has known about it all the time. That man is—myself! And if I hadn’t been an honest man—!”

“This book”—he laid his hand reverently on the title page—“is the most valuable book in the world. Even a first folio Shakespeare is nothing to it. It is absolutely unique,—it stands alone. Other books may be rare, but this outshines and dwarfs them all,—a Koh-i-noor of diamonds, a Mount Everest among ant-hills.”

HOW THE LAST OWNER DIED

The young man was pleased with the metaphors. They seemed to foreshadow an Everest of a price. He was a little impatient, for the afternoon was getting on, but he would not break in on the poetical mood of a buyer who thought in terms of Koh-i-noors.

“I’ll tell you how I came to know about it,” Johnson went on. “The book belonged to your mother’s father. I’ve no idea how he got it. As of course you know, he was a retired professor in a little German town. At his death—. My word, yes, I hadn’t thought of that before, but your mention of burglars brings it back to me.

“He was killed defending his house from a gang—three of them. It must have been this very book they were after. He was a poor man otherwise, living on a small pension. They ransacked the place, throwing all the other books off the shelves, but evidently couldn’t find the one thing they wanted. They tied him up and started torturing him, no doubt to make him tell. Some one next door heard him groan, and called the police. The thieves were furious because he wouldn’t say where it was, and shot him.”

“Strange they never traced it to America, where such things have a habit of coming,” said young Galt.

“They were all hanged, that’s why. Probably no one else knew what they had been after. They were not professional burglars, or known to the police as criminals at all, but members of a good family,—three brothers, if I remember right. There was some mystery about the affair. Maybe they had some claim to the book, or thought they had.

“Your mother had been his only child, and his library came to your father.

As soon as the books arrived, he asked me to come and make an offer for them. I was an old acquaintance of your father's,—born on neighboring farms. We lived in northern Vermont, close to the Canada line; the Galt farm was just over the line, in the Province of Quebec. But we'd had nothing to do with each other since coming to New York, except in a business way. I started this store, and he bought a good many books from me, though he wasn't what you'd call a great collector. He kept very much to himself, as of course you remember, and I had never been in his house before. I guess you were away at school, as I didn't see you about.

"He had got the books all out of the cases and ranged neatly on the library floor. But it was a terrible lot of junk, from a trade point of view, and I told him so. 'I'm afraid you're right, Johnson!' said he. 'I've been over it carefully, piece by piece.' He knew German well, and he was a good judge of books. 'If I can get back the freight I'll be satisfied,' he said. I didn't ask him how much freight he had paid. I really wanted to give him every cent they were worth.

"I was going over the lot a second time, when a bank messenger brought a parcel to the house.

"It was this very book,—and maybe this very parcel.

"Mr. Galt had just opened it when I came up to the library table with my figures. He shut the book quickly, but opened it again at once, saying—'I didn't mean to be rude, Johnson. I know you're a man to be trusted. You can look at the thing. You'll never have another chance, not as long as I live.' He gave a little shiver. 'I'm not superstitious, Johnson, but this book has just cost four lives, and God alone knows how many it may have cost in the four and a half centuries since it was printed.'

"Then he told me the story as I've told it to you. The old professor had left the parcel at his lawyer's,—afraid to keep it in the house. The lawyer, I gathered, didn't know exactly what was in the parcel, but he knew it was a valuable book, and when the old gentleman died leaving his books to your father, the man took the precaution of sending it out through the agency of some American bank in Berlin.

"I promised Mr. Galt I'd never say a word about it,—as I wouldn't even now if you weren't his son. Then we gloated over the book together. Gloated's the only word. Do you wonder? Just look at this."

He pointed, not to the beautiful initial letters that some unknown fifteenth century artist had illuminated at the beginning of every chapter, but to four lines of ancient handwriting on the fly-leaf. Lowering his voice, though no one but his client was within hearing, he said:

"This is not only one of the few surviving copies of the first book ever printed,—there, under your eyes, is John Gutenberg's own written declaration

that this is the very first copy completed and he therefore presents it to his partner John Faust, who supplied the inventor of printing with the money to carry out his great idea.

“Only four other copies of this marvelous work are known to exist in private hands, and two of those are promised to public institutions. That leaves only two that can ever come into the market. To say that this copy of yours beats all the rest is putting it far too mildly.

“The binding,—it’s superb. There may be others with gorgeous bindings, but probably not one so rich. From the coat of arms it must have belonged to some royal library. And you’ll notice that remarkably well-rounded back. Not many ancient books have that, even if they ever had it. Then look at the magnificent margins. Many copies have been so trimmed by the binder’s knife that parts of the colored scroll work have been cut away,—you see how the artist who put in the big initial letters by hand let his fancy carry them down the side margin and along the foot of the page. In this copy, all these are uncut and absolutely perfect.

“But its great feature, of course, is the autograph, the very handwriting of the inventor of printing. I doubt if there is another unquestionable autograph of Gutenberg in existence,—and to have it in the very first book he printed!” The bookseller threw up his hands. Words failed him.

The young man had caught his enthusiasm. “That is good news for a sick man,” he said. Then, after another fit of coughing, he came to the point. “What do you think it is worth?”

Sam Johnson was in a quandary. If it had only been a first folio Shakespeare—! But this treasure was priceless.

“It would run to five figures certainly, probably six.”

“Well, think it over,” the young man said. “You sleep on it, and I’ll do the same. I’ll come in again to-morrow morning, and we can talk over it.” He wrapped the book up as he spoke, put it back in his bag, and rose to go. Then he hesitated.

“But I don’t see the sense of taking it away again, now it’s here. Even if you can’t buy it, I’ll leave it in your hands to find a purchaser. Between ourselves, Mr. Johnson, I’ve simply got to sell. I shouldn’t be as frank as that with any other dealer, but with you—well, I know you’ll do the square thing. And the fact of the matter is, I want a little advance, $500 or so,—with security like that, eh?”

Sam jumped at the idea. To let that book go out of the store was not to be thought of. It might never come back. As young Galt was so hard up, he would certainly try elsewhere, and there were a dozen booksellers in town who would give their eyes for such a chance.

Honest as he was, he must not seem too eager. “It’s not a thing I would do under any ordinary circumstances,” he said with a benevolent air, “but for you, and as you’re your father’s son,—I never saw a stronger family resemblance, —I’ll do it. The bank’s just closed, but I’ll ’phone the manager, and I daresay he’ll oblige me.”

He took down the receiver. Yes, to be sure, he had only to send a messenger. The messenger was sent.

“Of course,” the bookseller observed as they waited, “it’s understood that you leave the book at owner’s risk.”

“Of course,” the young man agreed. He sat down, and took the parcel out of the bag. “Shall we seal it up?” he suggested, with some diffidence. “In case anyone happened to open it by mistake?”

“No chance of that,” Sam Johnson smiled. “But we’ll seal it up by all means, and be sure you examine the seals carefully when you come back!” He found a stick of sealing wax in a drawer, and struck match after match while John Galt pressed his signet ring on two or three molten masses.

“That’s the Galt crest,” the young man said,—“I’m sure you must have

seen it before." To be sure he had, said Sam.

"Now I must be getting along," said the young man, picking up his bag. Sam walked with him to the door, carrying the precious parcel. "I shouldn't have come out, a day like this, but I guess it won't hurt me. In fact I feel better,—influence of mind on matter, eh? It's really been a great relief, to know the book's as valuable as all that. And as for its bad luck, you don't believe in that sort of thing, now, do you?" But, from his tone, he evidently half-believed in it himself.

"To be sure I don't," was Sam's robust reply, though not uttered in a tone of robust assurance. "If we were back in old Europe, now,—there seem to have been more conjurers than common people over there, and a fairy town under every hill. But then," he laughed, "you know witches and warlocks couldn't cross a running stream,—you remember how Tam O'Shanter got away from them—and I guess they wouldn't try flying over the Atlantic on their broomsticks! I guess the good old book must have

A MEMORY OF MEPHISTOPHELES

easily shaken them off at Hamburg all right. If it went back there now,—but there's little chance of that,—we couldn't answer for the consequences, eh, Mr. Galt?" He laughed again as he spoke, but the idea seemed rather to startle than amuse the young man. "Goodbye," he said, and hurried out into the rain.

"Goodbye," said Johnson. He stood a while, his eyes on the rain but his mind wrapped up in the parcel under his arm. A tall, dark, thin and anxious man in a trance. Then recollecting himself, he walked slowly back through the store, but stopped at an encyclopaedia and pulled the "F" volume off the shelf. He thought he knew all there was to be known about Gutenberg; but that partner of his, that man Faust? He sold himself to the Devil, didn't he? And after spending the price, a high old time for twenty years, he went up in flames, up or down, with his conjuring books and all. If he had the Bible among them, of course it wouldn't burn. Maybe the Devil had a particular spite against it on that account. Maybe then—Sam Johnson smiled at the old legend, but he was rather glad to read that Mephistopheles' friend was not the same Faust as Gutenberg's partner. It was a pity Gutenberg had quarreled with his partner, all the same.

The honest bookseller, who had no partner, sat down to work at his desk alone till closing time, the parcel in full view before him. He would not let anyone else see him put it away for the night. He was correcting the proofs of a new catalogue. It was full of rarities, many of them already in his safe down below, but he seemed to have lost all interest in those. They were mere dust and ashes compared to this incomparable gem. The world's desire, if the world only knew what lay hidden in that brown paper. The treasure of treasures. After what unimagined adventures in the ancient world, through what blessed

chance had it taken refuge in that New World store? And his own store, of all the hundreds it might have sought, if the Devil had had his way!

The crowd hurrying past that window,—if they only knew! Under that bobbing umbrella, now, or in that glistening car,—a famous book collector like as not,—old Matthew Budge had his den but three doors up the street. The old book-miser would be sorely tempted to kill and steal, if he happened on Sam in a lonely office with that thing on his desk.

A car flew by with a vicious howl,—just such a howl as Satan would vomit, hunting such a prey.

Closing time. The last clerk had gone. Sam walked after him and made sure the door was locked. Halfway back to his desk he turned round,—the door could not be opened from outside, but some curious eye might be looking in, and every eye was that of a potential thief.

Now he stood by his desk, and touched the book with reverent hand. Not because it was a Bible, for all his inherited awe of the Scriptures. The hallowed Latin of that ancient book enshrined the inspiration of the civilized world,—the meaning of it mattered not one straw, at such a moment. Had this been a work of ribald blasphemy, and still the unique first copy of the earliest printed book, he would have worshipped it as heartily.

If the parcel had not been sealed—! Never mind, with vivid imagination he saw through the dowdy covering a glory of picturesque black-letter type, of florid illumination, an autograph destined to thrill the sensation-loving world. To-morrow he would examine these things with microscopic enthusiasm. But these after all were details. It was the marvellous Whole they made up, that filled and satisfied the man. He scarcely saw the trees for the wood. Even the profit could not enter his mind, at that ecstatic moment.

How long the moment was, he only realized when a clock struck. That brought him down to earth. There was a wife awaiting him. She would not make annoyed and annoying remarks about time, in connection with dinner. She was not that sort. An admirable wife, and dearer to him than his books. . . . No, he made no exceptions,—this book was not his, anyway, and he did not consciously wish that it was.

NO ROOM IN THE SAFE

With the gentle hand of a nurse to a new-born prince, he carried the parcel down to the basement and opened the safe. It was chock full of treasures, many of them left by clients for sale on commission. He would not disturb them if it could be helped. Besides, it would take so long to pick and choose. The wings of flying time beat loud about his ears, and dulled the uneasy voice that whispered “Risk!”

Ah! There, on top of the safe, was a tin box. It was full of books crowded out of the safe, but they were all his own. He took them out to make room for

the parcel, locked the box and put it back on the safe.

With a light heart and absent mind Sam stepped up the stair, wriggled into his coat, and picked up a cigar, though instinctively he avoided striking a match till he reached the door. Pausing there for a final glance around, he was horrified by a mouse audaciously trotting across the floor.

Atrocity! A mouse in a book store! Worse than a bull in a china shop. Where was the good-for-nothing cat? Next morning Sam would have the store bristling with mouse-traps. A fort surrounded with barbed wire entanglement would be nothing to it. Thank heaven, a mouse could hardly gnaw its way into a tin box and have any teeth left for the contents. What a millionaire’s meal the beast would make, off a ripe old Gutenberg!

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Sam bought a paper to read on his way home as usual, and sat holding it up before his eyes, but never a word he read. The flaunting front-page headlines might have been printed in blazing gold, and he would not have noticed them. He only saw—an old brown book.

Visions of future bliss came flooding into his mind. He smiled to find his thought shaping itself to the tune of a revival song,—

"Yes, there will be
Glory for me!"

With natural incongruity, the same thought took the shape of a theatrical announcement: "Samuel Johnson presents—" The reflected glory of a royal accoucheur presenting a loyal empire with a long-expected heir to the throne, was nothing to the glory of the one and only bookseller chosen by Providence to dazzle a universe with the totally unexpected treasure of treasures.

Glory—yes, and profit, now he allowed himself to think of that. Decidedly, a handsome profit. Only a commission, to be sure. Alone, he could not buy the book outright, and he never went into partnerships or syndicates; but a very moderate commission would mean a big sum. The book would fetch an enormous price, the highest by far ever paid in all the fevered annals of book-collecting.

He saw himself surrounded by a clamorous crowd of potentates,—deigning only a silent smile in contemptuous rejection of hundred thousand dollar bids,—reluctantly letting the treasure go at a quarter-million,—bringing home a $25,000 cheque to his wife,—filling the last days of a dying young man with comfort and luxury.

THE IN-EQUALITY OF FATE

Yes, he was sincerely and generously glad, and glad that he felt glad, on poor young Galt's account as much as on his own. . . .

Here a fellow-passenger, swaying past him to the door, trod on the dreamer's toes, and offered not even a grunt of apology. A supercilious glance at the projecting foot proclaimed that he felt rather sinned against than sinning. An offensively prosperous and proud young man. So unlike young Galt.

Under the sting of youthful insolence, however, Sam's thinking took a less benevolent turn. The vast difference between young Galt's share and his own occurred to him. That $225,000 was really more than the invalid could spend easily, or at any rate decently, in his remaining time on earth. The other

$25,000 would have given him everything he could possibly need, or even desire, with one foot in the grave. If, now—if their positions had been reversed,—if Providence had given the ownership to the dealer and the dealership to the owner—?

This vague idea at once took definite form.

Sam's great ambition from youth up had been to retire from business rich, buy back the ancestral farm in Vermont, and live the country life. A stony hill farm it had been, to be sure. His father had been starved out of it, and he himself could hardly hope to dig a living out of dirt and rock. He had no wish to try. He would build an ideal country home. The old farm sloped down to the shore of exquisite Lake Memphremagog,—the Loch Katrine of America, as a Scottish writer had called it, and that from a Scotsman was superlative praise. He would turn most of the farm into a park, as Nature had meant it to remain. He would hire other men to cultivate the rest,—men who liked that sort of thing when profit was no object.

It would take a lot of money, to make that beautiful home, and a lot more to keep it up. Sam had started saving early but for years now he had been living up to his income. Bad investments and high expenses had banished his dream to the clouds. Only a great stroke of luck could bring it back to earth. He was past middle age. And to think of that young man on the point of raking in $225,000 which he had not earned and could not hope to spend!

Sam's wife needed the change,—he himself only wanted it. She was delicate. He had sent her down south, the last three winters. Not this winter, for it could not be done without borrowing, and she would not hear of that. He was in debt already. The $25,000 would clear off everything and leave—well, what would have seemed a noble surplus but for that dream, which had suddenly returned from the clouds and persisted in hovering just—only just—out of his reach.

$225,000!

"Bah!" he said to himself, "what's the matter with you, Sam Johnson? Coveting your neighbor's goods, eh? Come out of it!"

He shook himself in disgust, as if to shake off a caterpillar. The man next him, feeling his elbow jogged, looked up in mild surprise. Johnson apologized, and started reading his paper.

He walked home from the station an honest man, honest in thought as well as deed. Glad of his luck, and glad of the other fellow's bigger luck. No, he did not envy, he did not covet.

THE SECRET SALVAGEMAN

The happy husband stepped up to the door, agog to share the good news with his wife. She could go south after all. His hand was in his pocket, for the key,—but Fiona had heard his step and rushed out to meet him, horror on her face. His smile vanished.

"Oh, Sam, the store's on fire,—they've just 'phoned."

One kiss, one word,—"Don't worry, we're well insured,"—and he was rushing back to the station. . . .

Insured, indeed! His own stuff, yes,—but his whole stock in trade would not equal that one book, and there was not a penny of insurance on that. He should have seen to it, of course, if only for the one night.

It might not be much of a fire after all, he tried to comfort himself. All the way down, he was forcing himself to hope it was out already. If not—in agony of mind he prayed God to stop the flames before they could reach the tin box. Poor young Galt!

He scarcely thought of the fat commission snatched away,—but the destruction of the priceless gem that all the wealth of the world could not replace,—and that belonging to another man, who had only brought it because he "knew he could trust Sam Johnson." Intolerable!

The red glow in the sky as he left the train shrivelled up his last hope. He struggled through the gaping crowd—it was just a show, to them. The firemen were as cool as the crowd. They stood there calmly holding the hose, as if they were watering a rose garden. Such roses! The water itself seemed shockingly, inhumanly calm,—a dozen hard white streaks pouring steadily in through broken windows to the red raging furnace.

"There was no rescuing to be done," the captain assured him. The caretaker and his wife had come down the fire-escape behind.

No rescuing, indeed! There was the World's Desire to be saved, if only they had known. And now it was beyond salvation. The floor had fallen in. He shuddered to think what might be happening in the basement at that moment. He almost imagined he could hear old Gutenberg shriek in the torment.

Helpless and hopeless, Sam stood there beside the firemen all night. He had rung up Fiona from a neighboring store as soon as he arrived, telling her not to wait up,—the store was gone, and there was no use worrying about it, but he must stay down town.

Now and then at first he looked round anxiously at the crowd, for the one face he dreaded to see. No, it was not there. With some relief he pictured young Galt sitting tranquil at home before a cheerful fire, while the same

unfeeling element devoured his last remaining hope.

The glaring flames died out early in the night, the drizzling rain came down, the crowd faded away. A few firemen stayed on, pouring water in on the smouldering mass, and Sam just stayed with them.

It was dawn before they quit, leaving a policeman on guard. Sam turned away, worn out and dazed. He told himself he must go home.

No, no, no—he could not go till he knew the worst, till he had seen for himself. It would be horrible. He had been on a coroner's jury once, when a human being had been destroyed by fire,—even the doctor could not say whether man or woman. This would be almost as bad, a handful of ashes mixed with blobs of melted tin. Kept perfect through volcanic centuries in war-swept Europe, to be tortured out of existence in an hour of American peace.

He must search that basement, at any cost.

THE WINDOW IN THE LANE

The policeman gently refused him admission. "What's the use, anyway?" he said, pointing in and downward. What indeed, in that black gulf? Sam turned away again. Then an idea struck him,—how was it possible he had not thought of it before? There was a back entrance, from a lane. He went around, without saying a word.

The firemen had been at work here too, but they had all gone, leaving not even a policeman. The windows were broken, but barred, so it had looked as if no thief could get in.

Sam pulled and pushed at the bars. One of them gave, where the woodwork inside had burned away. He scrambled in.

The fire had not raged so fiercely at the back as at the front. The floor was nearly all gone, but an edge remained jutting out from the wall,—the water had reached it just before the flames. He crept along this edge to where the stair had been, and clambered down a slope of debris.

The street light shining in through the gaping front revealed a black monotony of ruin. A landscape devastated by earthquakes and forest fires combined would look like that. Charred beams fantastically rose at all angles from hills of black sodden pulp,—the wisdom and folly of a thousand minds resolved into their common element of carbon.

One glance was enough for all that. He turned quickly towards the strip beneath the unburnt edge of floor. Looming in the shadow he spied the safe, and hurried towards it.

His feet crunched on the charcoal, and he trod more lightly,—the policeman outside might hear and call him back. There was danger still. The floor of an office above had been nearly burnt through, and might give way at any moment. Listen! A little crackling sound. He shivered with sudden fear, then hurried on. So near the goal, he would take any risk rather than turn

back. . . .

Wonder of wonders! The tin box beamed upon him as the rising sun upon the Eskimo after a six months' night. With trembling hands he reached up for it.

The shrine was inviolate. But for a trifling heat blister here and there, the very lacquer of its surface was untouched.

The happy man opened the lid. The brown paper smiled up at him with its black eyes of sealing-wax as the three children of Israel must have smiled stepping out of Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace, their very hair unsinged.

PROBLEMS OF THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

If any tempting devil lurked in that black hell, now was his time!

The guardian of the book stood motionless, not even thinking, dazed with the shock of sudden relief when hope had fled.

A little black worm of thought crawled into the empty mind, swelled up, and in a moment filled it. The same he had shaken off in the train, but now full-grown.

One moment Johnson was an honest man,—the next, he was a thief.

The treasure was his for the taking. Everything in the store outside the safe had been destroyed,—the insurance people would certify to that. It would be plain as daylight that nothing had been saved,—after he had walked off with the one thing worth saving. No one could have the slightest suspicion.

Young Galt would be distressed, of course, but he could have no complaint. He had insisted on leaving the thing, at owner's risk. Sam would be generous, and give him $1,000 of the insurance money. . . . But, come to think of it, he had given him $500 in advance, so another $500 would be enough,—perhaps. Would it? No,—yes,—no,—well, maybe—. And yet—. Oh, he would see; he would do the right thing, of course.

Of course? The man did not yet see that he was a thief. He was not startled by the change in himself, he was hardly conscious of it, though he knew perfectly what he was about to do. His conscience was numbed and silent. The garb of honesty, that coat of shining mail so proudly worn these many years, had shriveled at a touch of fire. A mere veil of cobweb, that fine coat, after all.

Temptation? He did not feel it. He just fell into it, and had no sense of having fallen. . .

A man went whistling down the street,—some old sentimental song. Yes, "For bonnie Annie Laurie I'll lay me down and—" The whistler stopped short at sight of the wreck and the policeman, but Sam's mind supplied the missing word—

"Die!" Young Galt would die pretty soon. No, Sam defended himself, he did not wish the poor fellow to go a day before it was inevitable. Of course, if his illness was unexpectedly prolonged—it would be no kindness to wish the poor invalid that lingering fate—the delay might have awkward results. The treasure must be hidden, no human being must know of its existence, till John Galt—went.

After that, Sam would easily dispose of it.

Easily? Well, somehow. He would plan that later. There was no time now, he must get away with the thing.

He trod more carefully than ever now. The charred remains of stair crunched alarmingly, to his guilt-sharpened ears.

Halfway up, he stopped. That box would be a suspicious article to carry through the streets any time. In the early morning, before offices opened, it would be flagrant.

Taking out the parcel, he set the box down empty,—then snatched it up again,—it must not be found in that burnt chaos, itself unscorched. There was only one place for it. Impatiently he clambered down again and pushed it back on the safe. It would be found empty, and his clerks knew it had been full. Never mind, he could say he had taken out the contents the day before.

Climbing again to the old floor level, he crept, stooping low, along the unburnt edge. Before daring to show himself against the light of the rear window, he looked back through the dim vista of the store.

The policeman was looking in. How far could he see? Sam held his breath in terror.

ALLIES YESTER-DAY, ENEMIES TO-DAY

The guardian of the peace, and the guardian of the treasure. Allies yesterday,—enemies to-day.

The policeman felt a strong desire to scratch his back. That cannot be done, in uniform, but it can be tried. He tried, and his hand, bitten the night before by a savage prisoner, gave him a sharp twinge of pain.

"Damn him!" said the policeman.

If the devil heard, he must have smiled. The advice was so superfluous.

Sam Johnson heard, and trembled. Not from any dread of final doom. He was almost sure the man had heard him. Who else could have roused his anger?

No, it was a false alarm. The policeman started walking calmly to and fro. After a few minutes, every minute an hour to the thief, his unconscious foe stood still, with a broad back turned squarely on the store.

Sam squeezed through the window, looked up and down the lane, wiped the grime from his hands on the providentially wet umbrella, and walked boldly out of the lane with the parcel under his arm.

More than one policeman met him, and gave him a look over. Any man out on the streets at daybreak got that, Sam told himself. Especially a man equipped with decent garb and neat umbrella. These things drew attention,—but disarmed suspicion.

His real passport, however, was that honest face and bearing. He had always held up his head and looked the world straight in the eye. The habit of a lifetime was not to be destroyed in a moment. A temporary suspension of

honesty could not wipe out the physical marks printed deep on figure and feature by long years' practice of that virtue.

Temporary? Of course. One act,—yes, but no more. Any suggestion that he had embarked on a career of crime would have scandalized the good man. If a sheep jumps out of the fold for a moment, does she come back a wolf? The reasoning was good enough for him,—you must remember, he had been up all night, his mind was getting drowsy, and his conscience fast asleep.

If a policeman did notice that bulge in his coat, and insist on seeing the inside of that parcel, Sam had a perfectly satisfactory explanation. He had saved a rare book from his own store. His anxiety for it would excuse even his disobeying the policeman left on guard.

But then, if the survival of that book became known, so would its ownership. He would obviously have to be carrying it back—to a young man who could do quite well without it. He shrank from telling the truth as yesterday he would have shrunk from telling a lie.

It was a great relief when he came on a taxi. He threw himself back, exhausted, for a doze.

In doing so, his hand fell on the book. That started him thinking again. The problem of its disposal came up, and would not down. It flogged his tired brain, insisting on solution.

At last he thought he had it all worked out. After the owner's death he would go over to Europe on a buying expedition.

No, that would not do. He would be out of business by then. He would certainly not start another store, just for those few months. It could not be longer,—the possibility of the sick man's cure, with that deadly cough, was not to be thought of.

Well, he could go over anyway, and prowl around Europe. He would naturally still be interested in old books, wouldn't he? He would come back with this book, saying he had picked it up—no one could expect him to tell where: that amount of secrecy was a collector's privilege.

Of course, he could sell it privately, without bringing it back at all. But over there he might have to prove his ownership. Besides, it would fetch more over here,—and here he was well known, he had a reputation!

Would that do? No, there was something else, some kink to be untangled, and he could not think what. Oh yes, and it was a nasty one.

Young Galt might talk about his loss, before passing out. The treasure had gone up in smoke. Its resurrection, being a miracle, would have been all very well, might even have doubled its price, in the fifteenth century, but not in the twentieth.

The book Johnson would "discover" must be a different copy, then.

But how about the autograph? That was the worst of it. He might cut out the fly-leaf, so neatly that the copy would still seem perfect,—old books often had no fly-leaves,—but the book would no longer be unique, it would lose half its value: $125,000 gone at one snip.

If only he had not called Galt's attention to the autograph,—not taken such pains to tell him its immense significance! The young fool had either never noticed it before or at least never suspected its nature.

The poor thief sighed. He would have to make the acquaintance of Galt's relations, if he had any,—his lawyer too, though now he hated to tackle a lawyer,—and lead up to the subject of his books. That could be done naturally enough. He could soon discover if they had heard of any books in the library containing valuable inscriptions. But even if they hadn't, some one else might have. There was no saying who might not suddenly spring up with the story.

He would take the chance. If Gutenberg wrote an inscription in one copy, he could in another. Nobody could possibly prove, by some chance recollection of Galt's talk, that this autograph was identical with the burnt one.

FIONA SHUT OUT

"What number did you say?"

The driver had turned half round to ask. He might have noticed the parcel on the seat! Sam kicked himself for leaving it exposed like that.

"Right here," he said. He had given no number, only the name of the street. He should not have given even that; he should have walked the last few blocks. But the man would not know which house the book went to, anyway.

Sam again tucked the big parcel with difficulty under his coat, and walked slowly to the nearest door, holding the umbrella well down over his head, though scarce a drop was falling now. When the taxi was out of sight, he turned and made for home.

Was it John Gilpin—no, it was his frugal wife, in John's "Diverting History," who would not let the carriage come to her door "lest folk should think her proud." The quotation from that most rollicking tale came into Sam's head, but provoked no smile, only a frown. His sense of humor was crushed, or chloroformed, like his conscience,—they generally work or play together. . . .

Fiona met him at the door, a soft-voiced pink-and-white blonde of forty overflowing with wifely comfort.

"I know all about it," she said. "I 'phoned the Fire Department. You must be half dead, my dear boy." He had always been her dear boy.

She started helping him off with his coat. "I'm all right," he said quickly, "just take this,"—handing her the umbrella. While her back was turned, he slipped off his coat and laid it, with the parcel inside, on a chair. When she faced him again he caught her arm and led her into the dining-room,—then left her to make toast while he slipped out, smuggled the parcel to his den, and locked it up in a drawer of his desk.

With that off his mind,—no, never off his mind, but out of sight,—he could talk almost freely.

"I'm glad you take it so well," Fiona said, when he had described the miserable scene—cutting it short at the point of his going round to the lane.

Now he felt his tone had been too cheerful.

"I try to look at the bright side of things," he said. "You know how anxious I've been to get rid of the business. Now it's got rid of itself. That's settled."

"But can you afford it, dear?"

"Yes, I've been reckoning up as I came along. The insurance will take care of that. We can buy the old farm, and make the old house very comfortable till we can afford to build. Not on quite the same scale we've sometimes talked of,

old lady,—but even that may come before long. You see, with my knowledge of books—it would be a pity not to put that to some use; people trust me,—"

"Of course they do. I do myself,"—smiling, and patting his hand. "There's a rare compliment from a wife, isn't it? But you've earned it, Sam!"

Sam thanked her with a fleeting smile, and hurried on. He generally consulted her about the slightest change in their way of living. Now, with a revolutionary programme forced upon him, he had to force it on her. He was afraid of discussion. You never could tell what awkward searching questions a woman might spring upon you, and Sam was not skilled at fence and parry.

"You can get south after all, Fiona. The last months of winter are always the worst to you. I'll be very busy getting things settled up, and I'd better take a room down town. This house will find a buyer fast enough. In spring you'll come back and we'll go right out to the farm." Without any reason he could have shaped even in his own mind, he felt desperately anxious to have her away for a while. He must get used to "things" by himself.

"I can trust you even to the extent of a bachelor's room down town, Sam, —but do you think the most trustful of women would ever dream of letting the most angelic man pack up her things, and strip her house, without her eye upon him?"

Sam replied, "You can have Martha do everything just as you want it before you go, and any extra help you need. While you're gone, I'll run up to Vermont and arrange to have the old place fixed up spick and span, so you can just walk right in and make yourself at home as soon as you get back from the south."

"It all sounds rather breathless," said Fiona, "but I'll make no more objections. Now you get to bed, Sam. You're absolutely worn out."

"Bed!" He started up. "I must get down town at once. There are the insurance people to be seen, and—all sorts of people."

The sort of people that owned priceless books and trusted them to honest booksellers, for example. He dreaded the coming interview with Galt, inexpressibly. The sooner he got it over the better. Would the young man be waiting for him at the store, looking hungrily in at the black charnel-pit where his hopes lay buried? If so, would some reporter, also waiting for the bookseller, make up to the bookseller's victim and worm out the news of his fearful loss?

What flaring headlines would stream across the front page of the paper! The priceless book of books discovered and destroyed in one sensation of a day and night.

Young Galt might still have a hope,—the careful bookseller would surely have put such a treasure in his safe.

The public would have to take his excuse, that the safe was

full—but would they? A mighty lame excuse, he had to confess. True, he had not seen that the safe was full till it was too late to get the thing into the bank. But surely, surely, he could have taken out something else and made room for it? Nothing in that safe could begin to compare with the incomparable Gutenberg.

PUTS IN A WORD

No matter what he said, some blame would fall upon him,—he could see no escape from that. His brother booksellers would be most censorious of all. “He may be honest, but he’s a fool,” he could hear them say. And, when they heard of his quitting business,—“It’s high time!” To all book-lovers, his name would be anathema.

To plead that he was in a hurry, that his wife was waiting dinner,—that would only make matters worse. He would be overwhelmed by a howl of derision . . . .

Maybe—and he squirmed at this—the poor young man could not come out. The shock of the bad news might have been too much for him, might even have—Sam would not let himself think the word, this time, though he still based all his plans on Galt’s death later on . . . .

He had been in such a hurry to go, yet he sat there mechanically stirring an empty cup. Fiona’s sympathy took the blessed form of silence.

The sun came out, and shot a ray across the middle of the room. Sam looked over the table and saw a gleam of sunshine on Fiona’s hand. He would not look at her face. Rising, he went to the window; his fingers drummed upon the sill. Suddenly they stopped; a new thought was fighting its way into his unwilling mind.

So simple, too! He had only to unlock that drawer, take the parcel down to the bank, and report its safety to the owner. No excuses needed then, and no deceit,—no trouble, no perilous problems to be solved, nothing but congratulations all round.

A drowning man has been known to spurn the life-buoy. Sam for one moment wavered. Then the quarter-million rose before him and outshone the sun. He turned his back on the window. Kissing his wife goodbye, though still avoiding her eyes, he left the room.

Before his coat was on, a telegram arrived:

“Leaving home. Keep parcel sealed till I return. John Galt.”

The blessed respite! He would have to send Galt his explanation by letter, but that was so much easier. No horrible interview now, no awkward questions, no replies to be chanced on the spur of the moment. He would take infinite pains with that letter, so that when he did meet Galt—if he ever had to—there would be nothing left to be said. With what calculated innocence he would answer every conceivable question in advance, forestall any inclination to censure,—“make an atmosphere!”

Fiona was not the woman to ask “Who’s it from?” or “What’s the matter?” every time Sam got a telegram, so he was spared one little lie. He was thankful for the smallest mercy now.

As she saw him, marching away down the street, his step was light, his head erect, his face serene as ever, until—until one of those plaguy little thoughts came shooting in. Was there no end of them? That single act of his lifting a dowdy parcel from an old tin box in his own cellar, had it flashed a fire signal through the universe and let loose a bombardment of explosive bullets?

That telegram! It showed that Galt had not heard of the destruction of the store where he had left his treasure. Yet, if he had not heard, why had he not addressed this message to the store? What real reason, except full knowledge of the fire, could there be for sending the telegram to Sam’s private house?

This was another nasty kink, and Sam had not succeeded in straightening it out before he reached the insurance company’s office. . . .

Fiona, left alone, had no kinks to unravel, though much quick work to do. From the kitchen rose the tuneful Martha’s voice,—“When Gabriel blows his trumpet in the morning.” To unsuspecting Fiona the words hinted no threat of judgment. She lost no time adjusting her mind to the sudden but agreeable change of prospect. That mental process, and the physical activity of preparing for her journey, went on harmoniously to the soothing accompaniment of the girl’s exalted melody.

AT SEA

The smashing of Atlantic seas on the steamer's iron skin was no soothing accompaniment to the fretful thinking of Jack Galt. His cabin was down below. Wave after wave swept savagely over his port-hole. He hardly feared the glass would burst, yet he nervously reached down and hauled his club bag up on the berth beside him. He was too sick to rise.

Half way across, he ventured out for a breath of air, but hurried down again after one turn around the promenade deck. Nothing singular about that! Passengers prematurely confident of their sea-legs and sea-stomachs do that every trip, on various pretexts but for one unvaried reason.

Jack had two imperative reasons,—one common to the crowd, one all his own. The breath of air revived his brain, from the torpor of two days' sea-sickness. He suddenly remembered having left his bag unlocked. Staggering down to his cabin as fast as weak legs and tilting floors would let him, he pounced on the bag and opened it—shut it with a sigh of relief, and lay down beside it in his berth.

A horizontal half-hour restored his physical but not his mental comfort.

"Thieves infest all these boats like rats," he considered. "The best of them"—meaning the cleverest—"only mark down staterooms where they know there's something big. There's not a millionaire's suite in the ship with a bigger thing in it than I've got bumping against my knees. The Number One crook with his eye on the Van Kranks' diamonds would switch off on to this old book in a jiffy—if only he knew. But the Number Two crook works a whole

CLEVER JACK

ship on general principles, dropping into any cabin as chance offers and picking up anything he happens to find, from a fountain pen to a Gutenberg Bible.

"He's the one I've to fear,—and now's the time he'll be getting busy, with everybody tumbling out of their rooms anyhow and nobody in a state to care a damn whether their jewels are in the bed-clothes or at the bottom of the sea."

Jack had seen a notice posted up as he came on board: "Deposit your valuables with the purser, or the Company will not be responsible!" That might have been safer. He might do it now. Bah! That would be out of the frying pan into the fire—creating evidence against him if the worst should happen and the book were missed. He was not fool enough to leave a scent like that on the trail,—a record that on such a date such a passenger carried to Europe such a parcel, of exactly the size required. He must just take a chance.

Challenging fate, Jack sallied out again, but not till he had stowed the

parcel in the bottom of his trunk. This he locked and pushed under the berth.

Snugly wrapped up in a deck chair, he closed his eyes on the mad and maddening waves, and chuckled over a much more pleasant scene that rose spontaneously to mind. Oh, very pleasant! He saw himself sitting at Samuel Johnson's desk, with the big club bag at his feet. He took a parcel out of the bag, enchanted the bookseller with a glimpse of its unique contents, and put it back again. Then, saying he might as well leave the parcel with Sam after all, he reopened the bag and took out—another parcel instead, made up to look exactly like the first.

Such an easy conjuring trick it had proved,—so neatly done, though his first attempt at "ringing the changes!" Oh, a very pleasant picture to keep his mind off that maddening sea. He patted himself on the back. A bungler might so easily have foozled it,—forgotten which side of the bag the real thing was on and which side the counterfeit,—might in fact have taken the real thing out a second time and left it to the honest bookseller, while the bungler unconsciously carried off the parcel of rubbish as a treasure to Europe. Jack's stock rose several points in his own estimation as he compared himself to the common run of knaves.

A more extreme contrast could hardly be imagined than that between Sam Johnson and Jack Galt. Neither of them had ever committed what the law would call a crime, till the fateful book threw its irresistible temptation in their way. But there the likeness ended.

Sam had lived fifty jog-trot years of passive virtue, steady in business, happy and considerate at home. If he had not actively built up his high reputation for honesty, fellow-citizens had built it up for him on the solid foundation he had laid, and he took all the credit for the structure.

Jack had crowded into half the time a hundred activities, taking little more credit for the innocent than blame for the shady. Distressing his parents while they lived, his sister more and more to the end, he had cared just enough for their opinion to hide his worst habits, and enough for his own skin to keep within the law.

Yet here they were, fallen into the same temptation, tormented by the same fears, haunted by the same threatening fate, chained to the same treadmill of a problem, and reaching at last the same solution.

Jack would have to wait for his cousin's death, meanwhile trusting his wits and his luck—"assisted" luck, at a pinch—to keep him well fed, copiously irrigated, smartly clad, and continuously amused. Afterwards, the course would be clear. He had no business experience beyond a few early tiresome years in a London office, and that he preferred to forget; but he had a childlike faith in his own

CHICKEN-COUNTING

natural ability.

In fact, if John was too unconscionable a time in dying, Jack would chance it and dispose of the book in England while its owner still breathed in America. There must be collectors, certainly dealers, ready to jump at such a prize. If they asked questions, he could invent a most plausible tale of picking it up in a German junk store. If they wanted something more picturesque, he would tell how he rushed in and saved it from a fanatical moslem executioner about to cast it on a ceremonial bonfire.

It was not as if this copy had been known and catalogued, so that its various owners and wanderings could be traced. And, after all, no buyer would be too critical of his story if he offered the book at much less than it would certainly fetch at auction,—say $100,000. Oh, yes, he could trust his wits to find a market for the spoil and cover up his tracks!

That telegram was a fine stroke, he chuckled, to keep honest Sam from opening the parcel and finding it differed slightly from the parcel, identical to all appearance, he had just opened on his desk! Again Jack flattered himself on the neatness of his first attempt at "ringing the changes."

He would write, instructing the bookseller to send the package after him. . . . No, he must cable. In fact, he would send a wireless from the ship that very day. In spite of his telegram that he was leaving home, honest Sam might try to get in touch with him—with "John Galt"—and solemnly inform him of his fearful loss. The bookseller's eloquent regrets must be diverted from Cousin John's house in New York to a safe address in England. Thence, Jack would send a forgiving reply—by cable, of course; handwriting was always risky.

If by some miracle the treasure had been saved from the burning store, then Johnson's letter would be congratulatory instead of apologetic, and the unopened parcel would come with it. Jack couldn't remember what he had put in it,—old trash, no doubt,—he could destroy it without much loss. One bit of stolen goods was enough to risk selling,—when it was a big one. But why bother his head about a thing like that? The newspaper accounts of the fire had all reported a total loss.

Yes, by the way, and none of the papers had hinted at any origin but accident, for that fire. Defective wiring was suggested as the most likely cause. The firemen had not reported any suspicious discovery,—a rear window broken, for instance. Before their arrival, no doubt, all the windows had been broken by the heat. And who could possibly have any motive for starting such a fire? The store-keeper, for the insurance money? Sam's high name for honesty would protect him, there,—or if not, Sam would just have to take his chance, as Jack was doing!

A feeble voice beside him broke in on Jack's pleasant meditation. The voice came from a large bundle of wraps on the next deck chair.

"Edward, there's the deck steward coming with tea and biscuits. I'm dying of hunger. I've left my teeth in a glass over the wash-stand."

Edward, somewhere on the other side of the voice, only grunted.

"Do go and get them, Edward. And, come to think of it, I dropped my emerald earrings into a glass there too. I think it must be the same glass. I was too sick to notice. Do you think they'll be safe?"

Edward struggled to his feet. "Not on your life, they're not." He staggered to the nearest door, and disappeared.

AN EMERALD WARNING

Jack's fears had all returned. He swallowed a cup of tea and a biscuit, and waited almost as anxiously as the lady herself.

The husband came speedily back, and handed something to his wife. She slipped it into her mouth, and pushed a biscuit after it. Her tea-cup followed, but paused halfway to her lips. "Well?" she asked.

"They're gone, sure enough," he said.

"Oh! Oh!" she feebly cried, setting down her cup untasted. "It's terrible. The company should be ashamed of itself, letting thieves prowl around first-class staterooms on a ship like this! Do you think it's our own bedroom steward? No, it must be the stewardess. I didn't like the look of her from the first, and I'm rarely mistaken. She's got those absurdly little ears, and I'm sure her shoes are two sizes too small for her."

"It's just as likely to be a passenger," said Edward, when his wife was out of breath. "There's no saying what consummate rascal you may be rubbing shoulders with, on board ship."

Jack had been on the point of getting up to visit his own cabin, but now thought better of it. Sudden departure, after Edward's remark about consummate rascals, might be misinterpreted. Fuming inwardly, he took up a second biscuit and languidly nibbled at it. After a discreet ten minutes, listening to the wrath and lamentation of his neighbors, he rose, paced slowly to and fro within their sight, then dived in at a door and descended to his cabin. Unlocking the trunk, he found its contents safe,—locked the trunk again, and sat down upon it to recover.

A gentle swishing sound in the corridor! He pricked up his ears. The door softly opened, a few inches,—a few inches more, and he caught a glimpse of a small gloved hand. The owner of the hand at the same time caught a glimpse of Jack's feet.

"So sorry!" a gentle voice said. "The wrong room!"

The door quickly closed. Jack sprang up and looked out, but the errant visitor had turned a corner and passed out of sight.

With shaky hand, the young man wrote out his wireless instruction to Johnson, giving the address of a backstreet tobacconist in London. He had often used that address before, for letters he preferred not to receive at home.

He rang for a steward to take the message, but immediately changed his mind. When the steward came Jack only wanted ice-water. He crumpled up and pocketed the telegraph form, waited till the steward had come and gone again, then drew a glove on his right hand and went off himself to the wireless room. “I’ve strained my wrist,” said he to the operator. “Would you kindly take down a message?”

Hurrying back to his cabin, he did not leave it again that day. At the sound of the bugle he lay down and made the steward bring his dinner. An evening in solitude was misery, but he would try to endure it. He got out a pack of cards and played “patience,” but that was too insipid. If only he had caught hold of that surreptitious little hand when it opened his door! A thief with a face to match that hand might be good company. He took a swig from his flask, lay down, and dozed off and on, still drowsy from his two days’ sea-sickness. Another swig, and he slept the all-night sleep of the irresponsible unjust.

After breakfast in bed, having quite recovered, he found it intolerable to stay down in that hole. Reading had always bored him, or he might have passed the time contented with a book, if he had had one. . . . “If! Haven’t I, just!” The recollection made him laugh. He kicked the trunk. “And a Bible, of all things! A Latin Bible, at that!” He laughed again.

LUCK IN BROWN PAPER

“Well, I’m not going to stick down here all the voyage,” he swore, growing more and more fretful, “and I’m not going to leave it here without me.”

He savagely dug out the parcel, hid it in the folds of an overcoat, and carried it up to the smoking room.

Though hidden, the parcel was so large that anyone with half an eye could see there was something in that overcoat. However, no one was interested in anything Jack might choose to conceal. Anything of that size, that is. If he had been suspected of a pack of cards up his sleeve, now, the whole smoking room would have been tense and taut with excited anticipation.

Up here Jack found himself in his element, the element of poker. His coat lay snugly on the seat beneath his elbow, and did not interfere in the least with his game.

“In fact,” he thought as he picked it up at the end of a profitable morning, “I guess the old book’s lucky. Good thing the boys don’t know it’s here. They might object.”

After this it would have looked absurd to order meals to his stateroom, and he couldn’t very well take his coat into the dining saloon and eat with it under

his feet. Fretting at the necessity, he locked the parcel up in his trunk and left it under Lady Luck's protection while he swallowed his uneasy meals. The rest of every day it spent comfortably under his elbow in the smoking room. His winnings grew.

Having no use for athletics except as something to watch and bet on, his amusement at the energetic passengers tramping round and round the deck for exercise was not even tinctured with envy. All the same, it was never long before he sank to his familiar state of fed-upness, and the boat steamed into the Mersey just in time to save him from the depths of boredom.

"You're quite a mascot!" he said, patting the parcel affectionately as he slipped it into his club bag for the landing. "I'll be sorry to part with you, old thing. But you'd take a couple of hundred voyages, at the top of your luck, to rake in the hundred thousand dollars I'm going to get by parting with you."

Counting his chickens, in perfect confidence of a record hatch, he stepped off the boat into England.

INTERLUDE: TRAGEDY OF A CANADIAN HILL FARM.

JOHN AS ANCIENT MARINER

If wishes could kill, John Galt would not have had one week's board to pay at Palm Beach. His executors might.

The germs of occult "science" floating thick in the light of modern America as in the dark of medieval Europe, and swallowed as greedily by the unreasoning and the hysterical, had never given John more than passing amusement. Tales of telepathic suggestion, baleful or boonful, shot from one mind to another on waves of mental radio, to him were only fairy tales, or he might have withered away under the spell of intense desire for his death now burning in the minds of Cousin Jack and honest Sam.

Immune to such waves of deadly influence, never dreaming that two of his fellow-men grudged him the common boon of life, unaware indeed of any great possession capable of kindling envy in the sourest soul, John marched serenely up the road to health.

"I can't make you out, John Galt," said the doctor, striding along the moonlit seashore road with his patient. "Here you've been putting on weight faster than any other sick man on my list; and I never knew such consuming energy on the road. I can hardly keep up with you. Physically there's scarce a thing the matter with you. You never had what your old doctor thought you had, and now we've found the real trouble we've disposed of it. I haven't the conscience to charge you for attendance now; you do me more good than I can do you, taking me these tremendous walks. Yet the stronger you get in body, the more depressed you seem in mind."

"Not exactly depressed, doctor, but somehow—. I did enjoy myself a little down here at first, but now I reckon I'm just homesick."

"I think I understand. As long as you felt under sentence of death, you just let yourself drift, enjoying anything pleasant that might come your way while it lasted. Now that you feel returning strength, you want to plunge into all the activities of your old life. But you'd better be careful. You're not out of the woods yet. The activities of a young man about town, at loose ends, with no responsibilities, are just what you've got to avoid. I quite agree that this won't be the place for you much longer, with summer upon us. But New York City's not the ideal summer resort either. A bit farther north, now—"

John laughed. "You're the sort of doctor I like. You give the patient his own prescription. It's up in the north I want to go; back to the old farm where I was born! I had planned a long summer hike up there, if ever I got away from here on my own legs. And now I know it was more than just a vagabond hankering after an outdoor life. It's the old farm up there I'm homesick for."

"Curious,—I've been thinking of you as the genuine town-bred article."

"A pretty thick veneer of the town I suppose I've laid on, but that's all. If I lived anywhere else for a century I'd always feel, way down inside, that the real home was where I lived those first seven years. The country-side. And what a country! For sheer delight—! My word, to think of it! Why, it all comes back to me as bright and clear as the moonlight shining on that sea—and as it shone on Lake Memphremagog. It wasn't so much the beauty, though, that charmed me then. A child's eyes find too much of interest in all the little things close to his feet. Oh, the berrying, and the sugaring-off,—and cutting a path through deep snow from house to barn after a storm,—and

the sleigh bells,—and the first time they lifted me on to the old mare's back, long before I had a pony of my own,—and old Jean B'teest the French-Canadian with his 'Marche donc!'—plowing in and out among the stumps with a walking plow.

"One time I trod on a chicken, and hid behind the cordwood pile, feeling as I think a driver must in those deadly city streets when he has crushed the life out of a child. Oh yes, there was some tragedy mixed with it all, but what sticks in my mind is the sheer delight—till the final tragedy that took us away from it all . . . . To think I had almost forgotten that!"

John fell silent. The doctor wondered what the tragedy had been, but asked no question.

"Let's sit down a bit, if you don't mind," said John. They sat on a moss-grown log, a little back from the road, and looked out from the shadows over the moonlit sea. The breeze was off shore, and hardly perceptible where they sat. The lamb-like ripples gently rose and fell, whispering to the beach as if in dreams; but far out, where wind struck water, the "white horses" shook their flashing manes.

"It was this way," John began after a pause. "Mother—I've never spoken of it to a soul till now—it has only come up in my own mind now and then in a shadowy sort of way. The little that father said, that first night,—I suppose he felt obliged to tell me something, to explain her not being there, and he could hardly lie, even to shelter her,—but that was all I ever knew. He never spoke of it again, and I never dared to ask. When I grew up, I could imagine enough to fill in the gaps, but it wasn't a pleasant subject to think of, and it seemed like something finished and gone like a piece of ancient history,—past and gone for ever,—nothing to be done about it. As if she was—dead. Yet when it comes back to me now I wonder—if she is dead, and, if not, whether there's really nothing for me to do about it.

"You must have been up against lots of family tragedies, doctor, and perhaps when you know, you might—well, will you let me tell you? I feel as if I must." John faintly smiled, as he added. "Sort of 'Ancient Mariner' feeling,

you know, only I haven't a glittering eye to hold you with if you want to get away, you may thank your stars."

"Now you've started," the doctor said, "you couldn't drive me away with a club, till you've finished."

"Thanks, doctor. Well then—Dad met her when he was a student in Canada. She was the German professor's daughter. They were both very young, but they fell in love—. Stupid to say 'but'. That seems the right time to fall in love, isn't it?"

"It's the time they all do it, anyway."

"I never did. Something left out of my composition, eh? Or maybe when the parents have it too—too powerfully, there's nothing of it left for the children. Sort of pendulum effect.

"My parents must have swung as far as the pendulum could go, in that direction. Father was intense about everything he took up. As for the love of women, he must have shut down on it hard, after—afterwards; but from the very strength of the effect the tragedy had upon him, I guess he had plunged into love as desperately as he plunged into business when nothing else was left him.

"As for mother, poor woman, there's no doubt about it.

"Father was in training for a lawyer, but both his brothers died, and he was the only one left to carry on the farm, which he loyally did. His parents were old,—they must have married late in life. Dad wasn't going to follow their example. He wanted to marry as soon as possible, and mother did too. If he stuck to the farm, of

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

course he would have a home ready-made to take her to, without waiting to work his way up in a city profession.

"He was barely twenty-one when they married, and she was only eighteen. They came to live at the farm, but—it was the old story, you know. She wanted to be mistress, and the old lady wouldn't be put on the shelf. Mother wasn't the typical sort of German hausfrau at all,—more of a southern or Celtic type, I gathered,—dashing, quick-tempered, passionate to a degree. But she wanted to run things all the same.

"To please her, though he hated to quit the old folk, Dad left his father to carry on with a hired man, and brought us to New York. His uncle had a wholesale grocery, and gave him a good job. I was just a baby, about six months old, and I've no reason to suppose she neglected me,—but something must have happened pretty soon to scare father. The old folk died, almost together, before I was a year old. Instead of looking for a tenant, or getting a neighbor to run the place on shares, father at once gave up his job in town and went off to run the place himself, of course taking us with him. He 'ought to have gone before,'—he let out that much, and I'll never forget his agonized

tone when he said it.

"Maybe it wouldn't have made any difference. But I guess he thought mother might settle down happily enough when she could run things to suit herself. Honestly, I think she must have run the house pretty well. It was clean and tidy compared to most of the old farm houses around, I remember thinking, as soon as I was old enough to notice.

"Maybe I'd be three or four then. I could read by the time I was five, and used to read Grimm's fairy tales aloud to her, sitting on a little wooden stool covered with a scrap of red carpet, while she knitted and darned our stockings. She knitted beautifully.

" 'That's good, little Jack, that's good,' she'd say, patting my head with her hand in a stocking, when I finished up with 'They lived happily ever after.'

"All the same, one of the first things I remember was her going off on a visit to the city. She had been particularly cheerful for some days before that, and even singing at her work,—singing the old German songs with that rich voice of hers, when we were alone together,—so I felt the change miserably the first day or two without her.

"Father and Jean Baptiste, one or other, would try to keep an eye on me, but couldn't keep me on a string, and when I got tired toddling along in a furrow after the plow I'd stray off into the bush hunting berries.

"Once I remember wandering on and on till I came out on the other side of the bush. I squeezed through an old snake fence, and found myself in a new world. There was a neat little log shack, with about a dozen kiddies playing around. I wasn't used to other children of any sort, and these were chattering in a strange language, so I got scared and started to cry.

"The biggest girl,—a dainty black-eyed beauty she was, washing clothes in a tub and keeping all her brothers and sisters in order at the same time,—wiped her hands and ran and picked me up and cuddled, me, and carried me off to the house, talking all the time.

"It was 'O le joli bébé,' and 'O mon petit tête rouge.' I didn't understand a word of it at the time, but that didn't matter, it was all mighty comforting. It might have been Chinese, it would have been just as sweet and musical, coming from her motherly little heart.

"Her own mother was scrubbing the floor—they'd as soon leave out the daily prayer as the daily scrub, those Canadian habitants—but she looked up and smiled and told Félice to give the 'petit tête rouge,' a 'croquinole,' which turned out to be a doughnut.

"They knew who I must be, and Félice took me back home at once in case mother would be getting anxious. Finding nobody at our house, Félice waited and played with me till Dad came in from the field. Then she was going to leave me,

but I clung to her, and when she had gone I cried and wouldn't eat my supper. I'd had more than one of Madame Thoreau's doughnuts, I guess.

"In the evening Monsieur Thoreau himself appeared,—a big round-faced jolly giant of a French-Canadian. He smoked a pipe with Dad, and talked about crops and cows and children,—he spoke English as fast as French, sixteen to the dozen,—and at last he let out that his wife had sent him over to ask if they couldn't keep little tête rouge till madame the maman came home. They had all fallen in love with 'le bébé anglais',—Félice especially was 'toute éprise.'

"That was the tactful way he put it, as if they were asking a favor. Dad of course knew it was the other way round. They just wanted to do us a kindness, out of the goodness of their hearts. He agreed, because there seemed no other way to keep me out of danger. He fought hard to make Thoreau take something for my board,—there were twelve mouths to fill, big and little, in that French-Canadian family. Bless you, Thoreau was as stubborn as a mule on the point of hospitality. 'My wife,' he said, 'she'll dicker for half an hour to beat down a pedlar one sou in the price of a handkerchief, but she'd never forgive her man if he took a sou from a little visitor. Eleven children are just as easy to feed as ten. Anyway, Monsieur Galt, we are farmers, not hotel-keepers. Et voilà!' That was that!

"How long mother was gone, I've no idea. Why should I think of time, with those ten children to play with, and all treating me as an honored guest? At last, one evening Dad came over to fetch me. When we got home, there was mother washing up the supper dishes. She put down her face to kiss me, but didn't wipe her hands to pick me up, like Félice, and when she had finished and put me to bed she hardly said a word. I pulled the sheet over my head and cried myself to sleep, for Félice.

"As the days went by her old affection for me seemed to come back, and her old high spirits at the same time, as if she was more and more contented with her lot. But it didn't mean that at all. I suppose it was something in her working up to a state of excitement—looking forward to another adventure, whether she was consciously planning it or not. Don't you think so?"

"Very likely," the doctor said.

"She went off again, and again I found myself among the Thoreaus. They were delighted and I fell into my old niche as one of themselves. Their little tête rouge, madame always called me. Félice, though she had given me the name at first herself, took a notion it sounded disrespectful, almost insulting, from her young brothers and sisters, and wouldn't let them use it.

" 'Tais-toi!' she cried when little Joseph ran shouting to meet me,—'you know what the postmaster's boy got for calling Billy Brown "carrots"—a box on the ears. And tête rouge is the same as carrots.'

"They couldn't call me Jean because they had a Jean of their own, so they

compromised on ‘le roux’, ‘the ruddy one.’ I got to be so much a member of the family, bye and bye all the neighbors were calling me that. Later on, when I grew up and went back there visiting, it was ‘Com’ se va, Monsieur Leroux,’ ‘Bon jour, Monsieur Leroux,’ never anything else. I’m sure that’s how they’ll welcome me when I go up there now.

“There’s a strong French settlement just over the line, not far from our place, a solid block of them up in the hills, shepherded by a good old curé who prides himself on having

not one ‘anglais’ holding land in his parish,—though the district was settled entirely by our people a hundred years ago.

“MADAME LA VA-ET-VIENT”

“That’s neither here nor there,—but these folk were so kind to me when I needed kindness most, I’ve loved the French-Canadians ever since. My happiness with them was so dovetailed and linked up with mother’s desertion, I can’t think of her without thinking of them.”

“They were the silver lining of the cloud she cast,” the doctor said.

“That’s so,—and frankly, there seemed more silver lining than cloud.

“Mother came back, and the same thing happened—it must have been three or four times. She always came home quiet and depressed, but that soon wore off, and then her eyes began to flash and she started singing at her work,—the same old German songs.

“If she patted my curly head oftener than usual, or spread herself in the cookery way, making all sorts of iced cakes and sugar bread, and even candy for us—I don’t suppose it meant any increase of affection for us in particular but just a rising tide of restless energy, and affection in general, that would soon carry her off her feet. Young as I was, when she got like that I came to know the signals, and quite expected her to vanish and let me turn into a little Frenchman again—which didn’t worry me the least bit.

“The last time, when she’d been gone about a week, I suppose she must have written. I was playing with the Thoreaus one Sunday afternoon,—I was on the swing, under a great old elm, Félice pushing me higher and higher, when I spied father coming out of the bush and climbing over the snake fence. He looked very grim. He went into the house for a while, then came out, and took me off home with him.

“On the way through, the woods, he said: ‘Mother isn’t coming back here, Johnnie, and we’re going to the city to live.’

“That was all. If I asked any questions, father put me off,—he evidently didn’t want to talk,—and the excitement of going to the city for the first time drove out of my head even the grief of leaving Félice and the rest of her family.

“I took for granted we were going to mother and would all live in the city together. But we just went to a single room in a down town street. There was

no mother to welcome us,—no mother ever again. Father got back his job with his uncle, and used to leave me with a family in the same house while he was away at the store, till he worked his way up and got a little house of his own.

"Presently uncle died, and father had the whole business. He must have done well at it, for by the time I had left college he had sold the business and given himself up to a hobby of book-collecting. He certainly never neglected me. In fact, he watched over my education and helped me at it in a way few fathers do. He made me a real companion.

"Every summer he took me off with him on his holiday, always to the old place in Canada on the shore of Lake Memphremagog, and left me there when he had to go back to business. The farm was rented but it was the old home all the same, with a second home among the Thoreaus close by.

"They welcomed me like a son and a brother. I had a delightful time, helping in all the farm work, and Sundays hiking among the hills around the lake with one of the boys or driving with a bunch of them to visit Félice. She had married young, to a farmer, and every summer she seemed to have a new baby. She must have a dozen by now,—and just managing them all as happily as she used to manage her brothers and sisters. . . . And here am I,

thirty years old, with neither chick nor child, neither father nor mother!

WHAT HAS BECOME OF HER?

"So that's where I'm going now. It just seems drawing me like a magnet,—the old home in Canada. I haven't been up there since father died, and now that I'm going for the first time alone it won't seem quite the same place. . . . Curious, too,—as long as he was with me I hardly ever thought of mother,—I was so young when she passed out of my life, and he so filled the place of both. But now I feel—at any rate as if I ought to know what became of her."

"Did your father leave no word—no reference to her in his will?"

"Not a word. But he left a private note for me. I remember its very words: 'If ever you should meet your mother, tell her I fully forgave her long ago, and if she thinks I ever did anything she had a right to complain of—though she never even suggested such a thing—then say I beg her forgiveness too. I wish for nothing but her happiness.' "

"Then it looks as if he was pretty sure she was not in actual want."

"Not in want of money. He may have settled something on her. Or—I'm sure he would never stir a finger to divorce her, but she may have got a divorce somehow, somewhere else, and married again. When father died and I found that note I asked his lawyer about it. Father had said, when he made his will, that mother was otherwise provided for,—and that was all."

"Her people? You spoke of her father the professor."

"He was her only relation, over here at any rate, and he resigned and went

back to Germany soon after she left us. I found a letter from him to father, written just as he was sailing. He was terribly cut up about it,—his daughter had brought disgrace on three honorable names, he said. He thought father had been too easy with her, 'letting her have too much her own way'—the professor evidently had strict old-fashioned ideas about discipline for wives and daughters—but he had no other fault to find with the husband, who, he said, had been 'extremely generous' to her.

"Whether grandfather ever forgave her as father did, I can't say. I hope he did. But I know one thing—he willed his library to his son-in-law. He had been living on a small pension, that died with him, and he had no savings. The residue of his estate, as they called it, was left to his daughter, but it hardly amounted to anything,—whatever the old sticks of furniture would fetch, and her mother's personal jewels. These turned out to be only a few trinkets, not worth a hundred dollars. Dad put them in the bank, with the trifle coming from the furniture, and there they are still. She never claimed them. The professor had hardly anything to leave, except his books."

The doctor thought a while. "There's more than one form of temptation she may have fallen into," he said, "without imagining the worst. Drink, for instance."

"Or a mania for gambling," added John. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Only—what was that the letter said,—'Disgrace on three honorable names,' not two. If she had led away some man belonging to a decent family, that would explain, wouldn't it?"

"I'm very much afraid," said John. And then, defiantly,—"But suppose that was it? Suppose a woman has that side of her nature so—so abnormally developed that she can't control it, have we nothing to do but throw stones at her? That's what society does, it stones her out, if it can't stone her to death as the Pharisees used to. And whatever other people may do—good Lord, I'm her son after all, and if I met her to-morrow—"

"That's all very well," said the doctor, "and it does you credit. Only—I hate to suggest unpleasant possibilities, but you've asked my advice, and a doctor often has to seem cruel when he's asked for the candid truth. She may have settled down to live a virtuous life, but she may not. She's not an old woman yet, remember, if she's alive. If you came upon her in circumstances you can easily imagine, it would be an awful shock to you, and I doubt whether you could do her any good. A young man suddenly reforming a—a mother, even, hardened by twenty years of the life she may have been leading,—well, I've heard of such things in a novel, or a film, but nowhere else."

John shuddered. "We won't say any more about it, doctor. If I ever happen to find her, I hope I'll be man enough, and son enough, to lend her a hand, if

she's arm-in-arm with the devil himself. I was going to say I wouldn't actually try to look for her,—it would be a wild-goose chase, likely enough,—and yet I don't know. It would be an object in life, and I've got none now."

"That's the worst confession any man can have to make, or any woman either."

"I suppose you're right. I know you're right, now, though it never occurred to me before. You'll wonder my father, being the sort of man he was, never set me to work or made me strike out some line for myself. The fact is, though he liked his business well enough to make a success of it, he hadn't enough enthusiasm for it to keep him at it when he'd made a fair pile, still less to shove me into it too. And there was another thing,—he was very sensitive, and I can imagine how he must have shrunk from mixing all the time with people who knew his wife had left him. Though of course they wouldn't say a word, he'd know they were either pitying or blaming him. I could see it was a great relief when he retired to the company of his books,—his silent and best friends, he called them. He had few others. He never joined clubs or societies of any sort.

"He was my best friend, I know that, and not an unnaturally silent one either. When I got through college, we travelled all over the world together, seeing everything. When we came back and settled down in the old house, he'd start now and then talking about my future, as if he felt it his duty; but he wasn't a bit keen, and I really think he dreaded losing me as a companion. We were real pals.

"He tried to interest me in his old book hobby, but I never took to that. We just drifted along till—till he died, after a petty operation that went wrong.

"It was an awful shock to me, as you can imagine—he'd been so much to me. When I'd sort of got over that, I found myself with more money than I needed, and I've just gone on drifting ever since. I haven't so much now, but enough to live on, as I've no intention of marrying."

"Any man that doesn't have to work for a living is to be pitied," said the doctor, decidedly. "And if it's only marrying that'll make you work, then for heaven's sake marry!"

John smiled. "It's a good thing you're only a man and not a pretty girl sitting beside me here, with the rippling sea and the moonlight to back up your argument, or there's no saying how fast I might give in. As it is—let's time ourselves back to the hotel, and I bet you won't have any breath left for more advice."

The glamor of that vision, the old home up in the north, was irresistible. John started next morning, and lingered not by the way. He had said something to Isobel about stopping off in New York, just to pick up the companion dog and raincoat, but on the whole he thought he had better not. It would only

break in upon the even tenor of his cousin's way, and perhaps bring up again the unpleasant

question of her leaving. She was so thin-skinned about that. Her cheerful letters showed she was getting on quite happily, —Olga and Bridget were behaving like angels,—and he would not disturb her. No, let sleeping dogs lie—even the dog he had meant to drag out with him on the tramp.

It was only a dog in the abstract, no particular dog he had thought of, and he could pick one up anywhere,—wherever he left the railway for the road. He would certainly not start walking at the foot of Manhattan Island and walk right up through the State of New York, with a dog or without one. He studied the map, and picked out the little town of South Vernon, on the very border of Vermont. He would write asking Isobel to send what clothes he needed to the station there.

No again,—it would of course be a very fine picturesque walk, right up the whole length of Vermont, but he had a hunch it would be lonely, however companionable a dog he might pick up at South Vernon. Yes, or even at Brattleboro, a little farther on.

A craving for human comradeship, especially for those who loved him, had taken possession of his mind. He would get to the old home as fast as steam would take him, and enjoy himself among the friends of his youth for a spell. Then he could start off on his hike and cover infinite distances. The roads would be better then. Spring was apt to come late, in the hills!

ADVENTURE OF THE ELUSIVE TREASURE, CONTINUED

The idea that Isobel too might be lonely never once occurred to lonely John. If it had, another bright idea might have slipped quickly in on the heels of the first: one "get-together" act, and the loneliness of both would be ended.

If she had been idling, as he was, she would often have felt a twinge of loneliness. Not the constant ache of its chronic form,—she had too much company in herself, for that. The people she had met, past scenes she had enjoyed, came up easily to the surface of her mind, whenever it was clear of present happenings. Most of John's memory—people and past scenes had to be called up, before they would come.

And she could not have idled for any length of time, so loneliness never even got a chance to fasten upon her.

To those acquaintances who gleaned a few facts about her life in England, her contentment with her present work, still more the actual interest she seemed to take in it, was astonishing.

To Lottie, it was incredible. Lottie held the typist's desk on Isobel's left,—and held it with disdain.

"I do believe you actually *like* work," said Lottie one afternoon. "If you had a husband, you'd go down town and run a bank or something all day, and let him have a high old time running around on your money. I've got a boy friend would marry me to-morrow if I'd let him do that, and if I'd got the money. As I won't, and haven't, he's looking for a job right now. Says he's fed up with

A QUESTION OF TASTE

town life and needs country air,—and I'll say he does! Sooner he gets out of this live town, the better. I can spare him. He's not the only boy in New York,—though I'll be glad to see him back, too. D'you know anything a nice boy can get to do in the country except hiring out as chambermaid to a barnful of mules, Isobel? You were talking once about some beautiful place your cousin's got a farm at, up north yonder."

"I've never been there," said Isobel, "but I heard that a lot of nice boys used to put themselves through college by spending the summer as waiters at hotels, there and other places where people go for holidays. That might suit the young man better, though I should prefer farm work myself."

"None of your hay-seed for my Eddie, thank you! But I'll get after him and see if I can chase him up to juggle with eats on the lake-shore."

Here Maisie broke in, from the desk on Isobel's right. "But do you honestly like work, Isobel? I don't."

"Of course she does," said Lottie before Isobel could answer. "Look at the

way she acts. The old man dictates a bunch of stuff to her, and if his wits have been wandering it's up to him, not her; all she's got to do is go ahead and type his bunk and let him take what's coming to him. But Isobel gives herself a lot of trouble for nothing. She can't be satisfied till she takes it back to him and asks him if he didn't mean to talk sense."

One kind of superfluous trouble Isobel never inflicted on herself, or on anyone—except of course her employers, who expected and wanted her to do it—was to reform their language. Even Lottie's embroidery on the fact she allowed to pass.

"Oh," she said, "I don't seem to feel comfortable even typing a thing I'm pretty sure is wrong, so why should I make myself uncomfortable?"

"She don't often have to take a thing back, Lottie," said Maisie, "because she makes the man correct himself on the spot. When he gets off a howler, or anything she thinks would be better said different, she just looks up, and says it over in a puzzled sort of way, and he catches on and changes it. When she's taking from young Bassett, she don't even have to open her lips,—he's watching her like a cat and a mouse, and the minute he sees her pencil stop and her head go over like a question mark, he jumps at the sign and puts up his lordly hand as if he was stopping her and not her him. 'No, not that,' says he, and switches on to another line. His lordship wouldn't be caught in a mistake for a half-year's dividend, and it's Isobel keeps him from making them. That's why he won't let anyone else take his letters."

"That's one of the reasons, maybe," Lottie admitted, "but—I think he must like the color of your hair, Isobel, or something."

"Who'd look at a cheap chromo when he could get a real picture?" loyal Maisie asked. "But looking's as far as he'll ever go. He's got a wife he's crazy about."

"Naming no names," said Lottie, "there's a man here you know very well, he's crazy about his wife, all right, and gives her a mighty good time, but that don't ever prevent him going after another girl just as crazy, as a side line. What keeps Bassett in the straight and narrow is—he's in mortal terror of a social foh paw, as he calls it."

Isobel paid no more attention to the gusts of gossip blowing to and fro over her head than a duck to a summer shower. She stopped it as usual by starting her typewriter, and the other girls had to start their own.

She would have answered Maisie's question, if conversation had swung back to that, without hesitation. Yes, she did like her work; and the chiefs, knowing well the value of the interest she took in it, were giving her more

and more responsibility. Bassett himself would often give her a mere outline of what he wanted to say, and trust her to put it in the right words.

“But it isn’t a bit like what you’ve been used to,” said Maisie, bringing up the subject again on their way to lunch.

“I’ve been used to doing things,” Isobel said, “and it doesn’t seem to matter much what it is, if I feel I can do it well.”

Then they parted, at the door of Maisie’s eating-place, but Isobel, even as she turned away, realized that she had only told a fraction of the truth. She enjoyed what she was doing largely because it was such a contrast, such a blessed relief, after what she had had to do.

Isobel always went home to lunch,—it was a very short walk, that was one of the compensations the old Galt house enjoyed for its submergence in a business quarter. That day, though from force of habit she opened a book and stuck it up in front of her as soon as she sat down at the table, she soon lost the thread of the story and drifted back in spirit to the old cathedral town in England.

Her father had regarded himself as an invalid. This was largely imagination, but it made him terribly fussy about himself and wearing to the nerves of his wife. Isobel in her earliest teens had instinctively felt that her mother was being put upon, and made herself a sort of buffer between her parents. But she was only just learning to be imperative to her father when her mother died. He was glad enough then to leave the management of the house to his capable daughter, but as, with all her kindness, she refused to take his invalidism seriously, he revised his own estimate of it. After a short experience of hearty filial management, he felt so completely cured that he went off to London, found there a spice he had thought departed with his youth, and lived thenceforth the care-free man about town. Care for his children had never weighed upon him,—his wife had borne all that. And now they had no need of him. The boy had long been away somewhere on his own, turning up now and then to spend a few days in the old home and vanishing as soon as he had squeezed all the money he could from any of its inhabitants. The girl—well, she had the house and a small income from her mother’s little property, to do what she liked with, and in her father’s opinion was quite able to take care of herself. That was perfectly true, though small thanks to him. Able to take care not only of herself but of other people,—that was what she had been doing for years.

She had carried the whole family on her shoulders. She had had to do the thinking for the whole household. She had had to manage first the imaginary invalid and then the real one,—a headstrong elder brother too, so far as he would accept management from anyone. They had all depended on her, and when both father and mother had gone, the breath of freedom from care was intoxicatingly sweet. She had loved them all, her mother intensely,—had cared for them willingly and cheerfully,—but now that need was gone she felt as if

she wanted never to care for anyone again. It was not a freedom to "express herself," as the saying went, that she craved,—no kicking up of the heels after long domestic slavery, for she had been no slave; she had been too much the mistress. She craved the delights of abdication. The home she loved so much, she loved still more to escape from.

She had welcomed John's invitation to America partly, as any girl would, to see a new world, but chiefly to be rid of an old world. She had taken up stenography, not because her powers and tastes were unequal to more brainy work, but simply because it would keep her mechanically busy without thrusting responsibility upon her.

To be sure, little responsibilities crept upon her unawares, but only by degrees, and the old abnormal passion to be free of them disappeared as its cause faded into the past. She enjoyed taking care of John's house. She had enjoyed the little mothering she had been able to bestow on John himself, before his going. She enjoyed leading her office chiefs gently into the path of correct composition from which they so often strayed, and rose eagerly to the opportunity Bassett gave her of composing the company's letters herself. Nothing she yet had to do came within a hundred miles of taxing her resources or burdening her elastic mind. Yes, she enjoyed her daily work, and it was just long and responsible enough to make her thoroughly enjoy the home awaiting her at the day's end.

ALONE BUT NOT LONELY

Isobel was very grateful to John for that home. Her gratitude was absolutely clean, unsmirched by the cynical motive of favors yet to come. That old house,—she had almost come to love it, in spite of its antiquated style. She luxuriated in its peaceful comfort,—but never let herself forget that it was not her own. Before John's return in the fall she would have made "other arrangements." She refused to consider the nature of those arrangements, yet. They could be made at short notice; they involved no one but herself. The fall was still remote. Meanwhile she was not going to spoil her present enjoyment by contemplating its latter end.

To say that Isobel's enjoyment in that house was complete would much misrepresent her,—and no one knowing her would believe it. She was no vegetable, nor even a hermit. Quite frankly she admitted to herself that evenings would be pleasanter if Cousin John were sitting in his usual armchair in the library,—meals more appetising with Cousin John at the other end of the table.

She accepted invitations now and then, from men at the office, to shows and suppers, enjoying herself without compunction. She often had a few of her office mates in,—but only on Sunday, when she could cook the dinner or supper herself, letting both the servants out. They were not her own servants.

She drew the line at making extra work for them in their employer's absence, though they would have done it just as willingly for her as for him.

The library door she always kept locked on such occasions, pocketing the key, though she always spent the evenings there when alone. She would have liked to keep it locked all the time, when she was out, but that would have set the honest maids a-thinking on undesirable lines. Therefore she was content to keep a certain closet door in the library locked. Every evening she looked into that closet before settling down, and every morning before going out.

One morning, as she read the paper at breakfast, a head-line caught her eye,—

MOST VALUABLE BOOK IN THE WORLD.
GUTENBERG'S BIBLE FOR SALE.

She read the description of this treasure, advertised for sale the following week. Then she hurried with the paper into the library, locked herself in, and opened the drawer where old John Galt's book catalogue was kept. Young John had shown it to her once, doing the honors of the house soon after his cousins' arrival from England.

"What does that red cross mean?" she had asked, pointing to a mark in front of several titles.

"It means the book might fetch more than $10,—though father never sold any. You can see the figure he paid for every book, after the title. Most of them cost nearer ten cents than ten dollars. When we were over in Europe—that time we stayed with you, you remember—he loved to prowl around old book-stalls in London and Paris. At first, if he found anything in the two-penny box he would call it a day. If not, he would dip into the four-penny box. He must have felt a regular dare-devil when he ventured into the six-penny.

JOHN AND THE GUTENBERG

"There's a whole stack of old folios in that closet, too high for the shelves out here, and I doubt if one of 'em cost more than half a dollar. He was indignant if I jollied him for buying literature by the pound, but I'm sure the weight did count for something with him.

"Then, when we got back home here, he began dropping in at book auctions and recklessly running up to dollars. I went along, once or twice. If he bid ten, in that intoxicating atmosphere,—it must be worse than Monte Carlo, to a susceptible subject,—next moment he'd more than half hope some one else would bid eleven. If not, he'd smuggle the book into the house and say nothing about it, at first.

"When I found out, I rather encouraged him. Most men of any enterprise want to speculate in something. Maybe it kept him out of other varieties, like stocks. I liked to hear him boast the wide margins in an uncut book,—he'd a

perfect horror of the Wall Street breed of margins."

"There's a book with a page all to itself," Isobel had remarked, "and a red circle instead of a cross. No price, either; just 'Gutenberg's Bible'."

"He got that for nothing. It was the only thing he kept, out of a lot that he came in for when grandfather died, over in Germany. I asked him what that red circle meant. 'It's the most valuable book I have,' said he. 'Would it run as high as three figures?' I asked. 'It would,' he said,—so sure about it, that I reckoned it might run to four. Somehow he didn't seem to like the book, for all its value. There was some tradition of bad luck going along with the thing. It was the worst sort of luck for grandfather that sent it over to us, because he was murdered. Father thought of giving it to the Canadian Parliamentary Library, at Ottawa. That library has such colossal good luck, all the bad luck one old book might bring wouldn't make any more difference than a drop of water in a glass of whiskey,—or the other way round. The library was the only part of the Parliament Building saved when the rest was burned. All the same, I've never been unpatriotic enough to pass on the risk to my native land, especially as I may be glad of the three or four figures myself. I don't know who Mr. Gutenberg was, or why his old Bible should be worth much more than Mr. Smith's or Mr. Brown's. I've never so much as opened the parcel it's in. There's a memorandum or something in grandfather's writing telling all about it. Rather exciting, so far as I remember. You're welcome to read it any time,—that or anything else you can find that looks interesting. No secrets here. Anything father didn't want known he took care never to put on paper, he said one time."

The conversation all came back vividly to Isobel in the flash-light of that newspaper announcement, especially of its last paragraph:

"The last copy sold realized $60,000. The present copy, an exceptionally fine one, is practically certain to bring a much higher price."

And John had thought his copy might possibly fetch a thousand!

She glanced once more at that red circle against the name of Gutenberg in the catalogue. Then she unlocked the closet, mounted a chair, and stood face to face with a brown parcel on the top shelf. A red circle stared out at her from its nearest end. But if the mark had been on the other end and out of sight she would not have had to look for it. She knew the parcel only too well, as she recalled with a shiver the last night her brother had spent under that roof.

She locked the door, and hurried away to her work.

"What's the good word?" Lottie asked, as Isobel took her seat, flushed and triumphant. "Rich uncle left you a million?"

Isobel sobered down at once. "Not that I'm aware of," she said, smiling, and busied herself with the machine. The other girls knew better than to press Isobel Galt when she did not

choose to talk. All that day she was particularly silent.

Home again, at her solitary dinner she read the newspaper article again. Her eyes sparkled. “If dear old John has lost enough to make him want to sell—or even if he hasn’t—won’t he be pleased!” She was pleased herself, immensely pleased,—more than if the gain were to be her own. Should she cut the article out and send it to him? On the whole, no. He would be back very soon, and she could mention it incidentally then,—if indeed he had not noticed it in the papers down south.

A year had passed since that conversation about the Gutenberg. Neither of them had had an inkling of its value then, and it had never been mentioned since. It might occur to John as just a little strange that she should remember his possession of it so clearly, unless something had happened meanwhile to bring it back to her mind and keep it there. She had not been in the habit of looking at that catalogue, still less had she ever thought of foraging for other documents, as he had casually told her she might. The books she read were modern things in an open bookcase—old Galt had never dreamed of admitting such juvenilities to his catalogue.

Then her brother’s hateful words came back to her, and clinched her resolve to say nothing of Cousin John’s good fortune to him now and as little as possible when he returned. She “would get everything out of John if she played her cards well and did her hair better,” the mercenary wretch had said. It was true enough, she had been rather indifferent about her hair,—and the next morning she had given it some little attention. Any woman neglecting such a hint, even given with so hateful a suggestion, would be no woman at all. But she was still ashamed of her taste in reform,—she might have waited a day, till John had gone. Well, the dear man had probably not noticed the difference, in his hurry that last morning!

The hateful suggestion itself was another matter, and a serious one. The sudden addition of $60,000 to John’s remaining capital, whatever that might be, would make him—not literally a millionaire, but what the other girls would emphatically call a “catch.”

Lottie, in fact, had made no secret of her readiness to “marry your grandfather, dearie, if he’s got ten thousand berries in the bank.” Maisie had protested against the sordid confession, but admitted that if she liked two men equally she would prefer the man with $10,000 to the man with $1,000. Isobel, appealed to, had said, without looking up from her work, that if she liked two men equally she wouldn’t like either well enough to marry him. If she did like a man well enough for that, $10,000 would not make her like him any more,—or any less, if he got it honestly.

An echo of this chit-chat came back to her now. Here was the man with the $10,000 six times over,—no hypothetical individual, but an actual man within

her reach. Again the dreadful truth of her rascal brother's words came crushing in upon her. She could easily win Cousin John by "playing her cards well." In fact, to win him, she might only have to show herself ready to be won. Even without that $60,000 to challenge her self-respect, she would not do it.

Besides, she said to herself, she did not like him well enough to marry him. She did not love him. . . She had never said that in so many words, even half-consciously to herself. And the instant she had said it now, the question sprang up to face her—"What *is* Love?" . . . She smiled. "I wonder. Something I haven't felt yet, thank heaven, or I'd know it!"

AN ENTRY IN A CATALOGUE

That "Thank heaven!" however sounded false and hypocritical. No, she might be thankful to be spared the sort of thing that Lottie had ladled out to three young men in turn, for whatever it would fetch, while waiting for a marriageable if grandfatherly $10,000. But Isobel knew there must be something better than that, something she would have to thank heaven for when it came. . . .

With a shake of her head the sensible girl sent these dream-thoughts flying, as birds fly off the grain when the farmer waves his hand,—to fly back when the scare has passed.

Hurrying over dinner, she shut herself into the library as usual with her work-basket—but she could not work. That wonderful book, she could think of nothing else. The newspaper article told why a Gutenberg Bible was such a rarity. It was the first book ever printed, and so few perfect copies had survived. What a bitter disappointment if John's was not one of these!

She opened the drawer and got out the catalogue. Under the name of the book Mr. Galt had written a very short description, and its first word was: "Perfect." Then: "Two vols. Wide margins. Untrimmed. Pages, 16x11 inches. Scrolls complete. Printer's autograph, etc. Binding, early 18th century, unbroken, heavy leather, gold filigree."

Why, the copy described in the newspaper had pages measuring only fifteen by less than ten and a half inches, and in trimming the pages the binder had partly cut away the flowery scrolls extending from the colored initial letters into the margins. Such a copy could hardly be as valuable as John's, even without the autograph, which must surely be Gutenberg's own.

Isobel's appetite grew with feeding. There was more about the book in some old memorandum, John had said, and he had given her leave to read anything she could find. She started turning over the various papers in the drawer. They were classified, in half a dozen large envelopes, the nature of the contents marked on each. The largest was labeled "Book Accounts." A glance at these was enough. A few showed to what moderate depths the canny collector had been tempted to plunge at auctions, but most were from the firm of Samuel Johnson, evidently Mr. Galt's favorite bookseller.

One envelope Isobel nearly put aside as empty. There was no writing on it, but she noticed a red circle in a corner, opened the envelope quickly, and drew out a double sheet of thin quarto paper covered with writing in a small angular hand.

"This will be handed to you, my dear son," it began, "when I am gone. You will naturally desire to know the history of the Gutenberg's Bible, which will come to you in an unusual way at the same time, and this will tell all I know."

The writer, evidently the German professor whose daughter Galt had married, traced the early wanderings of the book, from Gutenberg's partner Faust, through various hands—though these, he was careful to say, he could not vouch for—till it found a resting-place in a certain monastery. Coveted by the reigning prince of that State, it was obsequiously presented to him by the head of the institution, and re-bound to suit his taste with golden adornment. His descendant, the prince who reigned early in the 19th century, "and whose name is never mentioned among us," the professor described as "a mere voluptuary" who cared naught for books, least of all for Bibles. In his premature old age he "entrapped for his mistress the beautiful daughter of one of his farm tenants. She, whether or not consenting willingly to this luxurious degradation, clung at any rate in form to the piety of her race. Of his many gifts, jewels of great price, unique articles of vertu, the rarest of porcelain, the richest of vesture, there was one he would never have thought of giving. It was her own choice, this Bible, and he gave it as one might throw a bone to a dog.

WHAT WAS IT SHE TOOK?

"They chased her from the palace before he was cold on his death-bed. They stripped her of his every gift but this,—and this they let her take, not because she implored, but because they despised it. One man, truly, would have torn off its binding for its trifle of gold-work, but the others, from a superstitious fear of mutilating a Bible, restrained his sacrilegious hand.

"She fled to another State, and took refuge in the home of a charitable kinswoman. Repentant, sick of vanity and show, she made no attempt to recover those things of which she had been despoiled. The greed and malice of her despoilers, on the other hand, was insatiable. They pursued her across the frontiers, invaded her retreat, and lawlessly ransacked the house, imagining or alleging that in spite of their vigilance she had carried away gifts of price. That these were not to be found in the palace may be easily believed, for in the prince's last illness she was so cruelly neglected that she had to sell some of her jewels for the necessaries of life. But neither were they to be found in her humble home.

"Young and beautiful still, she had many offers of honorable marriage, but only after five years did she consent, becoming the wife of a worthy merchant. They were devoted to each other, and she was a most thrifty and diligent

housekeeper, as well as a spotless wife and affectionate mother. Can I ever forget that? I was her only child.

"One black night, her persecutors returned,—or others, mere burglars perhaps, who had heard the story of the royal treasures she was alleged to have carried off. They broke into the house. Her husband, awaking in time, and calling his servants, drove off the criminals, but not before receiving a terrible blow on the head. He never recovered. She lay speechless for months; slowly sinking, but with occasional gleams of intelligence. In the last of these, a sudden desire appeared to seize her. She could not express it, and her agony at the servants' failure to understand was very painful. I was in the room, a mere boy, and I suffer whenever I think of it. They mentioned one thing after another, till at last she turned her eyes upward, as though to heaven. 'Perhaps it is the Bible', I said. And so it proved. While they went for the little Bible she commonly read, I ran and fetched a volume of the old Latin Bible from the corner of her room, where it lay on a wooden stand of its own. I could not read it, but I loved to turn over the pages with their ornamental letters and colored scroll-work. I was only just strong enough to carry the volume, but I held it up beside her. Her eyes seemed to sparkle, and she tried to speak—no doubt to exhort me ever to keep its teachings in my heart—but the effort was too much for her, and she sank into unconsciousness. That night she died.

"How far I have obeyed the Book's teaching, God will be the merciful judge. But I have treasured the Book itself, not, you may be sure, as a relic and reminder of an unhappy episode in my family history, but as the sacred relic of a good, good mother, and especially of her last unspoken words to her son. I could have earnestly wished to pass it on into the equally loyal guardianship of her sole remaining descendant in the next generation. I am deprived of that privilege by another unhappy episode,—perhaps indirectly a result of the first, by inheritance. I pray that she who has now proved herself unworthy may repent, as my mother did. But you, my altogether worthy son, will value it even apart from its personal associations.

"The guardian, my father's kinsman, who took care of me when I was left an orphan, deposited the book with his

lawyer, and although I took it away when I made a home of my own, I have now in my solitary old age thought best to place it again in the custody of a lawyer, who has also received instructions for my will."

THE DRAMA NOT ENDED

Isobel sat long pondering on the tragic revelation. Not unrelieved tragedy, she was glad to feel. Good had followed evil, in the first tragic act of the drama. But that final dark act,—whatever it was, it had not been played out when the old man wrote. Was it still being acted? If so, the girl's warm heart

prayed as the old man's had, for a happy ending before the curtain fell. It must have been John's own mother who "had proved herself unworthy." How? But Isobel checked herself from speculating. She felt as if she had been prying into family secrets she had no right to know. She carefully replaced the letter in its envelope and shut it up with all the rest in the drawer. But she found it hard to work that evening, and in the night she dreamed—!

A ROYAL AUCTION

On the night of the great book sale, she made her way to the auction room. It was a spacious hall, and crowded, mostly with men.

The tale of that red-letter night is written large in history, like the inauguration of a President, the coronation of a King. Here we see it only through the eyes of one young woman sitting silent between two conspicuous men. On her right was a portly dealer, glowing with interest in "the show," voluble, turning this way and that to greet his numberless acquaintances with nod or smile. The man on her left was tall, thin, preoccupied, keeping his eyes fixed on the catalogue in his hand,—still and silent as herself. If he was a dealer, he must surely have wandered in from mere force of habit, for he seemed to take no more interest in what went on than Abner Dean of Angels under the influence of old red sandstone in the Society upon the Stanislow.

Isobel followed the proceedings closely, catalogue in hand, like the rest of the congregation—or choir. When they came to the foot of a page and all turned over together, the rustle of a thousand pages in unison reminded her of a Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace back in England. There, however, the multitude sang in chorus; here the music consisted of explosive solos shot out in quick succession from different quarters of the hall.

Book after book was knocked down—she wondered how many of the buyers ever read any of the books they bought—till only one was left, The Book of Books.

A hum. A hush. A thrill. A coronation service in Westminster Abbey about to begin could hardly have

THE BIDDING

inspired more tense expectation. The man on her left, as if miraculously raised from the dead, was now feverishly interested. The man on her right was fanning himself with his catalogue, and Isobel followed his example. The man stopped short when the auctioneer began to speak, but Isobel continued to fan. "Better keep that down," her neighbor whispered, smiling at her inexperience, "or he'll think you're bidding."

She thanked him, and obeyed. It would be rather amusing, as well as alarming, suddenly to find herself with two Gutenbergs, when all the great collectors had gathered to fight for the one!

The auctioneer ceased. The Book was up for sale. Isobel was startled to hear a woman's voice break the silence.

"Fifty thousand." That was Pierpont Morgan's librarian, her neighbor said, as she craned her neck to see.

The bidding began to climb. Her big neighbor jumped in with “Sixty thousand!” She glanced at his face. A Hebrew, like a good many others around. He would have to take the New Testament with the Old, but that evidently made no difference to him. Everybody wanted the Book, but nobody for what it contained. The bidding climbed and climbed. Her neighbor had fallen silent. The height was too dizzy for him.

“A hundred thousand.”

The fight became a duel between two giants. “That’s Rosenbach, the Philadelphia dealer,” her neighbor said, as she looked up inquiringly, “and the other’s Benjamin—a syndicate—they want it for the Episcopal Cathedral. If they get it, they’ll have to hire a military guard to keep it!” She was glad to find she had been wrong; there were people who wanted the thing because it was a Bible, after all.

They did not get it. The Philadelphian bid $106,000. . . . A breathless silence . . . . She saw the nervous man on her left count ten on his fingers. The battle was over. The Cathedral champion confessed defeat.

A startling imagination broke in upon Isobel as she rose to go. Here was the auctioneer coming down from his rostrum, wiping his brow. He was passing close to her. She had a sudden impulse to take him by the sleeve and whisper—“Tell them to stop. Tell them you’ve just discovered another Gutenberg ever so much finer than this one,—the finest copy in the world,—so the poor Cathedral will have a chance after all.” Imagine the sensation that would make!

Of course she did nothing of the kind. The book was not hers, she had no right even to reveal its existence. Besides, the idea of figuring in a sensation was detestable to her. But she smiled as she turned to the door, and thought what a glorious bombshell, what a dramatic climax, she could have thrown on that spectacular night.

The triumphant auctioneer was exchanging smiles and nods with a hundred men, all ready to claim his acquaintance after such a record-breaking. Groups were chattering among themselves. “Only one perfect copy left that can ever come up for sale,” she heard a man say. “And I doubt if that will,” some one replied,—“I’m told its owner or his agent is here to-night and one of the underbidders has privately snapped it up.”

If that was true the unknown Galt copy would have absolutely no competition. John would have the field to himself. There could be no harm in asking the auctioneer if he knew whether the report was true. Spying him in the crowd, she had nearly reached him when he was accosted by another woman, whom she had noticed before. A remarkably attractive woman, Isobel said to herself at once, before noticing either her clothes or her features. Radiant! The sort of woman who would be attractive in rags, even to a critical

sister-woman,—a man would be unaware

of the rags. With herself as the heart of the picture, who could pay heed to the frame? As a fact she was uncommonly well-dressed, in light but quiet shades, with a touch of bold contrasting color in quaint shape on her hat. Dark almost to blackness in hair and eyebrows, her rich rosiness toned down ever so lightly by art, her features neither sharply defined nor irregular,—what struck Isobel more than any of these material things was the overflowing life of her face. Most women, even the dull,—if the existence of dull women can be admitted for a moment,—under a sunny stimulus grow charmingly expressive, animated, bright, and therefore even beautiful, though the life vanishes swiftly to its cavern within when the external sun stops shining. This woman's face was alive all the time,—even in immobility, mobile.

The auctioneer smiled, was all attention, before she began to speak.

"A beautiful book," she said,—her rich soft voice expressive as her face. "Do you know any more beautiful?"

"A finer copy of the Gutenberg?" he said. "I've never seen any,—but of course I haven't seen them all."

"Do you know of any finer, here in New York—or in America? Did you ever hear of one?"

"Never! And I think I should have, if it existed."

"Ah! Thank you very much." With a quick bow and courteous smile she turned and made her way to the door. The smile, as Isobel caught it, became one of triumph. There was no mistaking that. Such a woman could hardly disguise her emotion if she tried.

Isobel forgot she had meant to ask a question herself. Unconsciously she followed the other woman from the hall.

It was raining, she found, when she reached the door, and there, with others waiting for taxis, stood her nervous neighbor of the sale. His lips were twitching, his eyes staring into vacancy. Could he be a disappointed underbidder? Or perhaps—the owner of that other copy, and not disappointed at all, but excited by the discovery that his book was worth $46,000 more than the record price of $60,000 at the last sale? In that case, he would be the competitor John would have to meet,—the one and only. She smiled at the idea.

But would he, after all? What did that woman mean? Why had she come, that night, a lone canary in a flock of crows? Any creature less like a bookworm could not be imagined. Of course, you couldn't judge by appearances, but—a bookworm in feathers, a blue-stocking Minerva with the face of a Venus! She did not want a Gutenberg,—indeed she was glad, Isobel was sure she was glad, there was none to be bought. Could she possibly have

one to sell—for more feathers?

The radiant woman, pressing gently through the waiting crowd, almost rubbed shoulders with the absent-minded man. Half turning to let her pass, he started as if with an electric shock. Isobel had no face-reading magic, but in his face she seemed to witness a chaos of amazement, pleasure and fear. His thin lips moved fast as though repeating "How? How? How?" a hundred times. He moved forward impulsively, just an inch or two, but then drew back a good deal more, so quickly that Isobel had to slip on one side to avoid a collision. Now he stood still, his mouth open, staring after the woman.

A young chauffeur sprang to meet her, with unprofessional alacrity, held an umbrella over her as she tripped across the wet sidewalk to a limousine,—and she was gone.

Isobel, her own sense of triumph strong, though slightly chastened, stepped out into the rain with elastic step. As she put up her umbrella she pressed to her side the arm that held it. In imagination, it was not her own arm,—she felt

AN ARM REMEMBERED

the pressure of another arm linked close with hers that afternoon when John had unknowingly groped his way so near the door of her heart and she had knowingly turned him away before he could knock. As she would now, of course, if the same thing happened again. And she would see it did not.

SOCIETY PICKS UP ISOBEL

John might be home any day now, but he would be off again almost at once, and that was just as well. She knew from his letters how keen he was to get away up to the old home in the north, and that would be good for him as well as for her. She was not keeping him out of a home he would really prefer, after all.

Ah, but—! When he heard of that great sale, and realized what an undreamt-of fortune lay on that library shelf, would that make no difference? He might have to stay a while in the city after all, to make arrangements for the book's disposal if he wanted to turn it into money—and why shouldn't he? Well, it would only be for a few days, not enough to worry about. She wouldn't worry, anyway. Time enough to cross the bridge when she came to it.

Tranquilly descending to breakfast two days later, she found a telegram from John. He was not coming home at all this time, he was going right through to Canada. In spite of herself, she was disappointed, even a little hurt, though she promptly scolded herself for that.

She was very busy at the office all day. Just for a moment now and then her mind wandered. He must have seen the news of the sale in the papers. Was that news responsible for his change of mind—or, say, his change of plan? If he had been like some men she knew, it might have caused a real change of mind,—they would have got swelled head and kicked up their heels, made a splurge of some kind, social or financial, plunged into Wall Street with the idea of turning their hundred thousand into a million in a week,—and, incidentally, avoided the poor

A SURPRISING INVITATION

domesticated cousin they "could not do without" while they were losing strength and money.

No, she stoutly told herself, John was not like that. If the good news had anything to do with his avoiding her just then, it was on her account and not his own. He had realized that now, a thousand times more than before, "people" would say—"Of course she will take every advantage of her strategic position, having a 'catch' in her power."

At lunch time, when Bassett had finished what he still called his "dictation" to her, he asked her diffidently whether she would be interested in the opera that night, as Mrs. Bassett would be very glad if she would accompany them. Isobel had never met Mrs. Bassett, but had gathered from other girls that she carried her nose tilted at a high angle and could not see any member of her husband's staff through a microscope. As Isobel was certainly interested in the opera, and had not the slightest fear of being trodden upon by

Mrs. Bassett or anyone else, she accepted the invitation quite heartily.

Mr. Bassett was obviously relieved, and said they would call for her in their car. His wife had told him to warn Miss Galt not to mention the invitation to the other girls, but, being sure that was quite unnecessary, he had tact enough to disobey his wife for once.

That the idea of inviting her was the young man's, and not his wife's, still less his mother-in-law's, Isobel naturally took for granted. But he could not have had to plead for it,—would have been sharply turned down if he had. No, he had doubtless represented Isobel as quite a social exception to the office, a "lady" in the most conventional English sense, of "good family" and genuinely related to an earl—you could trace her stream of blue blood in the reference books without the slightest aid of imagination.

Mrs. Bassett's nose, Isobel was glad to find, showed no disposition to tilt when they met in the car, and held itself down at a human angle all evening. Certainly Mrs. Bassett showed no exuberant interest in her guest,—was not particularly concerned to attract or please, still less to conciliate her. But exuberance was never Mrs. Bassett's way. She showed polite interest to the exact degree of warmth or luke-warmth prescribed by her social code,—half a degree less would have been insolent coolness, half a degree more, undignified heat.

In the opera box, Isobel found herself provided with a good seat, a programme, and a young Minter, whose duty was simply to make up the quartet and relieve the host and hostess of the strain of small hospitalities. An idea that he might have been introduced to her with some ulterior object, such as match-making, Isobel easily dismissed. The young man's attentions were marked by precisely the same moderate degree of temperature as Mrs. Bassett's. His box of chocolates and his demeanor were equally unimpeachable.

After the opera, Isobel found herself carried to a supper and dancing place, where a table had been reserved for the party. Looking around, she saw no one she knew, but she did not enjoy herself any the less on that account. The Bassetts and their other harmless guest kept up an easy dance of small talk, a conversational quadrille, in which Isobel easily held her own. There was another quartet at the next table, enjoying itself in the same way but with a little more animation; the life and soul of that party was evidently the woman sitting back to back with Isobel. Her rich soft voice recalled some one Isobel thought she must have met before, but she could not turn round to see the speaker without a too obvious display of curiosity and a certain amount of bodily contortion.

Presently Minter asked her if she liked dancing, with a cautious notion of suggesting a waltz and privately persuading the orchestra to play one if she

agreed. As she

agreed with evident pleasure, and only remarked that she had never learnt the Charleston, he suppressed his caution and took her for a tango. This she performed with grace and skill, to his concealed surprise and unconcealed admiration.

THE RADIANT WOMAN AGAIN

As they returned to their seats, the woman with the voice at the next table had her face turned away, but Isobel saw enough of it to recognize it at once. It was the charming woman of the auction hall.

More than one dance followed, generally with Minter, though once Mrs. Bassett took him and Bassett himself ventured to dance with his favorite stenographer. That time, as they returned, Isobel became conscious that the radiant woman at the next table was looking at her,—not with radiance, though not with ill-will,—simply with concentrated appraisement. It was just for a moment.

The small hours were growing up. Isobel rose, turned to her hostess with a smile, and said,—"There is such a thing as an office, you know, Mrs. Bassett!"

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Bassett, with answering smile and a little sigh, "I suppose we must acknowledge its existence, my dear. I'm so glad we've helped you to forget it for an hour or two, but now—." She shrugged her shoulders resignedly.

Mr. Minter, it appeared, was kindly going to take her home in the Bassett car, which would then return and wait till the Bassetts themselves were ready to go. It seemed not unnatural that they should stay longer if they wanted to. Mr. Bassett, keen as he was on business, was the "old man's" son, and he could be late at the office whenever he pleased.

Isobel, mildly amused by Minter's chit-chat on the way home, failed to notice a certain tingling of the right ear which she ought to have felt. She was totally and mercifully immune to occult influences.

If she could have suddenly returned invisible to the scene she had just left, she would have been much astonished. No sooner was she gone than the woman who had sat back to back with her came and sat in her vacant chair at the Bassetts' table.

"Thank you ever so much, my dears!" she said.

"I hope you're satisfied," said Mrs. Bassett, coldly.

"Perfectly, my dear."

"Would you like to see more of her? I'll ask her to dinner if you say so."

"I would like, but I won't, my dear,"—this quite decisively. "It's all right!"

"Well, have your own way, as usual. I can ask her to another show after a while. It wouldn't look just the thing to drop her entirely after taking her up like this. . . . I haven't an idea what you're driving at, mother, but you did seem desperately interested in the girl."

“I wouldn’t say ‘desperately’, my dear Bess. I heard Tom speak of the girl and thought I’d like to see her without necessarily making her acquaintance, you know. And I’m sure you and Tom don’t feel as if I’d made you waste your evening, giving a little pleasure to a girl like that.”

“Not at all, not at all,” Tom assured her. “She did enjoy herself, didn’t she? And young Minter too. He’ll be wanting to see more of her, if you don’t!”

“Will he? Well, he can save himself the trouble. He’s a feeble creature. She wouldn’t be able to stand much of him, still less throw herself away on him. Wine and water, so far as I can judge the pair.”

“She might do worse, financially.”

“Might—and might not. Anyway I don’t fancy that would be the first consideration, with a girl like that.”

“Since when have you taken up mind-reading, mother?” said Bess, laughing. “But what I’d really like to know is—when will you be ready to go home?”

Mother gaily laughed, and led the way out.

THE COUNTRY CALLS HER TOO

“Always ready for home, and always ready to leave it,—as I think I will in a day or two. I can’t stand the city as long as you youngsters can, with the spring in my blood and the country calling!”

“Youngsters, indeed,” said Tom, “you’re the youngest of us all!”

If she had not been leading the way with that light quick step of hers, he would have seen her face cloud over suddenly with wistfulness and pain. For a moment, only for a moment.

ADVENTURE OF THE HILL FARM BOY

ALIAS LEROUX

The country called so loudly in John's heart, it seemed to chime like Sunday bells when he left the train and stood once more on the beloved soil of his native province. To be sure, the beloved soil had put on its most unlovely dress to welcome him. His three mile walk to the farm easily justified the wisdom of his decision not to hike all the way from the foot of Vermont. The rivulets babbling shamelessly over the road from relics of snowdrift in shady hollows were bad enough, and the deep stationary mud left by last night's rain was a good deal worse.

His feet were soon as wet as if he had gone barefoot,—as he had joyfully gone so often with little Isidore and Honoré and Joseph and Louise and Henriette and Malvina and Narcisse and Napoléon, and the rest. He didn't care even now if his feet were wet,—he basked in the memory of golden days when wet or dry made no difference at all.

Ah, there was the old house, newly whitewashed, and a tall man was carrying a milk pail from the old log barn.

The man stopped. Foot passengers were always rare, on that country road. At such a time of the morning, an hour before the milk collector was due,—who could it be?

"Ma foi, c'est lui! Marie!" he cried, turning to the house. Then, putting down the pail on the doorstep, he went to meet the newcomer.

"Leroux!" he shouted, to John still fifty yards away. "C'est toi!"

Beaming with delight, he strode through the mud and gripped his old playmate with both hands. "C'est toi, mon vieux! Notre vieux petit Leroux! Mais pardon"—with a bow—"Monsieur Leroux."

MONSIEUR LE PROPRIÉ-TAIRE

"Et c'est toi, mon vieux, notre petit Joseph," answered John, "mais—I'm afraid my French has got a bit rusty. Don't tell me you can't speak English, Joseph!"

"Of course I can, like a Member of Parliament and a Congressman put together! But when the heart beats hard it pumps up the old language, and I can't help myself. . . . My word, but it's good to see you again—only why didn't you send word, so I could drive down to the village and meet you? Such mud to wade through! You don't have good rich mud like ours in New York, whatever else you have!" He laughed a good rich laugh. "Come along in to breakfast. Three miles of country mud is worth six miles of Broadway for giving you an appetite, I bet you!"

Marie, plump and smiling, met them at the door.

“This is our own Monsieur Leroux at last, Marie, and hungry as a bear. Think of him, monsieur le propriétaire if you please, walking all the way out rather than give me the pleasure of going to fetch him.”

Marie put out her little hand, and murmured, “Soyez le bienvenu, Monsieur!” A pair of toddlers hiding behind her skirt, seeing the stranger smile as he grasped maman’s hand, thrust out their own. He stooped and kissed them both. They clung to his muddy knees.

Marie was delighted, but felt bound to protest. “But you must not bother the gentleman, Jacques and Henri.” Mothers always take for granted that “gentlemen” don’t like to be bothered by children, and they are generally right, but this time Marie was wrong. John felt a totally new thrill of delight at finding some one interested enough in him to bother him. His heart expanded under the warmth of his welcome like a flower in the sun. He almost fancied himself a child again, dropping in from the woods to the midst of these children’s baby uncles and aunts.

“We’re going to be the best of friends, mes petits,” said he. “But just wait a minute till I’ve got rid of this mud,”—scraping his shoes as he spoke on the edge of the doorstep. “I mustn’t dirty your mother’s beautiful floor.”

“Oh, n’importe du tout,” protested Marie. “It’s no matter at all. I’ll soon clear that up. I’ll be scrubbing it anyway after breakfast. And isn’t it monsieur’s own floor after all?”

John laughed. “If it is, I ought to put down a new one. These must be the same old boards Dad put down with his own hands when—when we came to live here first.” A little cloud flitted over his mind. Father had taken such pains to fix the old house up for its young mistress.

Marie fetched a bowl of warm water for John to wash his feet, and when these were comfortably installed in Joseph’s Sunday boots and a pair of dry socks, the family sat down to breakfast.

“But where’s Johnnie?” asked John. He was glad he remembered—he had almost forgotten—that the first-born had been named after himself, not Jean but John.

“Oh, he’s got one more cow to milk,—he’s nearly ten, think of that, and his fathers right hand man already,” said Marie proudly. “We won’t wait,—he wouldn’t like you to wait, I know well. But how glad he’ll be to see you,—he’s always been wondering if he ever would. His father has talked so much about you, and how he used to play with monsieur the propriétaire and call him —”

“Out with it!” laughed John, as she hesitated. “ ‘Petit tête rouge’, of course, and I didn’t mind it a bit, though Félice said it wasn’t polite, bless her dear heart. It will be good to see her bright face again.”

“Yes, she’s a good woman,” said Marie, piling the buckwheat cakes on

John's plate. "Don't be so sparing of the maple syrup, monsieur,—it's fresh from your own trees, and there's been a great run of sap this year. Félice

HOW TO MANAGE A WIFE

is a good woman, a good wife, a good mother. She lost one just before New Year, but she has nine left. Not many of us can save nine out of ten. Well, if the good God takes them, it saves them a lot of trouble, I say. Félice doesn't look at it that way. She's not as resigned as she ought to be. She wanted to keep them all, every one, and that's not natural."

Joseph was fidgeting. "Give our Leroux some fresh cakes, Marie," he put in, to change the subject, John's plate being piled high already. "You never tasted better buckwheat cakes in Montreal, or New York, or London, or anywhere else you've been in all your travels, nor finer butter than Marie's, confess that now!"

John confessed with enthusiasm.

In the barn after breakfast, before showing off his cows, the young farmer said: "Marie gets on well with Félice, you know—how could any one help it? But she's a little bit jealous of her all the same, just because I used to talk so much about Félice and how she used to manage us all and keep us all happy and behaving all the time—well, nearly all the time. Curious, isn't it? Or perhaps it's just natural,—there are some things about women that I don't understand yet."

"And never will," said John, "make up your mind to that!"

"Oh, I don't know,—I've learnt a lot already. I don't say so much about Félice now, and I praise Marie often, her cooking and her churning, and her scrubbing and sewing and everything. Oh, you learn how to manage women when you've been married a few years, even if you don't learn so soon to understand them altogether. Don't talk too much—leave the talking mostly to them—and when you do talk, talk nice. Isn't that right, mon vieux?"

Joseph was so hugely pleased with his great discovery that John could only slap him on the back and congratulate him on the profound wisdom of his marital policy. "Though I don't set up for an authority," he said, "having had no experience."

"No," said Joseph, compassionately, "I forgot you had never married. What a big pity! And you thirty years old last month. It's old to marry, but not too old. Oh no! And you've come to the right place to change all that. My word, Leroux, we've got some nice girls here not picked up yet, and more nearly ready. Par exemple, there's my sister Louise,—you remember little Louise? She turns up her nose at young Boisvert, but she wouldn't turn up her nose at you, bien sûr! And if you don't want a country girl, just wait a few days and you'll have all the city girls you want to choose from. This is the place they come to, when they're sick of the town. Mon Dieu, I've heard a

hundred summer visitors throw up their hands and say it's like heaven, and heaven's the place marriages are made in, n'est-ce pas? Such a place for pairing off you never saw."

"Oh yes,—I've just come from a place where they do that all winter,—and then come up here and do it all summer, I guess. I've seen a young man snapshot a girl he'd never set eyes on before, then walk up and get introduced, and their engagement was in all the papers that night."

"There now! But maybe they broke it off the morning after. I suppose half the couples that fall in love on the lake here fall out of it when they go back to the city. And the other half that get married, they get divorced right away,—so you'd think from the papers we find lying around,—Marie won't let me bring them up to the house, though she reads them when she finds them herself. Nothing but one scandal after another, and 'look out for the next because it's going to be wickeder than the last.' All this cat and dog business,—cats and dogs fighting in the middle of the dirty street, and all the rest of us crowding around to catch the mud!"

John smiled. "If you honestly want me to marry, I don't think you've given me much encouragement, have you, Joseph?"

ON LEAVING A HUSBAND

"Mais oui, Leroux, you're not that sort at all. You come of good old country stock, if you do live in the city now. You're one of ourselves. Once we marry, we're married, and we stick together no matter what happens. There's me and Marie, par exemple,—do you think I'd run away and leave her and the little ones, if she does be a bit jealous and fire up now and then without any reason that I know of? And as for Marie, I may try her temper at times, but, as she says, 'out of the frying pan into the fire,' and she'd never leave me if she wanted to. As for you,—I know you, don't I? What woman would ever want to leave a man like you?"

John took the good husband by the sleeve and gently moved him on. "I thought you were going to show me the cows," he said. . . .

Had Joseph forgotten the tragedy of the Galts? Or had he never known? He had been very young, younger than John himself, at the time. Perhaps none of the neighbors had ever known the secret. Tact was not Joseph's strong point, but even he would not talk so freely of wives leaving their husbands if he had ever heard the story of John's mother. Her long absences, even before the final break-up, must have provoked remark among the country folk around, but maybe her husband had prevented suspicion by saying she had gone to visit friends. The neighbors would pass censorious remarks among themselves—a mother, a farmer's wife, leaving husband and house and child for weeks at a time for any reason short of life and death. But perhaps they had made charitable allowances for her being a city-bred girl, and a "foreigner" at that,

and presumably knowing no better,—at any rate, having standards of conduct they did not pretend to understand.

In the afternoon, John took the old familiar path through the woods,—the path he had strayed away by, that memorable day a quarter-century ago. He came out at the same spot, but the old snake fence was gone, and he had to squeeze fearfully between barbed wires.

Gone was the old log cabin too,—but there, at the door of a spick and span frame house, stood the dear old mother of ten. Not so very old, either,—fifty, perhaps,—she must have as many grandchildren as years. Grey, and wrinkled, but wiry and capable yet. She had a hand up shading her eyes. Who could this be coming out of the woods?

"Eh, eh! C'est mon p'tit tête rouge! Tu es le bienvenu, mon p'tit—Monsieur Leroux!"

She called her man from the barn, and they had a great forgathering in the kitchen living-room. No suggestion of taking him into the parlor, the chill ceremonial shrine of respectability! That would have made him a stranger, and he was their own boy still. They talked in French,—he would forgive them, wouldn't he?

Would they ever forget that day when he first came toddling into the yard and Félice carried the little tête rouge in to get a doughnut? Jamais de la vie! Here now,—she heaped up a plate,—Joseph's woman was a good enough cook, yes indeed, but her croquinoles couldn't beat her old mother-in-law's, could they now?

John munched and munched. "Vraiment, ma mère,"—he found himself calling her mother again,—"I've never tasted such doughnuts as yours!"

He must have an apple, too, a good old "spy." There were only a few left, put away for special occasions. There were so many little mouths gaping for them every Sunday. Yes, the children took turns to come in with their little ones for dinner, at least one family every Sunday, not to speak of stray visits in between. Ah, they were good children, all of them, from Félice down to little Napoléon. He was only

a month old, that time Leroux saw him first,—and now he worked the farm with his father.

"THAT SHE SHOULD DIE SO YOUNG!"

Louise and Napoléon, they were the only ones living at home. Louise was away down at the village school that afternoon, taking a class for a sick teacher. She was "bien instruite," was Louise,—had a well-stocked head. She would be so desolated when she found she had missed Monsieur Leroux,—but of course she would have many other opportunities of talking over old times with him. She had talked of becoming a teacher herself, and getting a school close by, so she could live at home and help her mother. But no, her mother would never stand in her way like that. Louise should

marry like all the rest, if she could get a good man,—she was rather particular, was Louise. Not many country boys could appreciate her talents, that was true,—still, she was good at the cookery and didn't turn up her nose at housework, not Louise!

Napoléon would be marrying pretty soon, of course,—he had a good girl; she often came in already, and knew just about how things had to be run. Madame plainly looked forward without the slightest apprehension to playing the part of the happy mother-in-law. It was the custom among these people, as John knew, for one of the sons to marry and take over the farm, old folk and all. That was the express condition, never questioned and always lived up to. The old folk's position was perfectly secure,—they could never outstay their welcome, though they lived to a hundred.

The talk branched off to John's own affairs, but the Thoreaus knew he had no kin they could ask after. They talked with great respect of his father,—ah, a fine man, and a good neighbor. And John's mother, too,—what a bright woman! A learned professor's daughter, wasn't she? Not very much at home on the farm, naturally. Ah, how sad that she should die so young!

John was both startled and relieved. There was no suspicion of scandal, then, in these good folk's minds. But was she really dead, to their knowledge, or had his father merely told them so,—or at any rate allowed them to believe it, just to prevent any rumor of the miserable truth? The young man could not show his ignorance by asking questions. He led the conversation back to the Thoreaus' own innumerable relations and affairs, and in that channel it flowed serenely till he rose to leave.

Between the two old homes, John spent a strenuous week.

At Joseph's, after making one crooked furrow, he left the plow to his host; but he found all sorts of odd jobs he could do about the house and barn without botching them. He was glad to find he had not forgotten how to saw a board square without sawing off his finger tips, and how to drive a nail without hitting his thumb black. He even remembered how to milk, and when his hands had got over the first aches of long disuse he could fill a bucket nearly as fast as Johnnie could.

Johnnie was awed but charmed to find the wonder-man of his dreams working in humble comradeship by his side,—proud, too, to find the wonder-man expecting instruction from his young admirer. On fence-repairing excursions, it was tall John alone who could swing the fourteen-pound maul, Johnnie holding the stakes up for the first few blows; but even then the man asked orders and advice from the boy, and persisted in treating Johnnie with the respect due to the man who knew.

"You're the boss of this team," said John. "I'm only a poor helpless city infant. You've got to boss me as your Aunt Félice always did."

To Johnnie the legends of “little red-head” were as familiar as Noah’s flood and the Red Sea crossing, but it staggered his imagination to realize that this tall capable

owner of the farm and the “petit tête rouge” of prehistoric legend were one and the same.

MARTHAS ARE NOT ALL DUMB

On Sunday the whole family, sleek and shining to an inexpressible degree, in honor of their guest, walked over to dine with the old folk. The fatted calf would have been killed for him, if it had only been fat enough. But it was not missed,—not even a dish of its liver could have found room on that crowded table.

Louise outdid herself as a Martha. “You sit still and talk to Monsieur Leroux, mother,” she insisted, “and let me wait on the table.”

After dinner, however, letting mother and Marie wash up, she proved quite capable of talking to Monsieur Leroux herself. Had she not been rehearsing all the week? John was genuinely surprised by the apparent width of her knowledge, and never dreamed of probing its depth. She seemed wonderfully familiar with geography and history, as taught at school.

Venturing delicately on the subject of literature, as on thin ice, Louise was relieved to discover that John himself was not keen to go far in that field. Tactfully leading him in other directions, she was more at home and more successful. His joy at finding himself in the old beloved scenes would have kept him talking for hours of her family and his old life among them, if she had let him. But very soon she brought him back to the present time.

Already at dinner enthusiasm for his surroundings had set him dilating on the contrast between the loneliness of bachelor life in town and the gregarious joys of full life in a family such as theirs.

Louise therefore had now only to echo his words. “How lonely you must be,” she sighed, “when you remember how many of us there were around you here, to live in a big house all by yourself, since your dear father’s death!”

“Of course,” John said in extenuation, “I haven’t been absolutely alone, this past year. My two cousins from England were kind enough to come over and keep me company.”

“Then they must be very lonely without you now.”

“Oh, cousin Jack’s gone back to England, and cousin Isobel’s at work in an office all day.”

So there was a cousin Isobel in John’s house, was there? Was she a fixture? If so, when John went back to the house, would she prevent him from feeling lonely? These questions Louise was too wise to ask directly, but without much show of interest she kept John talking of Isobel until it was quite clear no stronger tie existed between the two cousins than cousinly affection.

John’s future career—without a hint at the alternative futures of single and

married life—Louise could be safely solicitous about that. After all those years in New York, shut in between towering walls which kept the whole city as gloomy as a prison, did he not think of coming back to live among trees and sunshine? If he didn't want to turn Joseph out, there were other good farms John could easily buy. Indeed, Joseph had talked of buying one of them himself, if by chance John should want his own for a summer residence. Or, again, if John wanted to live on the old farm without the trouble of working it, did he not remember that beautiful site for a summer cottage on the back of the farm, at the top of the hill, with a grand view over the tree-tops to the lake?

John let his fancy play for a moment on this alluring prospect, but did not commit himself. He was no lotus-eater, but just then the last thing he craved was responsibility. The future was vague, and he shrank from compelling it to define itself. He would make no plans beyond that summer in the country, not even detailed plans for that summer. He would knock about among these people

SYMPATHETIC LOUISE

of his till he felt like going off here and there for a hike,—coming back no doubt between hikes to the old home and staying till the wandering spirit stirred him up again.

Louise understood his mood, and sympathized heartily.

"Before I do anything else," he said, "I'm going to visit my 'little mother' Félice. I'd have borrowed Joseph's buggy and gone already,—he'd have lent it and even gone with me like a shot, but I knew the horse was wanted on the farm, and wouldn't let him."

"We have a spare horse here," said Louise, "and no one will be using the buggy to-morrow. In fact, I was planning to drive over to see Félice myself to-morrow." It was true; she had planned that in the last two minutes. Félice could do anything with John,—twist him round her little finger, if she would.

"I should be very grateful if you'd take me with you," said John, "if I won't be in the way."

"In the way!" In her way! The very idea!

Louise took the reins in her own hand, literally and metaphorically, on that drive up into the hills. She had Leroux all to herself, and shone,—almost sparkled. John was glad enough to listen,—she was mildly entertaining, and he was not in a talking mood himself. There was something he thought Félice might be able to tell him, and he could not get it out of his mind till he knew, but he had no wish to mention it to Louise.

Félice, coming out at the sound of the horse's hoofs, and standing framed in the vine-clad porch, was a sight for sore eyes. Was she beautiful? Perhaps—but she might have been ugly as sin, and John could have seen nothing in her face but the reflection of her beautiful motherly heart. As a fact she was charming even in externals, if not an artist's ideal of beauty. The babies, playing around her as thick as when poor little Johnnie had first set eyes on her twenty-five years before, had not cut wrinkles in her face as they had in most of her neighbors. Small, but straight and slender, she was still the queen whom all delighted to obey.

John picked her up and kissed her. "As you did to me," he said,—"my own little mother Félice!" Even her brothers would not have dared,—and perhaps she would have resented the liberty if they had. But this tall man was just her boy, her own particular boy, her petit tête rouge. She was unashamedly pleased.

They brought out chairs from the house, common kitchen chairs, and the fresh young leaves of the big maple spread over them a royal canopy of million emeralds. They talked, the three of them, interrupted a dozen times by children running up for a share of attention, singly or in bunches. The youngsters did not worry either Félice or John, and Louise knew better than to check them. She would have liked a word with Félice alone at the very start. As that was impossible, she waited for the chance she knew would come when Félice went in to make tea. Meanwhile she left John and Félice alone and went about making herself agreeable to the children.

NEWS OF THE VANISHED MOTHER

This was the chance that John also had waited for.

"You remember my mother, Félice?"

There was something like fear in Félice's eyes as she turned them sharply upon him.

"Yes."

"Can you tell me anything—no, can you tell me any good news of her, Félice?"

“I hoped you had forgotten her yourself. You were only seven. Yet how could anyone forget her that had ever seen her? It was too much to hope. . . . John Leroux, have you ever seen her, or heard of her since—she left?”

“Not a word.”

“Then it will be news to you,—and good news, too, if all you know is bad. But how could you expect me, of all people, to have it?”

“I can hardly say I expected—but you were the one I always came to with everything, and I didn’t dare to ask anyone else. Your mother, without my asking a word, spoke of her as dying young, and seemed to know nothing bad. Had she—changed before she died, Félice?”

“Mother only knew what we all knew,—or thought we did. Your father never whispered a word of anything wrong. I suppose it was he that gave people to understand she had gone first to her father, and then preferred to live in the city, so naturally he was taking you to live there too. Then the talk was that she had died—and the next time he came up here he did not contradict that. She had died to him. But—John, she is not dead.”

John was all aglow. “She is alive, and the news of her is good!”

“It is hard for me, John,—you will understand, you know how sacred marriage is to us, and how it can never be broken—hard to think a woman can be good when she has left her husband and gone through no matter what marriage ceremony with another man. But last year, John, when she came to me,—I will say it—she was a good woman.”

“She came to you, here?”

“You may well wonder. I thought she had risen from the dead. And so she had, most truly. It was because of you she came to me and no one else, John,—because she knew how I loved you and mothered you, she said, when she had left you motherless. She knew your father had died—‘such a good man he was,’ those were her words,—she knew you had grown up and been to college, and a great deal more that I didn’t. Yet she said at first she came to me for news of you! I hadn’t seen you for years. I told her you always sent us presents every Christmas, and such nice letters, like the dear boy you were, and that pleased her,—that was just what she wanted to be sure of, she said, that you had grown up a fine good-hearted man like your father.

“But what she really wanted, John, was just another woman to throw her arms around, and confide in, and cry with. And she did that with me, John, with me, here under this tree, as she said she could not with any one else. Oh, I was glad and proud then, John, to soothe and comfort her—even before I knew that she was penitent,—for your sake.”

“For my sake!” said John. “Why, you would have done the same for any miserable Magdalen, for a hundred of them, if they had come to you—the comforting angel that you always were, Félice!”

"I don't know, John. And I do know I'm no angel. But she was your mother, and in tears. Truly penitent, John,—as far as she could possibly be. I'm sure she never felt, never could feel, somehow—though I could not have believed it of any woman before—how terrible it all was. If I had not felt that, I don't know that I could have forgiven her, for all her tears. And whatever she saw or couldn't see in her own—guiltiness—she was really heartbroken to think of her good husband dying alone without a good wife to tend him, and her son that she could never see or speak to again."

"Why, Félice, what could she think of me? Though she had passed so utterly out of my life, I had been longing to find her, and—no matter what had happened—take her home again, if she would let me."

"John—you can't. She can't. I've got to tell you, now.

"When she left, that last time, she joined a young man she had only met once before, but he was infatuated with her, and so was she with him. He was a fine young fellow in every way, apart from that, and wanted to marry her. She confessed everything to your father, and told him he could divorce her. He wouldn't, and before she could do anything more the young man died.

"That was her first shock,—and she was so broken, she actually thought of asking your father to take her back. But then another man made hot love to her, and nearly carried her off her feet.

"By this time she had made up her mind it must be marriage or nothing, and she got some miserable kind of divorce, to marry that man. But he wasn't a man,—he must have been a devil, and she found out just in time. She was so horrified and disgusted that she broke it all off,—would never see or speak of him again.

"The shock of that sudden discovery and disappointment,—and knowing it was too late to go back to her right home, and the wrong one she had nearly fallen into was hell,—brought her to herself, she said. Nearer what a woman ought to be than she had ever been, I should say.

"She took a new German name, and began looking for honest work. She was so humbled, she would have scrubbed office floors, or anything.

"People asked her for references,—places where she thought she was being welcomed just for her face, she shrank away from. She dared not give her father's name, but in despair she did give John Galt's, of course not saying he was her husband. She knew he would not go back on her, though she had gone back on him. She wrote telling him what she had done, and what she meant to do, to lead an honorable life. He answered, kind and forgiving as always, promising to do what she asked, but still begging her to come back. She would not do that, for shame—she had learned some shame—but she took the money he sent her, for she had more fear of hunger than shame. It was not much

money, but it was much of the little he had then. He took it out of his own mouth and yours, John."

"We always had enough, Félice."

"But you could have done very well with more,—done better with it than she could."

"I don't know about that. The less she had, the more she would be tempted, surely."

"With some women, yes. Not with her, John Leroux. As long as she wanted to keep straight, she would keep straight, if she had just enough to eat and a clean corner to shelter in. Starvation might drive her wrong—it is a wicked whip—but luxury and idleness, that was not her great temptation."

A light from the past broke in upon John. "To be sure," he said, "I don't remember her ever in a complaining

mood, or peevish and fretful. She made herself look nice easily, with cheap clothes. And she always worked, worked hard and well, as if it was easy and pleasant to her. Naturally active all the time, she must have been."

"Till the times came when she was—call it naturally, if you like—too active, and she broke all bounds. Anyway, John,—let me finish before Louise gets tired of playing with the children,—your mother, though she'd never worked out in her life before, found a good job as translator in a company just starting business with Germany. Your father, when they wrote him, spoke wonderfully of her intelligence, her industry and capacity for work, and—yes, her honesty! I suppose he was right. She may have always been what you call honest, though not what we call an *honnête femme*. She would not steal, perhaps she could not easily lie. She was not tricky and underhand like so many women who go to church and won't speak a lie though they act a hundred. She was open and above-board; she is that now,—you can see it in her face.

"She knew German perfectly. She worked as well as she spoke, so she made herself very useful to the company. She was such a lady, too! She hadn't been there two years when one of the big men at the head married her. She did lie then, writing herself down an unmarried woman, and not as divorced. No one found it out, or took the trouble to inquire. She was supposed to have no relations over here, and no near ones anywhere.

"She became a leader in what they call society—and she is that still. Her husband died a few years ago, and she has what they call a home with her daughter—his daughter, their only child. She has her own income, and does as she likes, goes where she likes,—that's what people think, she said.

"But how she is punished! The daughter is cold, unsympathetic,—and she has no one else, no one else at all to love her, though everyone admires. The

son she loved, the son who loves her still so much, must never know her, never speak to her. In all her 'society' no one knows anything bad about her past life. If she acknowledged you, everything would come out. She would bring disgrace on her daughter, on her daughter's husband, and all his family. . . .

"That's all, my dear John. I've never seen her since. C'est fini. Here's Louise now. She'll keep you company while I make the tea. A clever girl, Louise,—but you must have found that out already."

Louise took her sister's place, glad enough to shake off the buzzing swarm of youngsters. Children were all very well in school, sitting in disciplined rows, but in their natural state of unfettered energy there might be too much of a good thing, for Louise! There were limits even to an affectionate aunt's patience, and Louise was not the most patient of aunts.

The shaking off, this time, was not so easy as usual. Another time, the kiddies would have gone back to their play with perfect satisfaction. But now, she had been telling them so much about this Monsieur Leroux, whose infancy had always figured strongly in their stock of family legend, that they could hardly keep their eyes off him, and play soon languished. From their mother's story they had pictured him a strange but most agreeable sort of fairy dropping out of the woods and tincturing the habitants' routine life with a new bright color, an exotic spice. The great Christmas box of candy, which he had never failed to send since he had taken his father's place, they attributed to the same fairy, but only one or two of them had the dimmest recollection of John Leroux in the flesh. This tall man that swung their mother up in the air and kissed her —astounding feat of strength as well as audacity—he was more like a giant than a fairy.

Happily he had not forgotten his proper role. "Venez donc!" he called, as soon as he noticed their spying eyes. "Venez donc, tout le monde!" He dragged up a big angular parcel, till then hidden under his chair. They rushed upon the prey, all shyness gone.

"You won't be lonely now," said Louise, "while I go and help Félice. Don't give them too much at a time, though."

Whatever superfluous help Louise gave Félice in cutting the roast pork sandwiches was more than balanced by the encouragement Félice gave Louise. If Louise wanted John and if John wanted Louise,—good, entirely good! It would be a magnificent climax to the Leroux-Thoreau fairy tale. A perfectly suitable climax, too.

If anyone had suggested that this would mean a coming-down of the husband from a higher to a lower level, Félice's eyes would first have opened wide in amazement, then flashed with indignation. If forced into a comparison she would have claimed superiority for her own family. The Thoreaus had

come over from France before the foundation of Montreal in 1642; they had farmed their own land, on the banks of the St. Lawrence, ever since, with intervals of brave citizen-soldiering in defence of la patrie against Indians, British, and Americans—equally brave against all. At first, their ownership had been hedged about by annoying privileges given to "seigneurs" by the King over in France, but even when the seigneur could demand a rent, a few sous per arpent, he could not turn them out at will,—they were not tenants, not peasants, they were habitants. Since that ridiculous vestige of a feudal system had been abolished, they were absolute owners and lords of their land, as much as any seigneur. The Galts—she had never cared one straw, never even thought with curiosity, what they had been doing, all those Thoreau centuries. Whether they had been landlords, tenants, or day laborers, before John's grandfather struck his independent plow into free Canadian soil, mattered nothing at all.

Differences of habit—these might have put an obstacle between John and, say, sister Malvina, if Malvina had not been married already. But Louise, though a true farm girl, had the refined education of two years in a convent, and John, though citified on the surface, was a true and unspoiled son of the soil. It would be a good match.

The episode of John's mother—Félice knew of no such blot on the Thoreau escutcheon, but she resolutely wiped that episode off the record; it was ended, non-existent, so far as she was concerned, and she was the only member of her family who knew it. Besides, the mother was officially dead, to both families.

To have John actually a member of the family that had long ago taken him to its heart would be delightful. To be sure, a little fly crept into the ointment of Félice's joy at this point. He could not be quite so deliciously her own boy when he belonged to her sister. In point of fact, as her brother-in-law he could not be also her son. But she pounced on that fly, pinched the life out of it, and flung it away with a puff of the lips. Anyway, whoever became John's wife, the same abdication of motherhood would be forced on Félice. Far better this new relationship than none at all. Yes, she would do all she could to help Louise with John.

Félice sallied out before tea to capture the box of candies before too many of them should disappear.

"How many have you each had?" she said.

"Three precisely," said Denise, "I saw to that. All except Christophe. I gave him one and a half." Denise was the eldest girl, a budding Félice.

"Very well, that's enough. Perhaps Monsieur Leroux will give you one more each with his own hand, afterwards."

She carried the box into the house, but before shutting down the lid she took out four and put them up on a shelf.

“That’s Bernard’s share,” she said. Then, by way of explanation,—“Bernard’s down at the village. He loves to help the curé with his garden, and run errands for Monsieur Panet who keeps the store and the post office,—and he always likes to wait till the mail gets in. Then he’ll run up to his father in the field and help bring home the team, and feed them. He’s a wonderful little helper, my boy Bernard.”

Louise wanted to get home early to help with supper, so John tore himself away, saying he would come back some time when the master of the house would be at leisure.

A SUNDAY WITH LOUISE

The mare was a good deal livelier going home than she had been on the outward journey. “She’s feeling her oats,” said Louise. “I’m sure Denise must have given her too much, but she knows she’s on the home stretch, with more oats at the finish, and she can never have enough. She’s always lazy on the way out.”

She was so lively, in fact, that she felt bound to get up on her hind legs and show off when a rattling motor met them, though she had passed two on the outward journey without a sniff. John offered to take the reins, to save Louise’s hands; but no, Louise would not allow herself to show a sign of weakness. All the same, under the circumstances she could not keep the stream of conversation up to her standard of fluent self-possession. John tried to make up, but his talk was only of Félice and her fine brood.

“Bernard must be a fine little worker,” he said. “It’s good to see how proud his mother is of him. Something like Joseph’s boy, my little namesake.”

“Not at all,” said Louise decidedly. “Little John is quite good at his books, as good as any of them. Bernard’s no good at all—you can’t teach him a thing. In fact, I don’t like to say it, but he’s not ‘all there’. The teacher has given up trying to put anything into his head. He’s just allowed to run wild. I don’t mean he gets into mischief, for he seems to have a sort of a horse sense about country things, and they say there’s a special Providence that watches over fools. But he’s nothing for Félice to be proud of. I believe she thinks more of him than she does of all the rest put together. And all the neighbors pet him too—just because he is a fool.”

THE FAMILY BACKS LOUISE

This was a shock to John, and he dropped the subject, but somehow he felt that Félice was more likely to be right in her appreciation than Louise in her contempt. There were worse kinds of folly than failure to understand books. Still, he encouraged Louise to talk about the bright children and her own pleasure in pouring information into heads gaping to swallow it, if the others only inspired her with repulsion. That was only natural.

“It must be a bitter trial,” he said, “for a girl to waste her strength day after day teaching children who cannot be taught,—like butting your head against a wall. I should think such constant balking of your aims would soon wear down the keen edge of enthusiasm for the work. Such children should not be sent to school, or anyway not herded into the same classes with normal youngsters.”

These sage reflections would be recognized by an educational expert as the mere ABC of his art. Their uprising in John however simply showed him at his

usual habit of making allowances. He hated to think evil of people, and conjured up infinite excuses for the people he liked. He liked Louise. He had no idea that she might be a little hard-hearted—no Thoreau could be that!

He saw a good deal of Louise on his frequent casual visits to the old folk, —more of her than any other of the young folk. Naturally, as she was the only girl at home, and always willing to be seen.

On Sunday, after another patriarchal feast, when Isidore's tribe and Honoré's filled the old home beyond counting, though not beyond feeding, Louise suggested a boat ride on the lake, and asked her brothers and sisters-in-law if they wouldn't like to go. They would have liked very much, but they understood, and all had reasons ready for not going.

Louise should have John to herself, the family were loyally united on that.

The lake, as fine a hill-girt gem as twenty famed in European song, was looking its best,—and so was Louise. A few town visitors, exceptionally gifted with taste, resolution and opportunity, had already come up to enjoy the early days of summer and strolled along under the trees or gazed in happy idleness from the verandas. A few were getting ready to launch their boats, but at first John and Louise had the lake to themselves, its silence still unbroken by the motor's impudent explosive chug.

John had enough energy to suggest pulling right across the lake, but Louise preferred to skirt the shore. They skimmed the glassy surface, white clouds sailing in the blue above and below them. Whiffs of invigorating scent floated out to them from clumps of pine and spruce. Louise, content for once to forego conversation, reclined voluptuous on cushions in the stern, watching with half-closed eyes the stalwart rower and glancing at the folk they passed on shore. As she could not help pitying these folk, how could they help envying her?

When half the afternoon was gone, they turned and pulled back the way they had come. Presently, passing a lakeside hotel where several groups of visitors were taking tea on the veranda, John suggested following their example. "That would be good, John," Louise said, "and you really ought to have it, after all this exercise."

The people, all strangers, looked with approving interest at the new arrivals coming up the steps. One woman, in soft summery raiment, reading by herself, looked up with a pleasant smile at the fair young man and the dark young girl. She half raised her book to go on reading, but put it down and looked at the young man again.

The waiter, coming out with a tray, raised his eyebrows at sight of the newcomers, and hurried over to them as soon as he had served the other guests. "Monsieur Leroux!" he exclaimed with delight,—"et Ma'mselle

Louise!" John beamed, and gripped the waiter's hand. Ma'mselle Louise was compelled to do likewise. She would

not give herself airs, of course,—and it was praiseworthy for a farm lad to earn extra money by working in a hotel. Still, when she had marched in among these elegant city folk like a princess with her prince, to have a waiter dash down upon them with the greeting of an old friend was—well, disconcerting.

John did not find it so in the least. “Mon cher Albert,” he said, “je suis bien content de te voir,—bien, bien content, mon vieux!”

He would have had the young man sit down, but Albert smiled and shook his head. Oh no, he knew his place. He brought their tea, and dainty cakes, and stood chatting with them in French, keeping an eye open for the needs of the other guests, and presently going off on patrol to make sure everyone was well satisfied.

When he came to the lady with the book, she ordered more hot water for her tea, and remarked—“A fine looking fellow that Monsieur—what did you call him? Leroux, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, madame.”

“A friend of yours?”

“Truly yes, madame, an old friend and a good friend, only we don’t see him around here often enough,—he is so busy and occupied, of course, with—with big affairs.” Albert spread his hands wide apart to indicate the vastness of John’s operations, of which he knew nothing at all. The lady appeared to be satisfied, and went on reading.

“I suppose your father can do without you on the farm, Albert,” said John when the waiter came back,—“you used to have such a lot of brothers.”

“Oh yes, plenty. And, Monsieur Leroux, the fact is, I have ambitions. I want to go to college in Quebec and become a lawyer. My father says all right, but he can’t spare money for that, because he has four daughters to marry yet, and they must each have something—more than a chest of linen. Father would be ashamed to give them no more, as if he was really poor. So I am making all the money I can, this way. You can tell me how much it will cost, perhaps. You went to college yourself, I remember well, for you always came back here in the holidays. And there’s a lot more I want to know about college.”

“I’ll be delighted to tell you all I can,” said John. “I’ll come along some time when you’re not so busy,—and we must be getting away home, too, or mother will be thinking I’ve drowned Louise in the lake! How would to-morrow morning do? I’ll be up early, and directly we’re through milking I’ll come.”

That would be magnificent, Albert said. He might have some cleaning of silver to do, but they could talk at the same time, and the silver would get all the brighter. Madame the hotel-keeper would have no possible objection—if monsieur had none to sitting back there behind—Albert waved his hand in

towards the humble rear apartments where guests were not supposed to go.

John assured him, truly, that he enjoyed humble apartments where real work was being done. He forced an absurdly large tip on the waiter, who waved an exuberant farewell as they pulled away from the shore.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE

John rowed up to the hotel early next morning, as he had promised, and found Albert already at his silver and glass polishing—not in a poky rear apartment, but on the lawn, and close to the end of the veranda.

"Madame knew you were coming," the young waiter explained, "and she thought this would be much better. She is very considerate. She said Monsieur Leroux could sit on the veranda and talk to me down here. All the guests have gone already for a long day's excursion across the lake."

The idea of talking down to his friend from a veranda struck John as even more absurd than considerate. He insisted on carrying down a chair and sitting beside the waiter. In fact, as their talk went on, he picked up a knife and polished it himself, then picked up another,—in fact, they worked on together as they talked, both of them unconscious of the least derogation from the dignity of monsieur. Albert's inquiring mind was insatiable. If he kept it keyed up to the same high pitch of curiosity, he would leave college a walking encyclopaedia.

John was sitting with his back to the house, but from an upward look of surprise in Albert's face at one point he gathered that the veranda was no longer unoccupied. Turning his head, he saw a lady's figure disappearing.

"They didn't all go then," said Albert, lowering his voice. "There's Mrs. Van Ruysen. Isn't she beautiful? And so gracious! The others would think it strange, you sitting here with the waiter,—and actually doing his work. Mon Dieu, I hadn't thought of that,—I hardly noticed what you were doing, it seemed quite natural. She wouldn't think anything of it, I'm sure, though she's the finest lady in the bunch. She would understand."

The lady walked up and down, without coming near that end of the veranda, till Albert and John finished the work and the waiter began to gather up the shining results. Then she went indoors.

A minute later, the mistress of the house came around from the back. With a deferential smile to Monsieur Leroux, she said: "Albert, Mrs. Van Ruysen says she is sorry she got up too late to go with the party in the launch, and she would like to follow them in a boat if she could get anyone to take her. I told her we had no one but you, and I didn't see how we could spare you. There's a party of half a dozen coming up from Troy, and they'll be here before lunch. As for the New York city boy that blew in the other day, he can neither row nor swim—nor do anything else, for that matter."

Albert looked disappointed. He wished the Troy party—and even their tips—at Athens, or any other place where Trojans would be sure of a chilly

reception. He, a born squire of dames, condemned to feed Trojans when he might be squiring this dame of all others! A cruel fate. And why should the mistress come and tantalize him by dangling an impossibility in his eyes?

"I should be delighted to take the lady over in my boat," said John. "I've nothing else to do, and I can't get enough exercise anyway." If he had thought, he might have remembered a new gate he was going to make for Joseph, and a boulder he had sworn to haul off on the stone-boat for an extension of the garden, and several other trifles.

"That's extremely kind of you, Monsieur—Leroux, is it not? I will tell madame."

She hurried away with the good news, and almost immediately Mrs. Van Ruysen reappeared on the veranda.

John went up to meet her.

"You are too good, Monsieur Leroux."

John smiled. "It will be nothing but pleasure to me, madame,—a godsend, in fact. I should have had to row alone, but for this happy accident."

"You have a true French turn for compliments, Monsieur. But it is too bad to take you away from your friend." She smiled sweetly on the waiter. Such a smile, Albert felt like saying, would almost make up for the desolation of his inability to go with her himself. He only bowed, smiling back, and assured her that the conversation over the knives was satisfactorily ended, and anyway he would be too busy to entertain monsieur longer.

Tripping down to the landing stage, with John carrying her wraps, the lady paused to gather a spray of lilac bloom,—then tried to break off a twig of spruce. That being too tough for her fingers, John whipped out his knife and presented her with the twig.

She raised the lilac to her face for a moment, and then the spruce twig,—holding that long enough for three ecstatic inspirations. Then she held up the blossom and the twig in turn for John to smell.

"Thanks!" he said. "Which do you like best?"

She looked out over the water. "I'm afraid—sometimes one, sometimes the other. Sweetness and strength. If only we could find them together!"

"Can't we?" John was on the point of quoting an apt old proverb, but for a moment his memory groped after it in vain. There was a puzzled look in his eyes. . . It was something in the Bible. He had not looked at a Bible since his Sunday School days. There must have been a Bible in his father's house. Yes, to be sure, that old Bible in a brown paper parcel. In imagination he dragged it out of its hiding place and started to break the seals, anxious—somehow over-anxious, absurdly eager—just to show an old proverb to this woman. Then he realized that she too had now an eager puzzled look in the eyes that she kept

fixed on his. He smiled, at the incongruity between this brilliant human butterfly and that ancient tome in dusty brown paper. But she was not smiling. He even thought she gave a little sigh, as she turned and led the way to the boat. Taking her seat in the stern, she laid the flower on one side, the sprig on the other.

John pulled away with a long sweeping stroke. He had left the rudder behind, not expecting a passenger that day, so he had to fix his eye on a landmark, the tall spruce in front of the hotel, to steer a straight course. The southerly breeze was gentle, but the bow was high and a breath would swing it north if he did not watch.

The lady took full advantage of this. Now and then he glanced at her face, and always found her looking at him. She was not embarrassed. She did not pretend to be only looking in his direction. She smiled, as if they were old friends.

"Motion like this saves you from thinking," she said. "In a car the motion is fine, when the roads are, but if you've got a heart, or even love your own life, you can't help thinking of the next car you'll meet, and the next child that will dash out in front of you from nowhere."

She picked up, idly as it seemed, the twig of spruce, and held it—well, it had to be close to her lips to be under her nose. Nature has seen to that.

"Why should they not mix?" John asked her. "Not those two scents, of course, but what you call them,—sweetness and strength?"

She raised her eyebrows, just a little. "I suppose they really ought to go together," she said. "I wish they always did. People seem to think they are opposites."

"But don't you remember the old saying, 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness'?"

SAMSON AND DELILAH

"Ah, but that's just it,—that was a riddle,—whoever asked it knew it would puzzle his friends."

"And as they were his enemies it didn't matter," said John, laughing. "It's in the story of Samson and Delilah."

The lady pressed her elbows sharply to her sides, as if in a momentary shiver, and ceased to smile. John remembered that Delilah belonged to a class not mentioned in polite society, at any rate in the proper times when he had been brought up, and the lady could hardly be younger. She might even be older, though the question of her possible age had not occurred to him before. Now that he thought of it, and looked at her again, he fancied that she and Father Time had been living in different worlds, and had never heard of each other's existence.

"And what did it mean?" she said. "I've forgotten, if I ever knew."

“He killed a savage lion, with his naked hands, and when he came by that way again he found wild honey in its skull.”

“Ah, so he did,—and fed the honey to Delilah, I suppose.” The lady’s face was still serious, and she kept it turned away from John’s, but she went on now as if she had to. Her voice deepened. “The Philistine woman brought him to grief in the end. They always do. Samsons—men—have no business to trust Delilahs.”

John, though he felt this must be a sermon for his own good, was decidedly embarrassed to have it preached at him by a beautiful woman, face to face. But now she gave herself a little shake,—her sunny smile came out of its cloud. Holding up the spruce twig, she said: “But here are the sweetness and strength together after all, so close together you couldn’t pull them apart, without your cruel knife; this tender bright green tip growing out of last year’s dark needles, —so dark they’re almost black, and I suppose they’ll die and drop off presently. But the tough old branch where they grew, it gives the tender bright young needles all their sap and all their life.”

John felt no inspired reply bubbling up in him, to keep the conversation on this high poetic level. All he could do was to pull harder on the oars. The lady seemed content to enjoy the swift motion in silence, till she spied the picnic party on shore.

“There they are,” she said, “almost right ahead. If you pull a little harder on the left—no, I mean easier on the right—there, now the tree beside them is just over your head! They were going to climb that high hill behind, but the lazy ones have thought better of it, or worse. They’ve settled down in a nice lazy corner under a little cliff, with bushes growing out of every crack, and that solitary pine tree at one side. How a tree loves to spread itself when it’s not squeezed up and starved in a forest!”

“An artist couldn’t have arranged them better for a picture,” John observed, after a glance over his shoulder.

“That’s why they picked the spot, I’ve no doubt,—or why that girl Irene did. She’s a photographic enthusiast. All she seems to think of any scene is how it will look in a snapshot. She told me so herself. She’ll take home half a dozen pictures of that tree and that cliff, with that group in the foreground. Do you go in for photography, Monsieur Leroux?”

“I used to, in my travelling days. But I was always wishing I had the time to stay and paint what I saw as I saw it, as it really was. They say a photograph can’t lie, but there’s something not quite natural about it, and it never satisfies me.”

“Ah, I’m glad to see you have caught that, Monsieur Leroux. It is said that every Frenchman has art in his soul, no matter how immersed he is in what they call practical affairs.” Monsieur smiled, but let her go on. “It’s only a

lying sort of truth a photograph tells," she said, with surprising vehemence. "Every time I look at one, it tries to make me think the world all black and white, or brown and white. I must have color, color—the colors of life. The hundred shades of green in front of me there, the hundred shades of red and yellow and purple and blue in the flowers we shall see when we land, the glorious blue of heaven with its sailing white clouds, and, when I'm too dazzled to keep my eyes on the sky, the—the very tasteful shade of blue in my obliging rower's shirt!"

"NO ONE ALL BLACK"

John laughed at her sudden descent from heaven to his insignificant self. "I believe you were going to say the red of his hair, only you were afraid he might be hurt! But I feel as you do, about photographs and colors. Black and white? They're all very well, I suppose, but—come to think of it, I don't believe I ever saw a sure-enough all-black thing in nature, except maybe a crow, or a Berkshire hog,—any more than I've ever known a man or woman all black, at heart."

She sat up, intense and glowing. "You don't? It does my heart good to hear you. I don't believe there ever was such a man or woman, myself. I can't. When I hear people set down as bad through and through, I feel it can't be true. I know better,—though some may have come pretty near it, at their worst times." She sank back, and shut her eyes.

"Here's the landing place," said John, looking over his shoulder. "It's no pier, only a row of stepping-stones."

He ran the boat alongside them, tied the painter to an iron ring in the outermost rock, then shipped his oars and straightened up to lend the lady a hand. But she had stepped nimbly out already and started for the shore. At the third stone, she miscalculated its distance from the fourth, and came down in the water. It was only knee deep, but the stones were high, and her attempt to scramble up was a grotesque failure. She laughed aloud, as a child will, to keep grown-ups from thinking it scared by a trifling accident. Another moment and she would have waded ashore; but in half that moment John had jumped in after her and gathered her up in his arms. He carried her up the beach and enthroned her on a boulder.

She hastily pulled off her shoes and stockings, remarking "I hate wet feet. I'm a regular cat. That end of me is, anyway; I hope not the other end!"

"All the cat that ever was in you must have run to your feet and stayed there, so it can't do any harm. You can't scratch with shoes on."

But the lady's face had clouded over in sudden dismay. "How stupid of me! I might at least have waited, and walked up wet-foot to where the others are." She rose, and took a step on the beach, but winced as the stones hurt her bare feet. "I can manage all right if you let me lean on your arm, monsieur," she said.

"It'll be easier if you lean on my two arms," said John. This time it took him less than the half-moment to pick her up. Long enough for her to protest, if she had badly wanted; but she made no pretence,—she could have purred with satisfaction. She put an arm over his shoulder, to make her weight fall easier on him. How she would have liked to stroke that ruddy hair! He was just a big rosy boy, after all, to her.

A decorous gaiety stirred the depths of the lazy ones when this pair rose into sight, but they only expressed a decorous concern. They hoped Mrs. Van Ruysen had not sprained her ankle?

"No, my dears, but she 'put her foot in it,' and 'it' was wet. Then came a knight errant and rescued her—"

"From what might have been a watery grave, if she'd taken it lying down," John went on, standing before her new boulder-throne. "And the knight had better finish his errantry by fetching up those wet shoes and stockings."

THE KNIGHT ERRANT

While he was gone, the lady satisfied their unspoken curiosity about her knight as well as she could. She only knew that monsieur was in business of some kind on a large scale, a business doubtless inherited, as he was such a youth; that he was a Frenchman with a perfect command of English, and that his arms were strong. "That he is a gentleman, and has an imagination," she added, "you can see for yourselves."

"I thought Frenchmen were dark," said Irene's young sister Joan.

"Surely not the Normans," said Irene. "He may be a French-Canadian. This is their Province, and a lot of them came from Normandy."

When John came back, he spread the shoes and stockings on a rock to dry, and was clearly about to leave. "I suppose you'll be going back in the launch, Mrs. Van Ruysen?" he asked.

"We all hope you will," said Irene. "And there's plenty of room in the launch for Mr. Leroux besides. We can tow his boat behind."

Mrs. Van Ruysen was grateful to the girl. She would have pressed John to stay, herself, but that was not her picnic.

John needed no persuasion. The tide of irresponsibility, after a few faint threats to ebb, continued high; why should he not continue to float on it? Those jobs on the farm could wait. He thought of no other reason to quit.

The rest of the party came down from their climb, and John was introduced to them all. He was surprised to find how easily, after all his seclusion from such folk, he fitted into the circle and took a lively share in the talk. Mrs. Van Ruysen took care of that. Monsieur was her own exclusive find; all the more considerately on that account she played him into the hands of the other women, while she turned away to other men. These intervals were never long, however. John found points of interest in all the girls; not a dumb-bell among them; but Mrs. Van Ruysen was made up of interest, the glowing metal

unalloyed. Her superlative charm, he guessed,—the interest everyone always found in her,—must spring from the obvious interest she found in everyone. She took evident pleasure in drawing out the points of others and making them shine.

It was nearly dark when the launch returned to the hotel. John carried Mrs. Van Ruysen's wraps up to the veranda, but she strolled back with him to say goodbye as he pushed off in his solitary boat. The parting was not prolonged, still less was it sentimental, but it showed a warmth of satisfaction on both sides. She broke off a fresh lilac blossom to give him, saying: "The other must be faded by now; but you'll find the spruce twig as good as ever."

Albert, coming down for a last word with his friend, did not understand the allusion, but was touched by the gift and thrilled by the voice.

"A fine couple they'd make," he said to himself as he hurried back to feed the flock.

Piecing together the lively picnic reminiscences that leapt from table to table, he gathered that his friend Leroux had landed with Elsa Van Ruysen riding happily in his arms. Also, that the day had been much more enjoyable than anyone had expected at the start, in fact exhilarating to a degree,—owing clearly to that unexpected couple. No one dared to hint that Mrs. Van Ruysen had "made a conquest," but Albert's mind jumped to that conclusion.

ADVENTURE OF THE LONELY HUSBAND

FLIES IN THE COUNTRY OINTMENT

If one ray of the sunshine that blazed on his hill-side farm struggled down into the New York canyon where Sam Johnson threaded his way through a stream of human ants, it did not penetrate his gloomy soul. Full of foreboding, he paused at the door of the insurance office.

The cheque for his burnt out stock was ready and waiting for him, he knew by telephone. Elated, without thinking, he had promised to call for it. He wished now he had told them to mail it. Dared he enter?

Of course. Why not? He was only collecting for what had actually been destroyed. His record being genuinely unspotted, how could any suspicion arise? Could even an insurance manager, suspicious by profession, detect the cloud of nervous apprehension cast on the honest man's spirit by the treasure he had saved from the ruins? Nonsense. He plucked up courage and walked in.

The cloud lifted for a moment when the manager, handing over the cheque, expressed cordial sympathy with the good man in the destruction of his business, and paid him a lavish compliment on his life-long probity.

An average dishonest man, with nothing more on his conscience than a few misappropriated umbrellas and hotel "souvenirs," might have blushed. Honest Sam, though his booty ran (he devoutly hoped) well over six figures, felt he had only one offence to his debit, and accepted the praise as fully earned by his otherwise perfectly clean sheet.

What pleased him even more was the warmth of his old customers.

"I'm extremely sorry to hear you're going out of business," said old Venn, dropping into the single room Johnson had hired as a temporary office—a cot behind a curtain made it his bedroom by night. "I shan't feel at home in any other man's store, and, frankly, I don't know any other bookseller I could have the same confidence in."

"Oh," protested Sam, "there are first-class men in the trade yet. You mustn't talk as if I were a remarkable exception. That would never do. And what have I done, more than my little best?"

"A mighty big best it's been, Mr. Johnson. I can't forget how careful you were of the books I left with you for sale. Everything found snug in the safe, exactly as if there'd never been a fire within a hundred miles. Not a thing lost that anyone had trusted you with."

"Not a thing!" Sam's lips formed the words visibly, though he could not force his throat to give them sound.

"One favor I do ask," Mr. Venn added,—"that you'll keep those books of mine and see to their sale, even if you won't take on any new business."

"I don't mind promising that. And for a little while I shall be quite glad to execute any little buying or selling commissions for my old friends. When we get finally settled in the old home we're turning into a new one, out in the country, I shan't want to hear of the book business or ever see New York again." This sounded a bit ungracious. He had meant to go on and say—"Of course, I should hate to lose my old business friends in New York, and I hope you'll pay us a visit as soon as ever we've got a corner to put you up in."

He did not say it. Of all the experiences he must avoid, he shrank most from the visits of customers who would harp on his book dealings, his fire, and his honesty! He would not take the risk of such visits, constantly waking the sleeping dog he was having such trouble to chloroform.

SAM'S FINGERS ARE ALL THUMBS

In fact, the more completely his wife and he, in their new home, could cut themselves off from the rest of the world, the better he would be pleased.

On a flying visit to the old farm, he had already planned the alterations absolutely required. Now he went again, got a carpenter to undertake the job, and ordered the material. He had thought of staying a few days, to see the work well started. The idea of helping with his own hands was very pleasant,—at the light jobs only, of course.

Curious, how unpleasant he found it in reality. A man's hands, branching out in elastic fingers and thumbs, are the most versatile of living tools, nimble, apt, and eager for the exploration and conquest of novel tasks. They almost seem to enjoy a conscious independent existence, as if they had minds of their own. Sam's hands, in their youth on that very spot, had not been unhandy. But many years of disuse had shriveled and atrophied their power of accommodation. Not the hands themselves,—these looked healthy enough, and no leaner than the rest of Johnson's frame, but they had idled along so many years in a little rut of smooth routine, signing a type-written letter or cheque, fingering the pages of a book, tying a shoe-lace or the string of a parcel, that everything outside the rut was now strange and difficult to them. They were no longer "gleg at the up-tak." Their handiness, the all-round quality essential in the unspoiled human hand, had faded out, and all their fingers now were thumbs.

To his surprise, disappointment, and swiftly growing annoyance, he ran splinters into his skin, damaged his clumsy fingers in a curious variety of ways that a carpenter would have found impossible, and even at the cost of all this painful sacrifice could not bore a hole or saw a board or screw a hinge on straight. The primitive art acquired by the normal farm boy too young for memory to register, the splitting of firewood, called for no mathematical nicety, but Sam could not be sure of either hitting the stick or missing his foot.

This was humiliating enough, but not so bad as his general distaste for his

surroundings.

The scenery was as fine as it had been, and he assured his uneasy inner self that he enjoyed the beauty of nature as keenly as ever. It was not true. The edge even of that enjoyment was blunted.

As for the trifles making the difference between life in a common farm-house and in the modest but modern city home,—he could hardly believe he had ever tolerated them. Yet he had even got amusement out of them. To wash and shave beside the kitchen door, to carry a tub to the attic, with buckets of precious warm water to half-fill it, and bathe in a rigidly vertical line or risk a deluge in the room below,—he remembered having actually laughed at these things. Now, the lack of a bath-room only made him shudder. Of course that would be one of the new additions, and the first. He had always meant to have the bath-room installed before Fiona came home. Now he swore that until it was installed, with a few other conveniences, he would not spend another night himself under the poor old roof. He would stick to the room he had taken down in the city, running up to the farm only on flying visits of inspection.

He was too old and set, he concluded, for roughing it,—though the word even as he used it struck him as absurd. To class these petty deprivations with the terrific hardships of the pioneers—ridiculous! He simply had to admit that city life had softened him. He was only fit for the pictorial and atmospheric features of country life. These he would greatly enjoy when combined with every mechanical refinement of domestic life in town,—as he was about to combine them.

SAM WOULD LIKE TO FORGET

It was the solitude of the country that Sam hated more than anything else,—because it was not solitary enough. It was a fraud. In some dense forest or on some peculiarly unpopular stretch of desert, a man might lay in supplies for years and keep to himself as long as they lasted. Here, where he was known, privacy was impossible, and any attempt to secure it would expose him to more publicity, to censure as unsociable, maybe to positive suspicion,—a risk that sprang up to haunt him at every corner.

He might keep away from his neighbors, but he could not keep them away from him. Old acquaintances of his father, or their elderly children, dropped in for a social spell as they passed. It was unnatural, in such a community, to plead pressure of business and shortness of time as excuse for not sitting down to talk; and it was invariably the fire they wanted to talk about. Again and again he had to describe that horror.

This had one advantage,—by constantly repeating an immaculate version, omitting his descent to the cellar and the crime there committed, he could almost persuade himself to believe it. The criminal incident was packing itself away in a cellar of its own, and its author, by marching conversationally again

and again through the “upper story” alone—he smiled faintly at this conceit—could nearly forget the dark cellar’s existence. Never quite.

On his third trip to the north, Sam happened to reach the farm at the same time as Joseph Thoreau. Sam’s farmer, Tim McElroy, had little stock; Joseph was steadily adding one high-grade cow after another to his dairy herd, and could afford to pay good prices to his less enterprising neighbors for their surplus feed. He had just come over the line for a load of hay.

The farmer was out in the fields. Joseph asked the landlord if he would pitch the hay out of the loft. No, Sam didn’t think he could; and Joseph, after a second look at the city man, did not even suggest that he should stand in the wagon and tramp the hay down while the buyer himself pitched it in. He didn’t mind waiting for Tim,—this was the first chance he’d had of a chat with the city merchant who had gone through such a sensational experience.

“You don’t know me, I suppose, Mr. Johnson,—why should you? But you used to know my father François Thoreau, eh? And John Galt, just the other side of him? It’s the Galt farm I’m working now. And young John Galt, he’s come up from the city too, like yourself,—couldn’t keep away if you tried, could you, Mr. Johnson? Honest, now, you never saw a better place to live in, did you? You’re doing the sensible thing, Mr. Johnson, fixing the old place so you can bring the family and settle right down again where you belong. How many might there be in the family, now?”

“Only the wife, Mr. Thoreau. We never had any children.”

“That’s bad. And poor Mr. Galt, he hasn’t got even a wife. But I don’t think it’ll be long—judging by the looks of things!” Joseph chuckled knowingly. “And then I hope he’ll follow your example, and settle down among us all again. It would be nice for you too, Mr. Johnson, wouldn’t it, having another city man close by?”

If Joseph had been watching Sam’s face closely as they sat on a pile of yellow boards beside the gate, he might have noticed a sudden twitch at the name of young John Galt. But after that, Sam took great care of his features. He showed a well-bred interest—feeling none whatever—in his visitor, and only the same mild interest in the subject, though this had set his brain in a whirl. Young John Galt, who ought to be decently dying in some far-off sanatorium,—lurking here at his very door, where they might run into each other any minute, and planning not merely to live but to marry! Outrageous! The young man had

A TERRIBLY GOOD REPORT OF JOHN

assured Sam he had only a few months to live, and Sam felt really aggrieved.

“I suppose he’s staying with you, Mr. Thoreau?”

“Sure. He’s just like one of the family, as he always has been. We still call him by the old name we gave him when we were all

children together,—Leroux,—because his hair was that color. But it's not quite so red now."

Sam Johnson was inwardly kicking himself, with violence. He had never forgotten, of course, that the Galts came from the same country-side. That was the reason why father Galt had come later on to the little store opened by the Johnsons, father and son,—glad to find old neighbors whose honesty he could trust in the realm of books. Galt, however, had choked off every allusion to the home he had left, and the young bookseller had got an impression that the deserted husband had sold the farm and cut off all connection with the scene of his tragedy.

"Yes," he now made himself reply with careful indifference, "I suppose it would be. His father's was that color. And how is the young man?"

"Fine, fine. Couldn't be better."

Couldn't be worse, that meant, for Johnson. But then lung patients notoriously cherished a hope of recovery to the end. The country wind and sun might have thrown a mask of color over that pale face.

"Who is the—the fortunate lady?"

"The—? Oh, I understand. Well, I'm not saying it's all fixed up for the banns to be called in church, but everyone can see that he likes my sister Louise and she likes him."

Sam thought he had asked quite enough about young Galt, and changed the subject rashly to hay, of which his knowledge was extremely vague. Luckily, the real farmer turned up, took the subject off Sam's faltering tongue, and handled it decisively with a fork.

The bookman kept out of sight, busying himself with the carpenters and plumbers indoors, till he heard Joseph's "Geddup! Marche donc!" and the fading rumble of his wheels. Sam had meant to stay over a day, but found himself compelled—this was his way of putting it, for Tim's benefit—to catch that night train for New York.

Tim was always willing to hitch up and take the boss to that night train. They hitched up directly after an early supper, so as to "keep the road by daylight." Tim said, but his wife said it was only to get in time for the movie show. At that show, undoubtedly, Tim and Sam passed the evening. Tim tore himself away before the second showing of the "feature," but Sam stayed on to the very end. There was no less tedious way of existing until train time.

SAM WILL AMUSE HIMSELF

The movies were quite as much of a novelty to the city bookseller as to the country farmer. Fiona and Sam, in all things living by rule, had one compartment of their life labeled “Entertainment,” neatly and completely filled with so many plays, so many concerts, and two selected operas. This programme had already acquired the sanctity of cast-iron age when the movies at last came within range of respectable lorgnettes.

The Johnsons continued therefore to ignore or sniff at them, except on some rare occasion when Sam brought home news of a great discovery—“a consensus of opinion, my dear,”—that a certain film was “quite in a class by itself, and really ought to be seen.”

At the break-up of the Johnson household, the Johnson programme had blown out of the window and vanished. If Sam had come across it now, he would have called it “a scrap of paper” and passed on. It had no authority over him whatever. Before, it had not merely dictated his actions but seemed to mould his very taste. Now, he was secretly pleased to feel that he could snap his fingers at it. His real taste had not been the moulded thing conforming to the programme, but something quite different. Long suppressed, it now at last got its chance.

With the insurance and tail-ends of business settled, and the house sold—for a good deal more than he had reckoned on,—Sam was thrown on his own resources as he never had been in his life. Never. Even his holidays, in those few scary years between launching out from school and picking up a pilot in Fiona, had always been arranged in advance, if only by an illustrated railway folder.

Fiona had no idea of the dangers she was leaving Sam exposed to, when she gratefully took his offer of a health trip to the south. How should she? Sam’s wife had never thought of herself as his pilot. She was not one of the women who consciously keep their husbands straight, even by invisible and intangible leading-strings. Indeed, she had always looked to him for the lead, and he had always imagined himself to be giving it.

Yet fragile Fiona, away by herself in the south, could mix with the hotel crowd, walk with them, talk with them, even dance with them on occasion, without the slightest sense of need for guidance,—not drifting, just naturally sailing along on her usual course,—while her strong lord Sam, left to himself, had lost his course with his pilot.

If he had not stolen that fatal book, he would probably have kept his course as she did. More than once before she had been away for months at a time, and

nothing had diverted him from placid continuance in the approved routine. But then he had a conscience for deputy-pilot, and what he called his principles for guiding stars. Now, his conscience was numbed, and having torn one of his principles out of the sky and trampled on it, he found all the rest shaken loose and ready to fall.

"What a relief," he said to himself at first, "not having to get off to business every morning!"

If only he had had anything to take its place, the relief might have been lasting. As things were, he was craving relief from idleness within a week. He had only had one hobby,—gardening,—and that was really his wife's. Fiona did the studying, thinking, planning and buying,—he did what he called "all the work." She called it that herself!

Even with her to fix up those pernickety preliminaries, gardening would have been difficult without a garden. Once he got into residence out there in the country, what delight he would take in creating the garden of gardens!

BUT WHAT TO PLAY AT?

In default of gardening, he paid formal tribute to his old principle of the virtue and necessity of work, by reviewing all the toilsome hobbies he had ever heard of,—and thought up a good excuse for dismissing each in turn.

He fell back comfortably on a threadbare proverb,—he had a stock of such thought-savers for every possible circumstance of life. Before the fire, if anyone remarked on his devotion to business punctuality at the store, he would quote Dr. Watts: "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." Now, he gave place of honor to "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Mischief, indeed! Who could imagine Samuel Johnson getting into mischief, like a schoolboy? He had kept his nose to the grindstone of work so hard and long, a good spell of play would do no harm,—in fact, health of body and mind both demanded it.

But what to play at? Athletics had never appealed to him. He might play the spectator's part, of course, and in a hopeful mind he tried a ball game. It gave him a little thrill, just a sip of oblivion, but not enough to make up for the irksomeness of getting there and back, and all the discomforts of a crowd. Besides, it was the evening that most pitifully cried out to be filled. Fiona and he had spent one night a week with a neighboring couple at bridge. On her departure he had been assured that they would still be glad to see him. But would he still be glad to see them? He would not! He would be on edge all the time, with people intimate enough to ask all sorts of questions. The less he saw of old friends, the fewer pitfalls he would have to expect, the less acute would be his chronic unease.

So it came about now that every morning Sam Johnson, before starting his breakfast, folded his paper at the Amusement Page, and assimilated its

contents along with his grape fruit, wheat cereal, and coffee. First of all he studied the moving picture announcements, looking, by force of tradition, for any film that hinted a motive of education or uplift. The force of that tradition, however, soon evaporated. He now marked the shows that seemed likely to amuse him, and no others. Crude boy-and-girl love interest he thought might be cloying, to a taste refined by books and tranquilized by years. But if the star was a beautiful woman, and any critic certified her acting as fair, he willingly took chances with the plot.

His appetite for spoken drama was curiously changed. He had fiercely condemned the bold sex play as public poison, and had even avoided sampling it. He was not so quick to condemn anything on moral grounds, having become mellower, more broad-minded and tolerant, he flattered himself. The simpler explanation, that he had now got to tolerate what all his life he had denounced as "evil," he rejected and suppressed.

What! Because a man had once happened to break one of the ten commandments, must he be suspected of designs on the other nine? Because he had once stolen—he still avoided the word, he had simply taken a thing the owner did not need; but of course the indiscriminate world would call it stealing—because of one theft, which did not even lessen his disapproval of theft in general, could he be accused of a leaning to lewdness, which he had always regarded as worse than any half-dozen other sins put together—murder possibly excepted?

Monstrous! And, consistently, he still avoided the bold sex play. He lost nothing by that, he admitted, for according to the critics every play of that sort then running was extremely dull.

But, for the first time in his life, one day he found himself pausing as he strolled by the Follies,—wandering into the vestibule and superciliously glancing at the array of girls in the photographs,—stepping up to the little window,—asking if there happened to be an odd seat vacant for

SAM TAKES A CHARITABLE VIEW

that night's performance. Yes, there was. But it was half way back, and Sam remarked that his sight—if there was one thing he had constantly bragged of, it was his marvelous sight—that his sight was not so good as it had been. A front-row seat was available for the following day, and he took it.

The magic of that ticket in his pocket was startling. Every girl on the street who looked theatrical might be one of the beauties he was going to feast his eyes on, and now half the girls he met appeared to be in that class. He had always lumped together all girls noticeably made up with paint and powder,—and these things had to be laid on pretty thick before they caught his eye,—with the obviously bold and flaunting in demeanor, and the brazen creatures he had spied ogling men as he and his wife had had to force their way through the

crowd from a play. To him they had all been “bad.”

Now, they interested him. Not the worst, the brazen,—apparently these only came raiding out of their dens at night. But the rest,—there were many attractive faces among the decorated,—good faces too, if he was a judge. They could not all be bad, after all,—to call them so would be unfair, indiscriminate, uncharitable. He had even heard a rumor that stage beauties on the street, defying all tradition, looked more like unadorned Sunday School teachers than the Sunday School teachers themselves. And, of course, not all the highly decorated faces were connected with the stage. If they had been, had he any right to assume that all the pretty girls on the stage lived ugly lives off it?

After an early supper, instead of lingering over his coffee and cigar, he finished his smoke promenading among the crowd. He studied the faces, especially of the ambiguous girls who might or might not be theatrical. His object? None, honestly, he would have said. If pressed, he would have scratched his head to find one, with no result but a trite quotation: “The proper study of mankind is man.” He would drop into some movie show, and later on, when the theatres were all pouring out their thousands, he would continue his study.

Really, a most interesting study! It so filled his mind that even his ruling passion was submerged. He had just paid his entrance money for a show when he pulled up as if turned to stone. This was the night of the great Gutenberg sale! Rather than miss that, he would have declined the most pressing joint invitation from all the kings and presidents on earth.

He made such furious haste that in spite of the congestion of the streets he reached the sale room in time to get a good seat. He did not notice the girl sitting beside him,—his new-born interest in the sex had gone to sleep. Nothing in time present had any existence for him; he lived only for the future moment when the Gutenberg Bible was to flit on the stage and off again.

Not being dumbly statuesque by nature,—in fact, being fond of expressing himself freely, especially on his own subject,—he could not mask his exultation at the glorious $106,000 attained by this marvelous book. Instinct and habit would have set him buzzing delightedly among the departing crowd,—“Ah, you wait till you see my copy—this one’s not a patch on it—mine’ll fetch a cool quarter of a million or nothing!” It gave him real pain to miss such an opportunity of sparkling in the spot-light of his profession—to realize that his imperative instinct must still more imperatively be suppressed, that the secret of “his” Gutenberg, as he had already come to call it, must never be whispered to a human soul. A bitter pill—but nothing after all when gilded by that gorgeous price.

RETURN OF THE TEMPTRESS

A flash of forked lightning from a cloudless sky, the vision of the radiant woman at the door now burst upon him. To the rest of the crowd, she was just a fine woman. A very few might happen to know her by sight, as the charming Mrs. Van Ruysen. To Sam Johnson, she was the sudden resurrection and embodiment of the two great temptations of his life,—Elsa Galt.

He saw himself, as vividly as if it were yesterday, a youth of eighteen, sent over on an errand to neighbor Galt's farm. To borrow a whetstone for the scythe, it was. The neighbor's young wife Elsa was alone. She made him come in and sit down. In her search for the whetstone she had to pass by him more than once,—very close. She brushed against him,—begged his pardon, bewitchingly,—stayed talking to him, he hardly knew what of,—had her hand on his shoulder. Looking up in surprise, his eyes were captured. Her face was just one radiant invitation, unashamed and unconcealed. Her hand stole up to his neck.

His soul was on the point of surrender, when something hard rose up to prevent,—the traditional horror of the "wanton," bitten into his boyish imagination by word pictures of beckoning beauties surrounded by the bones of their victims,—of "strange women" dancing with deluded partners down the path to hell.

He remembered how reluctantly he tore his eyes from hers, and muttered that he must be going, when he would have given the world for courage to stay. She fetched the thing he had come for, put it into his hand, and let her own hand linger upon it, touching his. She smiled—he was to have another chance. He kept his head down, the smile was wasted. He got up, thanked her incoherently, and fled—from Potiphar's wife.

Yet this woman did not rave, or vow vengeance. She sighed, followed his retreating figure across the field with her eyes, then picked up her broom again and sang softly as she swept. She had been denied and disappointed; but the fatal spirit within had not yet reached high tide; the youth was only a shy boy, he had not really scorned but only feared, and she was not of a tempestuous breed. Her passion might devour herself when at its height, but she was too soft-hearted to let it devour everyone who withstood her. . . .

That, her first temptation of Sam Johnson, he had resisted under an impulse of doubtful virtue. Her second temptation he had instantly yielded to, under an impulse which had smashed through all the bulwark principles of a lifetime like egg-shells.

The first, she had probably forgotten; the second she had never known,—

but Sam, now always keen to find a scapegoat for any fraction of his guilt, had no trouble in fastening the responsibility upon her with ruthless logic. It was through her, indirectly, that the Gutenberg treasure had crossed the sea to America. It was directly owing to her misconduct that the book had been left not to her but to her husband, and so to a son who was totally ignorant of its value and had thrown it as a stumbling-block in an honest man's way! The honest man would not have had it happen otherwise, at this stage of the game, in spite of all the problems and anxieties it had raised to worry him; but he found a pleasant opiate in the idea that the woman was somehow to blame. . . .

"Oh, damn!" Fastidious Samuel had rarely, in the tranquil sheepfold of store and home, sworn beyond "Tut" and "Bah!" In these few weeks of freedom from scrupulous

principle he had graduated from "the dickens" to "the devil," and here he was already handling the "damn" with mastery and snap.

What was the provocation? A totally new question had just stung him,—a whole string of questions, each one dragging in the next.

Why had the woman gone to that sale? Unquestionably because she remembered with interest the Gutenberg in her own family. But the book had never been hers, and many years had passed since her father's will had destroyed her last chance of possessing it. Surely, then, her interest could only be remote. Yet she had not been satisfied to wait for a report of the sale in the morning paper. Her interest therefore must be keen. Then why?

Sam had never seen her, never heard of her, since the Galts had vanished from the countryside. But, from the silence of the deserted husband and the voice of rumor, he had gathered a certainty that the rupture was complete and could never be healed. She had doubtless married again, shed her identity as a snake its skin, and could not have anything to do with her old family if she wanted to.

Was it possible that she had some sort of claim on the book after all? Was she in fact its real owner? Sam had never seen a copy of her father's will, and though he knew the old man had left his library to his son-in-law, this exceptional book might have had exceptional strings attached to it. If Galt had known of some defect in his title to the book, that would account for his never having tried to dispose of it. Perhaps only pride had kept the woman from claiming her property, knowing she would have to reveal her old name, and fearing that her history would all leak out with it.

And now that she knew the treasure to be worth far more than she could ever have suspected, would she not pocket her pride and take the risk for the sake of the fortune? She might not take action while her son lived—little as she could have cared for him at any time,—but on his death she would certainly

demand the book from his estate. As no executor could produce what wasn't there, she would be entitled to its value,—and probably the whole of the Galt estate would be swallowed up before so enormous a price could be made up. If John before dying told how he had entrusted the book to Sam, who had let it burn, that would not relieve the estate of its liability, but it would heap odium on the bookseller.

Worse still, the poor wretch would exchange a dead pursuer for a living one. No matter how fully his story of the book's destruction was accepted, how impenetrable its hiding place, he would always feel suspicion lying in wait for him. Some accident might any moment expose the treasure to the light of day. To his imagination, heated by fear, nothing was too improbable.

For a few months, he could have stood this suspense; and he told himself that he would never have stolen the thing but for the certainty that in a few months his ordeal would be ended by the owner's death. By now he was almost convinced, more by fear than reason, that John's mother was the owner, and one glance had been enough to reveal her the picture of health. She had scarcely changed since that terribly delicious day when her hand rested on his neck. Two or three years older than he was, she looked at least fifteen years younger. He had been growing old and grey even before this "accident" had started drawing deeper wrinkles on his face. He would probably die before her, and then the treasure would fall into her hands—unless his last act was to destroy it utterly.

For the worst of it all was that the woman must have been familiar with every little peculiarity of the old Bible from her childhood. He could not pretend to pick it up in some corner of Germany, as he had planned, and send it

DOING AS THE ROMANS DO

over to America, or even dispose of it in Europe, without her certain recognition of it as the Galt copy "burnt in Johnson's store." Even if he disposed of it privately in Europe at a sacrifice of half its American auction value, the news might leak out, and ten to one the book would find its way to New York for sale after all his precautions.

This storm of facts and fears and fancies had raged in poor Sam's head as he stepped back hastily and nearly trod on Isobel's toes at sight of Elsa Galt. It continued to rage until he fell asleep that night. Yet in the morning the first vision to fill his mind was not the woman as threatener, pursuer, avenger, but the same woman as charmer and temptress. He was not so proud now as he had been of young Sam Johnson's virtuous self-denial. If that little scene could be played over again, would he give it the same magnificent—the same cowardly ending?

He would not allow the answer to frame itself in words, but he knew very

well what the answer was.

At the show that night, he did not pay his former self the tribute even of a frown at the boldest extremes of personal exhibition. “When you’re in Rome, do as the Romans do” was his motto for the occasion. He enjoyed himself without reserve. The show would have thawed an iceberg, and Sam’s temperature was already above normal.

“What would Fiona have thought, if she had been there?” Yes, the question did occur to him, during one most audacious act.

“If she’d been home I wouldn’t be here, nor want to be.” That seemed answer enough. And with the same answer he crushed the whispered protest of his old beaten-down conscience when the show was over and he set himself deliberately and hopefully drifting with the midnight crowd.

He was ready for anything now. Every moral restraint had dropped away. But other restraints had firmer hold on him. He courted temptation, but if a temptress, over-average bold, had seized his arm, he would have shaken her off in panic. He watched for some half-shy inviting smile. Once or twice he saw it, but it vanished instantly before he could conjure up a smile in response. The girl, encountering his cold virtuous mask, had feared she had made a mistake and turned away. Pursue, he could not.

Angrily, he ate a lone supper in a cheap cafeteria and went off to his solitary room, loaded with fatigue and vexation. Yes, emphatically he wished Fiona back, and the elusive figure in his dreams, though sometimes radiant as the temptress of his youth, became the modestly gracious and satisfying Fiona whenever he caught a glimpse of her features.

A dash to the old home in the country would do him good, he thought next morning. . . . All the good he got by it was that ghastly discovery from the lips of Joseph Thoreau,—the one man he had to avoid was haunting the same little corner of the north.

ADVENTURE OF THE FARM WIFE AND THE BUTTERFLY

FÉLICE FIGHTS FOR HER CUB

A few days after John's adventure with the Lady of the Lake, one of Albert's brothers came down from the family farm with a wagon-load of vegetables, poultry and eggs, for the lakeside summer resorts.

"You remember our great Leroux, Alfred?" said Albert.

"Truly. Who would have a chance to forget him, with Félice Loranger for neighbor? I'm surprised her husband does not get jealous, the way she talks about her great—no, her 'little Leroux.' I'll say that for her, she never calls him her great Leroux, and why should you?"

"If you'd seen him here the other day, you wouldn't wonder. He can look over the top of your head, or mine."

"Giving himself airs, I suppose. Just because he lives in the city and doesn't have to work for a living. That's no credit to a man."

"Airs, indeed! You're unjust, Alfred. He came out all the way here to talk to me as an old friend. He knew well I was only a waiter here, for he had happened in the day before, taking Louise Thoreau for a boat ride. When he saw me, he saluted me like a long-lost brother. Airs? Why, he sat with me an hour, right under that tree, telling me all I wanted to know about college, and worked on the silver with me as if he was a waiter himself."

"Is he going to marry Louise Thoreau, then? She has airs enough for the city herself."

"Ah! Who knows? He must like her, for he rowed her about the lake the whole afternoon, and then brought her in here to tea. But she had better look out. The day after that, he met a lady here that Louise can't hold a five-cent candle to. A wonderful woman, truly. One of his own city class, too. Mrs. Van Ruysen, they call her."

Albert went on to give his brother a full account of the picnic,—second-hand, but no less graphic for that,—embellishing its romantic episode, and enacting with unction the lilac farewell. "She's the sort of woman that can make any man fall in love with her as easy as slipping on a banana skin. If she wants our Leroux she'll take him, and truly it looks as if she does."

Stopping by the Lorangers' with the empty wagon on his way home, Alfred poured the whole story into Félice's horrified ears. Bustling about the kitchen, getting supper for her tribe, she might hide her emotions, but her heart thumped cruelly. She could have fainted, screamed, thrown the house out of the window, anything. But she forced herself to fling Alfred an "Ah" or a "Oui?" and even to smile, as he paused at intervals expecting her to say something.

"It's good of you to come in with the news, Alfred," she said tranquilly as he got up to leave. "Anything about our old friend Leroux always interests me, of course."

When Alfred was gone, and the children were still out of doors, she sat down, to think. The storm in her mind, held off by her household activities, now raged unchecked. Outwardly, she was motionless, a statue of dread, her hands clenched tight in her lap.

She had no need to recall the facts told by Alfred; they had burnt themselves in at the telling. It was the fatal future, the inevitable result of these facts, that beat upon her. Two of her best beloved were threatened. Esprit de corps, the strong mutual loyalty of a close-knit family, tender affection for the sister she had nursed as a baby, filled her with a passionate fighting grief for Louise. That

THE NERVES OF A LIONESS

John might not in the end have chosen Louise was a mere detail, a dim possibility; the monstrous actual fact was that she was being robbed of her chance, he was being stolen from her at the start, by a woman he could never possess after all—for that woman was his own mother!

For poor John himself, lured by a will-o'-the-wisp to the edge of a dreadful abyss, Félice's pitying rage was hotter still. His danger was imminent. His need, his unconscious need of rescue was desperately urgent.

She alone could save him. That she, the hard-working wife of a farmer, the mother of nine, should have to sally out and rescue two human beings for whom she had no earthly responsibility, never occurred to her as irksome, still less could it ever have given her a moment's hesitation. She sprang to the defence of a grown-up sister and another woman's son, with the fierce immediate instinct of a lioness defending her cubs.

But how to do it?

"Maman, maman, baby's crying!" It was little Denise, running to the door. Her watchful ear had noticed that baby had cried at least a minute. Baby never cried so long unless he was sick, for maman always picked him up at the first sound of hunger.

Félice had only heard the child as in a dream. She started up, caught him to her breast,—but then denied him its comfort. With her nerves on fire, her very milk might turn to gall. "Warm a little milk and water for him, Denise," she said. She could not explain, could not say she felt sick, or the whole family would be troubled by the almost unheard-of event. Her husband would probably try to keep her in bed next day, if he did not send for a doctor; he would certainly be angry if she insisted on going off to the lake in the morning, —and that she must and would, though the heavens should fall!

The swarming in for supper drove the trouble to the back of her mind. No

one noticed anything strange about her. Denise, puzzled by the baby's condemnation to cow's milk and water, glanced at her mother once or twice, but the untroubled brow set her quite at ease. With nine little souls and a big one to care for, the rest of the universe might reel and Félice would not be distraught.

At night, however, the morrow's adventure took possession of her. However carefully she might plan, she could not avoid giving pain; if the main object could only be won at the cost of a wholesale catastrophe, she would not flinch. But there must be some less frightful way. To blurt out the truth of that woman's relationship to John, even to start the rumor rolling,—it would cut John free from his entanglement, as by a surgeon's knife, but would inflict a hundred incurable wounds beside. John himself must be hurt at the outset, there was no help for that, in private; but—a public exposure would condemn him to drag a scandalous shadow through all his days. The shadow would overwhelm his mother; and Félice, though ready to punish in order to make her harmless, desired no vengeance. The whole circle in which the woman moved, little as the farmer's wife admired their ways, were innocent of her crime, and should not ruthlessly be forced to share her penalty. That some of the shadow would fall on Félice's own family was the last of all the deterring thoughts to enter her mind, but it did enter. The exposure might not cool the ardor of Louise, but it would certainly turn many of her friends from admiring approval of her choice to sneering contempt, if she took a man thrown back on her hands by the collapse of so lurid a venture.

Bad enough if the true cause of the collapse remained unknown after the siren's vanishing. Gossip might still accuse the farm girl of meekly accepting the wreck of a frustrated flirtation—flirtation of a weakling dazzled by a clever woman "old enough to be his mother." That much

WITH OR WITHOUT THE KNIFE?

risk, Félice saw, had to be taken. She only hoped the flirtation had not gone as far as she feared. The time had been very short. She was sure the farthest advances had been from the woman's side,—maybe John had really gone but a little way to meet them, in spite of his carrying her in his arms. And Félice prayed fervently that, whatever had happened, the rumor might be scotched if not killed, watered down if not extinguished. She knew what it was to fight a forest fire in its infancy. With the active alliance of Albert, the chief local witness, who had the power to minimize as well as to magnify, and of all the others she had influence over, the embers might be stamped out and only a trifle of ashes remain.

The one clear act before her was—to catch John's mother alone, before another day's mischief could begin. What words of vitriol she might use, what threats, she had no need to seek; they would come, to match the reception she

might get. She knew well enough that she could drive the woman off the scene, probably out of her son's life altogether, without more than a hint at public exposure,—if indeed even a hint was required.

It might not be so easy to settle John himself. If Elsa's unequaled witchery had completely conquered him, if he was dazed by her fascination, he might resolve to go through fire and water in search of her. Then, and then only, would Félice cut the fatal tie with the knife of truth. She prayed to be spared that deed. If the woman departed without seeing him again, without leaving a word for him, or if she left a cold contemptuous word to make him think her ice instead of fire, he would fume and fret a while, maybe, but would give her up as hopelessly double-faced,—surely. Still, "surely" was not certainly. Félice was ready for the worst.

The intensity of her strength, as she lay awake and planned, collapsed when the plan was formed. She felt so weak, she trembled. She knew she must act alone, and knew she could. But in this moment of weakness she longed for some one to lean on. She had a pitiful impulse to wake the dear man at her side, and tell him everything, and cry on his breast,—yes, even to take him with her in the morning and have him wait within call while she tackled the woman. . . . She slipped her arm softly under his neck, and kissed him. That was nothing rare,—Félice and Jacques were lovers yet. He turned and caressed her gently, half awake. That was enough. She drew a deep breath of relief, lay perfectly still, and fell asleep in his sheltering arms.

Morning came, Jacques went off to his work, and Félice got two of the elder children ready for school. "I'm sorry, Denise," she said, "but I have to drive down to the lake, so you must be mother to-day. Baby will only want one feed while I'm gone; you know what to give him."

Then, "Bernard, my dear!"

He came running up. Should she take him with her? She had a good excuse; the horse must be tied up somewhere, short of the scene of action, and he could look after it. . . . She staved off a decision. "Get out the horse and help me hitch up, little one."

She went into the barn with him, and together they did what she was well used to doing alone. Then, on the point of sending him off with a "Be home early to supper, my dear," she found she could not. To put another poor woman through an ordeal would be the worst ordeal for herself that she had ever faced. The craving for support came back strong. She must have it, even the fragile support of her boy with the half-formed mind.

"Jump in and come with me," she said.

Driving, she kept an arm around the boy all the time, except when they had to pass another rig or let a car pass them. Bernard chattered away, and she tried to give

intelligent answers when he took an interrogative turn. That was not often.

A BOAT ON THE LAKE

At the first point where the road came in sight of the lake, Félice stopped, shaded her eyes, and peered out over its length. It was early,—the summer-resorts would scarcely have had breakfast yet. But she spied one little spot on the smooth water, moving steadily and coming nearer. “Marche donc!” said Félice sharply, and the old horse broke into a trot.

The road ran down to the level of the lake. Approaching the shore, Félice knew she was also nearing the hotel. They passed the blackened site of a summer cottage, burnt several weeks before. In front stood an empty boat-house, half under the trees, half on the beach. This was the place she had had in mind. She turned the rig, drove back around the first bend in the road, tied the horse’s halter to a tree, and told Bernard to stay on guard till she came back. Then she walked on towards the hotel. She hoped she would not have to go up to it. If necessary, of course, she would,—saying she had come to speak to the hotel-keeper about asparagus, which Alfred’s folk did not grow. Then she would have to trust the hotel-keeper with a note, already written, asking Mrs. Van Ruysen to come and talk at the old boat-house. If Albert saw her talking to that woman, John might easily hear of it; and she did not want to excite even Albert’s curiosity by swearing him to silence.

She waited some time, within observing distance of the hotel, in the faint hope that the woman would come strolling out. But Félice kept an eye on the lake as well. That moving spot was fast drawing near. It was a boat, with a blue-shirted man at the oars. Félice started for the hotel. She saw a woman in light grey and blue descending the steps, passing down through the garden to the shore. Félice hurried, scrambled down to the beach, and crept along the water’s edge. The trees and shrubs were thick, and sheltered her from the hotel. At the garden fence, she saw Elsa Van Ruysen waiting on the beach, not five yards away. She called her name. The woman turned, saw her, and came quickly to the fence, smiling. Félice did not smile.

“Come quickly to the old boat-house up the road,—in front of a burnt cottage. It’s most important. Right now, before he gets here and sees you.” She pointed to the fast approaching boat.

The woman gave one glance at the boat, but did not hesitate. She went up beside the fence to the road and followed Félice. At the gaping landward end of the boat-house, Félice stopped till she came up, then led the way in, and turned upon her, a prophetess of wrath, inspired.

“You!” No epithets, if Félice could help herself,—but all the indignant epithets in the world were crammed into the “You.” The woman gasped, bewildered.

“You came to me. I believed every word you said. You had given up

everything bad—everything that had robbed a husband of his wife, a son of his mother, made your home a wreck—like that." She pointed to the black ruin of the cottage. "Worse than mere fire like that. The fire of hell it was you walked into, not caring though you splashed it over them too. And you told me you had escaped, got out of it all,—though it was too late to get them out of it. You had left it all behind. You were a good woman. And I believed it. I sympathized, though I could not understand. It seemed a miracle, and I believed."

The woman was leaning against the lintel, and gripping the fragment of door that hung from one hinge.

"Come farther in," Félice commanded, hearing wheels on the road.

The woman came in, a few steps, and paused. This fury might hurl her into the lake.

"That will do. He might row by and see you."

The terrified Elsa wished he would.

ATTACK AND DEFENCE

"You had done with men," the fury went on scornfully, "but not with—boys."

The woman tried to protest. Félice held up a warning hand. "You can see how little more than a boy he is. He can't see how old you are—but you know."

Attacked like this by anyone else, the victim would have drawn herself up and asked—"What business is it of yours?" But Félice was the guardian angel of her deserted son. To Félice she had gone with her penitent confession. Félice had given her absolution, with tears. Félice had authority to condemn if she returned to her guilt.

"I did nothing. I meant nothing. I told you the honest truth, Félice. I've gone perfectly straight from the time I learnt my lesson to this very moment."

"It's easy to see what you mean by going straight,—not going crooked enough to run into the ditch. You can play with a man, shine on him, flash all your wonderful feathers in the sun before him, the charms of your body and mind, your bewitching manners, and—yes, your tender heart; I refuse to say your soul. You can dazzle him, tie him to you, lead him on, this side that side, till you're nearly into the ditch,—then skip gracefully out of danger while he crashes into it before he can stop himself."

"Félice, I don't. I never do. If ever a man shows the least sign of—of caring too much, I freeze him quickly, though it hurts me badly if he's really nice. I can't help attracting people, somehow, Félice," she went on pitifully. "You wouldn't have me scratch and scar my face, or turn rough and stupid, or hide in a cellar."

"Better that than attract too much. . . . What you've done elsewhere, I have only your word for. What you've done here, I know. It's notorious. At the

hotel they say what a ‘conquest’ you have made. You know what that means, eh? And there he is back already, early morning as it is, and you looking out for him. It will be all over the country as a sure thing, if it isn’t stopped at once, and the only way is for you to go, go quick, without letting him see or hear from you again.”

“What? Run away like a thief in the night? Really, Félice—”

“No; like a witch in the day. You mustn’t wait till night. Anything might happen before then,—the débâcle,—the crash.”

A breathless pause. The women faced each other in silence. A squirrel hopped in from the grass, glanced at the motionless statues unafraid, and hopped out again.

From the side where she stood, Félice, and she alone, could see the blue-shirted oarsman on the lake, pulling gently to and fro, waiting.

For the first time, the woman showed signs of resistance. “It’s not reasonable of you,” she said. “It’s too much to ask.”

Félice sprang at her and seized her wrists. The poor woman cried out under the fierce grip of those sinewy little hands. Félice saw the oarsman stop suddenly, listening.

“You shall go!” she said. “If you won’t promise, I’ll hold you here till he goes. And before this day ends I shall tell him—what you are. All, all!”

“I promise,—let go! You’re so cruel, Félice.” She nursed her tender bruised flesh.

In the impulse of a moment the lion spirit fled. It was the real soft-hearted Félice who picked up her victim’s wrists again, so gently, and kissed them. “I’m very sorry, my dear,” she said. “I forgot my arms were strong with work, and not like yours.”

“You’re a dear good soul, Félice,—though I still think—. But I’ve given my promise. How can I keep it, with Monsieur Leroux out there wondering?”

BERNARD CAN TALK FOR THREE

“He won’t stay forever. You shall come home with me till he goes. I’ll drive you down as far as this at lunch time, in case the people think something has happened to you. He’ll be gone by then,—unless—did you make an appointment to meet him?”

“No, I wasn’t expecting him at all, when I saw him rowing up the lake.”

“Come, then.” Félice led her along the shaded road to the buggy. Bernard, cutting a primitive picture of the horse on a weather-grey stump, sprang up to loose the halter, but turned shy and stopped at sight of his mother’s companion. The lady’s smile sent shyness flying. He picked up the bunch of wild flowers he had tied together with a shepherd’s-purse stalk, and offered it to her, but half drew it back. “I made it for you, maman,” he said.

“Of course you did, Bernard, and it’s beautiful.” Félice pressed it to her

lips. “But here,—give it to the lady. She doesn’t have so many chances, living in the city.”

Neither woman had much to say as they rode, but little Bernard, squeezed in between them, never noticed that. He could talk for three. He had counted the fish that each of seven gulls had picked out of the lake, though he couldn’t put all the figures together, quite,—Denise would do that for him. A mouse had come out of the stump, and he had sat so still that the mouse climbed right on to his foot, but it tickled so he had to move. He had taken off his shoes and stockings, to paddle in the lake, but a car had come by and he was afraid to leave the horse,—old Marbot, who had lived half his long life dodging cars in the city and would eat the stuffing out of their cushions like hay! The stranger woman showed a charming interest in his chatter, and Félice herself was relieved,—she could not have kept up a conversation on indifferent matters with her captive.

DENISE EXPLODES THE BOMB

On the heights, at the break in the woods, the boy twisted his head around for a last look at the lake.

"I saw a man in a blue shirt while you were gone, maman. He was rowing first up the lake, then down the lake, till I couldn't keep count,—as if he had lost his way. And his hair was red like our copper kettle in the sun. And he had a blue shirt. Leroux had a blue shirt when he came up to our place with Aunt Louise, maman, Denise told me so. And Leroux has red hair like that, too. I wonder if it was really Leroux, Maman?"

"Maybe. And you've got a pink shirt you've never worn, my dear. I'm going to show it to you to-night and let you wear it to-morrow. You love pink, don't you? I don't think I saw many pink flowers to-day. Did you?"

Switched off easily from the dangerous subject of Leroux, the boy started telling of a white mouse with pink eyes he had seen in the village, and his talk rambled safely on from one beast to another, through a large part of the animal kingdom.

"So Félice has a sister with an eye on Leroux," said Elsa to herself, "and maybe thinking she had got him fast, if he let her bring him up here and show him off. That would account for the violence of the storm! I'm glad I gave in. If I dreamed of cutting out any woman, the last I'd want to hurt would be Félice's sister. I hope she's not utterly unfit for him—he's a man in a thousand; but it's almost too much to imagine another genius like Félice in one family."

With that, she pushed Leroux to the back of her mind; fine as the man might be, what was he to her, after all?

WHILE THE CHILDREN PLAY

At the barn, Félice kept Bernard with her till the horse was unharnessed. She had won her victory, though she had hardly hoped to, without having to hurl the bombshell of Leroux's identity; she would not let the secret out now, when there was no need at all. But if the child harked back to the subject, she might not be able to prevent the revelation.

"Come up to the house as soon as you've given Marbot his oats," she said, "and I'll give you a fine lunch to take with you to the village." She hurried away, installed her guest with an English book in an easy chair under the maple, and made haste with Bernard's sandwiches.

The boy obeyed orders, but it happened that Denise ran into the barn for a moment while he was pitching a fork of hay into Marbot's manger, and asked if he had seen anyone he knew, "down below."

“Only old Thomas Trudeau, going down with a load of hay, and a man in a boat,—I think it was our Leroux.”

“Oh, I wish he had come up with you, and brought some more of those chocolates.”

She ran back to her brood of youngsters, while Bernard went up to the house, wrapped his lunch in a lettuce leaf and an Agricultural Bulletin, and strode away to the village.

The lady in the chair, fatigued, sat with eyes half closed, the book unopened in her lap. She was not to be disturbed, Félice had said, and Denise kept the little ones at a distance, some making a miniature garden, the others building castles of mud. Presently the lady rose, came over to them, inspected their work. She displayed such sincere and intelligent appreciation of its importance that they accepted her at once as that rarest of discoveries in the child world, an entirely human grown-up. The difference of inches, which to the child’s instinct puts the common grown-up miles away in cloudland, they hardly perceived in her. She was transparently of the same race with themselves.

She went back to her seat, and their play-work for a time seemed dull. That soon passed off. Presently, however, when Elsa looked up in their direction and happened to catch a four-year-old eye, she smiled so invitingly that the whole flock rose and flew to her like chickens at the hen-wife’s cluck.

She told them fairy tales. Even the youngest boy listened keenly. Though he knew little English, he read much of the story in the apt expressions of her face. Denise whispered him the gist of vital phrases, and the story-teller soared boldly into French when she felt sure of her idioms. This meant effort, however, and she was soon fatigued.

“Won’t you tell us a story yourself, Denise, in French?” she said.

Denise searched earth and sky for inspiration, folded her little hands in her lap on the grass, and began:

“Once upon a time, far away down below, when all the uncles and aunts were no bigger than we are now, they were playing like us behind grandfather’s house, and mother was washing the clothes. All of a sudden, out of the woods came a strange little boy, about as big as you, Philippe. His mother had gone on a journey to fairyland, so an angel came down to look after him and brought him through the woods till he came to grandfather’s fence. Then of course the angel knew he would be all right, and went up again. The little boy came toddling into the yard, and mother left her tub and ran and picked him up. And what do you think she called him?”

The story was evidently a popular classic in the family, and at this point the teller was always expected to pause and give the chorus a chance. The lady in the chair had begun to nod, but the pause roused her, and she heard the

children chant in unison:

"Oh mon petit tête rouge!"

The lady gave no sign, but now she kept wide awake.

REVELATION BY FAIRY TALE

"Oh mon petit tête rouge," repeated Denise. "Oh my little red-head. And grandmother heard it, scrubbing the floor inside, and told mother to give the pretty little boy a doughnut, and he ate three of them, and they didn't make him sick a bit."

On and on went the story, an epic of youthful adventures on the farm and in the woods, with petit tête rouge always the hero, and mother as the guardian angel, and grandfather and grandmother the shadowy gods of Olympus in the background. The lady, with eyes shut, knew it well already, but to hear it told by a child, and herself transfigured by sheltering charity into a voyager to fairyland! Tears formed in her eyes.

Denise was going on. "And the little boy grew, and grew, and grew. And one day when Uncle Joseph called him 'petit tête rouge' mother said 'You mustn't call him that any more. It's not polite enough. You may call him Leroux, because that's polite and it means the same!' "

If Denise had looked up, she would have seen the lady's head fall back as if shot. The eyes opened, but stared blindly up through the tree to the sky. The mind, set whirling in chaos, could not on the instant accommodate itself to the blinding new light, but—Leroux was tête rouge, Leroux was her own deserted son.

Denise was still going on. "And he grew, and he grew, till his people took him away to the smoky city, and mother cried. And when he came back he wasn't little Leroux but middle-sized Leroux, and he drove the team and held the plow as well as the uncles did. And he grew and he grew, and went voyaging all over the world, and sent us the picture post-cards we've got nailed up on the wall, and every Christmas he sent us—?"

The chorus again,—"A big box of candies!"

"And we ate them—oom oom! And at last he came again, and he was Big Leroux, and he picked up mother as easy as mother picks up baby Christophe, and kissed her, and called her his little mother, because that's what she was when he didn't have a big one.

"And Bernard saw him on the lake to-day, and wanted to go down to the beach and shout to him, but he couldn't leave the silly horse,—or Leroux could have come up in the buggy, because he could have taken mother on his knee, and the city lady too, and Bernard, all three he could, and wouldn't have minded a bit, he's so strong."

The city lady had held herself down,—she would not hurt the teller by breaking away before the end of the story she had asked for. But now, with a forced word of thanks to Denise for the "beau conte," she hurried into the

house.

The tables were turned. She was the fury now, and furies do not beat about the bush. She came and stood over Félice,—quietly patching and piecing old knickers of Bernard's for Philippe. Félice sprang up, and fell back a step to meet her on equal terms.

"That child says Leroux is—my little tête-rouge, as you called him. Is it true? But of course it is; where could she get the story from, but you? My own son, and you never told me! You made me think he was a nobody,—just a man. A man you wanted for your sister, I suppose, though you didn't dare tell me that,—the boy gave you away there. I must run away from him, whipped, and never speak to him again. My own son! I was a terrible woman for attracting him and letting him attract me!"

Félice did not wince. "There are two kinds of attraction, madame."

Madame opened her lips, but said nothing. She saw. She turned pale, and trembled.

"Sit down, my dear." Not a cold "madame" now. Félice went on, compassionately. "You'll be worn out.

MOTHER AND SON MAY NOT MEET

You see now, don't you? You played with him, not with bad designs, I'm willing to believe, but you played with him as you would with—any fine man that you liked. You charmed him—who can tell how far? Not so far as I fear, I pray God. But the charms you made him feel were the charms of—a bewitching woman, with no suspicion of the awful barrier forbidding. You see the terrible danger you led him into?

"I spared you the pain of knowing that. I would not have spared you if you had persisted. And I hoped to spare him the knowledge too. I still hope to. Can't you imagine the shock, if you have excited in him the feelings of a man for such a woman as you—the awful shock when he discovers the truth? Of course you can! As for Louise—" Félice drew herself up scornfully—"if they both wanted each other, why not? I don't know what he feels for her, or what he felt before you stepped in between them. Whether she will have a word to say to him after seeing him fluttering around you, I have no idea. Do you think I would have acted differently, I, if any other girl or no other girl had been concerned? You know me better."

"Félice"—the woman was thoroughly softened by this time—"it is all true. But now I know it was a mother's love I felt for him, and nothing else, from the moment he picked me up in his arms. It was something I had never enjoyed before, never, the love of a mother for her man son. I revelled in it. If only I were sure, as I hope to God, that he felt nothing more—without knowing it—than a son should feel for a mother, I would go to him now in spite of everything."

“But you don’t know it, and you can’t. Besides, you told me yourself you must never meet your son, because of all the trouble it would make for others.”

“I would meet him, though, if I were sure—as I can’t be. He should be my son, if only for an hour,—one delicious hour. Oh, Félice, you with all your children around you, you can never imagine the misery—a thousand times worse, now I have seen what the happiness would be! No, I have made my bed and I must lie on it, but it will be harder than ever from this day,—hard and cold as iron.”

Félice was herself again, soft and warm. She petted the woman like a broken-hearted girl.

As soon as the children were settled at their dinner, the two women drove off together. There was no fire between them now, nor ice that follows fire. They talked freely of their son—the son who belonged to them both. Neither knew much of his doings, still less of what he planned to do, and both wanted to know. He was a reluctant letter-writer. He had not been up there for several years, Félice said, and on his flying visit the other day he had talked little except about—the old times.

“Did he say anything about his health?” his mother asked.

Félice smiled. “No. And that’s the last thing I would dream of. One look at him is enough.”

In the long interval, when she had not had the chance, one look at him might have been enough to horrify her. Those little signs of ill-health which he had not been able to conceal had given some apprehension even to Isobel, used as she was to a man making the most of his ailments. Among Félice’s friends, pride, with the helping spur of constant need, kept both men and women at work till they dropped, and skins well tanned by sun and wind concealed the march of inward trouble.

The distaste for disease, which produces in many men a curious love of talking about it, had the opposite effect on John. His physical decay he had desperately tried to cloak. Last Christmas, his annual letter to Félice and her children he had made unusually gay.

“Money matters,—does he never mention them?”

MOTHER TALKS OF MONEY

“I remember he did say something about losses, and I’m afraid they may be heavy; but he wouldn’t complain if he were poor, any more than he would boast of riches—though of course he knows that even if he were a millionaire we wouldn’t envy him.”

“You’d have no cause,” the rich woman said with decision.

“True,” said Félice. “I sometimes have fairy-tale dreams, and then it feels lovely to wander through life without having to work, but I’m sure I shouldn’t like it.”

"You would if you'd ever been poor,—on the rocks. Then, if you got money, you'd cling to it like a drowning man on any dirty board that floats his way. The sharpest kind of poverty is being poor the second time."

"John has never been poor, anyway,—and I hope he never will be," said Félice.

"Would you like to see him rich, in the fairy-tale way, wandering through life without having to work? Do you think he's the only man it wouldn't spoil?"

Félice wriggled in the dilemma, but shook herself free of its horns. "I'd like to see him rich," she said, "and I'd like to see him work. I believe he will, and work hard, once he gets started."

"You start him, then! There's no one else to, at present. And then, if you suddenly hear he's got rich, see if you can keep him hard at work, till some one else takes the job off your hands."

"He's got no long-lost uncles who might leave him a fortune, or anything of that sort, has he? So he can't very well get rich suddenly, can he?"

"That depends on—on me, Félice."

"What! You'd give him the money you got from that—other husband of yours?"

"Not a penny of it. My daughter will have it all, and more, for I've never spent the whole income from it."

Félice, thoroughly puzzled, but not wanting to seem inquisitive, remained silent. What mysterious means had this woman of suddenly enriching her son? Or was it only hallucination? Often before, when tempted to regard John's mother as simply wicked, she had tried to strengthen her more charitable view by the idea that the woman was slightly touched.

"I hate to keep anything secret from you, Félice,"—the mother answered her silence,—"but, believe me, for the present I must. Only, if John should happen to tell you, or give you an impression of some great change in his circumstances,—some of his property, say, turning out much more valuable than he had reckoned on,—well, Félice, as a wise woman, I hope you'll warn him against possible slips between the cup and the lip, and advise him to make very sure of his title to it."

This was both mysterious and alarming. Félice would never have dreamed of giving John such advice. But there could be no harm in doing as she was asked.

"A word from me," the incomprehensible Elsa continued, "could make John rich again. I want to say that word, and take the risk of the consequences. But it all depends on how he acts now, whether I see the risk too great. He is at loose ends. He may pick himself together and settle down so that his happiness will be secure, without the money. Then the money will be his. But he might,

if I spoke the word too soon, be led into—."

The woman was evidently getting more and more embarrassed. She could not tell Félice what she half feared, that if John became suddenly rich in his then rudderless state he might be cleverly steered into the port of unhappiness by a girl thinking more of his money than of himself. There was one girl, she was sure, who would never do that, but she was far away, and anything might happen to rudderless John on the spot.

THE COUSIN IN JOHN'S HOUSE

Louise Thoreau, there! While Leroux had been only the stranger, it had not mattered,—in fact, as Félice's sister it was all right that she should capture the young man. But now that Leroux was the son, Louise became the designing girl that the mother felt she must do everything to guard against. And Louise could certainly not hold a candle to the remarkable Isobel Galt.

Having come to this conclusion, the impulsive lady "backed" Isobel against Louise with the ardor of a gambler on the turf.

Now it was Félice's turn to catch a glimpse of the other woman's mind. But it was natural enough that the words "settling down so that his happiness would be secure" should conjure up the marriage question. She recalled a little fact that John had told Louise.

"Did you know," she asked point-blank, "that John had a cousin, a girl, living in his house?"

"Yes, curiously I did. Don't imagine I have been spying on John. We might almost have been in different worlds,—and, as you know, I always tried to feel glad it was so. But I happened to hear of a girl named Galt in my son-in-law's office,—a remarkably fine girl, he said, peculiarly intelligent; she was known to be living, she and a brother, in the home of a second cousin, a young man of the same name, whose father had been a wholesale grocer. There could be no mistake about it,—I knew who that cousin must be. That the girl was working hard for her living while her cousin's guest, might mean either that John was very poor, which I could hardly believe, or that she had a fine independent character. I said I should be interested to see such a girl, though I might not care to meet her,—putting on a rather lofty air that I certainly did not feel. Tom and Bess are used to my whims, and they invited the girl to a supper and dancing room where I could watch her without joining the party.

"She seemed all that Tom had said,—not in the least the kind of girl who would take advantage of John's hospitality. I haven't seen her since. I hope her brother is the same sort, but I don't know the first thing about him."

Félice would not ask any more questions about the remarkably fine girl,—or give the faintest sign of sisterly jealousy for Louise, especially as the jealousy was a fact. Félice did not at all like the remarkably fine girl in John's house, and inwardly prayed that he would fall in love with Louise before going

back there.

As Marbot trotted by the boat-house of painful memory, the mother shut her eyes. Félice, driving, took one glance,—and Marbot's pace just allowed her to catch a glimpse of a blue-shirted figure at the far end of the grey wooden shed. The man was sitting with his legs dangling over the water. He was leaning against a lintel, and his head, hanging forward on his chest, proclaimed him fast asleep.

"A good sign," thought Félice.

A little farther on, she stopped. Before alighting, Elsa gave Félice her address in New York. "Please let me know anything that happens, but don't write otherwise."

A conquered woman, far from appearing now rebellious or even cast down, put an arm around Félice's neck and kissed her an affectionate farewell. Stepping lightly to the ground, she walked calmly on to pack her trunk for parts unknown.

FÉLICE TAKES JOHN IN HAND

On the way home, Félice pulled up opposite the old boat-house. Many wheels had rolled by without disturbing the sleeper, but the wheels that stopped aroused him instantly. The sight of Félice framed by the entrance to the boat-house brought him hurrying out.

"Who'd have thought to meet my little mother here?" he exclaimed, climbing into the buggy.

"Nothing strange to see me on my own home road, surely, mon petit. But who'd have thought to meet you here, John? Are you alone, or waiting for some one?"

"Both, in a sort of a way. I came out alone, for a spin, and passing that hotel I thought I might see one of the visitors who rather interested me the other day."

"A clever boy, John, if you can see anyone with your eyes shut!"

He laughed uneasily. "I can't imagine how—. It was the glare of the sun on the water, I suppose, sent me off; sort of hypnotic effect."

"No doubt. But—don't be surprised, John, but was it a Mrs. Van Ruysen you thought you might see?"

"Yes, that's her name. How did you guess? Do you know her, Félice?"

"I have made her acquaintance, yes. She was taking the air. I gave her a lift, up to the farm, and now I've just taken her back to the hotel. But I can tell you, it's no use waiting to see her now. She has just got some news that has rather upset her. She has to leave at once, and meanwhile she said she wasn't going to see or speak to a soul. People do feel like that sometimes, John, and you have to respect their feelings."

John could not help showing a little disappointment, but only for a moment. "She evidently made an exception in your favor, Félice, and who could help it? Don't tell me two such women as you could ride in the same buggy together miles and miles without lots to say."

"Oh yes, we talked, but not all the time. And I could see before we parted that she was tired and ought to be let alone."

"Did she happen to mention that she had met me, Félice?"

"Why yes, she mentioned a Monsieur Leroux she had casually met. She seemed to take rather a motherly interest in you. Who could help that either, with a nice boy like you, John?"

"Motherly interest, indeed! You talk as if she was an old woman, Félice!"

"Oh, not very old,—not more than ten years older than I am,—and wonderfully well preserved, as they call it."

John was serious and silent. Félice knew she could not take this as consent. Even if he did not believe her, he would never tell her so.

"She lives a soft luxurious life among the smart set and—the swells, don't you call it? The rich folk. And she is rich herself."

"Then I'm sure she's not spoiled by her money. I got a very strong impression of that."

"Perhaps not. But I remember how she said she clung to her money like a drowning man to a stick, having once been poor. She would hate to lose it, as much as that."

John was a little surprised; it sounded so unlike anything she had revealed of herself to him. "Well," said he, if I were to come in for a pile and then lose it, I might feel just as desperate, and say so."

This opening, to push in his mother's mysterious advice, was too good to be lost. "If such a pile ever came in sight

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING

I wouldn't believe it, if I were you, John, to begin with. I'd be afraid it was a mirage, or a mistake or something. I'd punch it and poke it and examine it hard to see that it was real, and make sure it didn't belong to some one else. You remember young Haskins, that had the farm next to Sam Johnson's? He always thought his land ran down to the lake, and when the boom for lake-shore cottages and hotels began he thought he'd struck it rich and started offering lots for sale. Then Sam Johnson reminded him that old Haskins had sold that strip for a trifle years before, though the Haskinses were to have the run of it till it was wanted for building. I tell you, John, you can't be too careful."

"I'm not in the least likely to need the advice, wise little mother, but if I should, I promise to do exactly what my wise little mother says. I won't count my chickens even when they're hatched, till I've made sure the eggs came out of my own hen-house. . . . The fact is, Félice, the last thing I want to be bothered with, all this precious summer anyway, is money and business. And it looks as if all my old friends here were in a conspiracy to prevent me from spending a cent. I could just go around from farm to farm, living on the fat of the land, and only getting kicked out if I insulted them by offering to pay board."

"Of course, mon petit. And, for example, won't you come home to our place with me now, and spend the night? Jacques and Bernard have been looking for you every day—they were so bitterly sorry to miss you when you came with Louise."

"Sorry, Félice, but I swore to Joseph I'd be home and swing a new gate this afternoon, and you wouldn't have me break a promise. I've been going to do that job and a lot of others ever since I came, only there seem to have been so many distractions. Tell Jacques and Bernard I'll certainly be up in a few days."

So Félice had to let him pull off in his boat. She scorned to wait or look to be sure he safely passed the “distraction” of the hotel, but turned her back in resolute confidence. Marbot, ignoring the fact that he had dined already, surpassed himself on the home stretch. Félice gave him his head. With the reins loose in her hand, she fought her battles over again and rejoiced that she had been able to spare the beloved son a grievous wound.

Frankly, she did not share Elsa’s convenient belief that a woman could be stirred instinctively by the real “mother love” for a young man whom at the same time she believed to be a total stranger. And she could see that John found the “motherly interest” idea distasteful. However, his yielding to the woman’s charm had not yet gone to any fatal lengths. He would soon recover, if he could never quite forget.

WHAT ISOBEL SAW

Many boats and launches were out on the lake that day. Gongs, bells and bugles were calling the navigators in now, to feed. The launches started for home. The boats, having no propeller-fingers to snap at Father Time, were nearing home already. . . . One boat however seemed unaffected by the shoreward current. The girl in it pulled slowly but steadily northward, parallel with the beach.

She saw, from under her broad-brimmed dark green hat, a young man slowly pulling south. He also seemed unaffected by the lunchward trend, though he kept closer to the shore, and his head never swerved from that direction. If it had, he would have seen something worth seeing, though the tantalizing hat made the features underneath it rather vague. A tall fair girl, with a fine elastic swing of body and sweep of arms as she pulled the steady oar.

A radiant vision appeared at an open window. A woman, standing still, holding a flower to her lips. Still as a statue. The vision slowly moved the flower from her lips, and stretched it at arm’s length out of the window. The boats had passed each other now,—the girl could see the young man’s responsive gesture, and his face smiling back to the window.

There was no smile on the girl’s face as she quickened her stroke and bent all her force to the oars.

As the young man also increased his speed before he took his eyes off that window, the girl and her boat were too far away to be recognized as anything but—just a girl and a boat.

DAMSEL'S DISTRESS AND KNIGHT'S DILEMMA

John's energy on the farm was tremendous that afternoon. "Making up for lost time," he said, when Marie begged him not to work so hard. The next day it was the same, and he felt "as tired as an honest man," he boasted laughing to Joseph as they washed for supper outside the kitchen door.

Two women's voices floated out of the kitchen, as he finished splashing and Joseph passed him the towel. Who could Marie's visitor be? He knew the voice,—yes, of course, it was Louise. He felt just a little uneasy. He hadn't been over to the old folks' since he had taken Louise for that boat-ride. Well, she had known he had promised Albert a visit at the hotel.

He hoped that Louise—or anyone else, indeed—would not be too inquisitive about that visit. It might be as well to give them a light and humorous account of the picnic incident right away, to forestall the serious versions likely to filter through later by way of Albert.

At supper, however, no questions were asked, except about Albert himself and his ambitions. John found his audience keen enough to know all about that. Marie already had dreams of college as a gateway to greatness for toddling Jacques or Henri,—Johnnie being naturally reserved for the farm.

Louise, regarded by the family as an authority on matters educational, took her full share in the conversation, and when the talk drifted into other channels she continued to shine. John, hearty as usual to all, turned to her as often and as kindly as to any, but rather wished she would not shine so persistently. Her illumination was like that

LOUISE AND THE AMATEUR CARPENTER

of a carefully burnished metal surface, not a spontaneous radiation from rich reserves of light and fire within. This had not occurred to him during her previous displays, but since then he had basked in the sunshine of—the radiant woman. The contrast forced itself upon him.

He shrank from an evening's conversation with this girl—that was the joy he knew his hostess would prescribe for him while she kept the children out of the couple's way and Joseph finished the evening chores. Louise might be a little disappointed if he went back to work after supper. He was not vain enough to suspect that what he so shrank from was the very thing she had come over to seek.

He had a good midsummer excuse, always admitted without question in hard-working country circles. The days were so temptingly long, they would

be getting short so soon again, and there was so much to do on a farm, that a man could put on his overalls after supper and work till dark without being thought eccentric. He announced, as an imperative duty laid on him by the laws of the Medes and Persians, that he had to get that gate up before hitting the hay.

Louise professed amusement at his whimsicality, and admiration for his energy, when Marie's protest had been lightly turned aside. She helped Marie in the washing up, then sauntered to the scene of action. The small boys were there already, delighted because Leroux said they were real helpers,—but now their mother called them to help at something else till their bed-time.

Such intelligent remarks as Louise threw in between the noises of hammer and saw were easily borne, and the busy carpenter had only to throw out a word or a smile now and then in response. It was dark before he had done, and then of course he said he would see Louise home. Louise couldn't hear of such a thing, when he had been working so hard all day, and she was perfectly used to going through that trifle of woods by herself! But she did not press her objection when he pressed his courtesy, and they went off together.

The bush trail was narrow, and Indian file the only possible order of march. John led the way in confidence, but it was long since he had been through there by night, and he asked if he had not better turn back for a lantern. Oh no, Louise was not afraid, with such an escort; Paul Boisvert, who had come up with her by the road on his way home, had wanted to come again and fetch her back, but what use would that be? He didn't know that trail as she or Leroux did. Presently, in the pitch dark, even John found himself at a loss, and Louise took the lead, saying she knew every little twist and turn exactly. So John followed her in faith, while she passed cheerful remarks over her shoulder. They were both too much engrossed in keeping the invisible trail to talk of other things.

When the path straightened out and the twinkle of a home window first appeared at the far end of the dark vista, Louise stopped short, with a cry of alarm. Instantly John's mind flew back to a radiant figure knee-deep in the lake. He did not instantly pick up the victim, this time, but he asked with real concern if she had hurt herself. Oh no, but she had trod on something soft, a frog, or a snake. She was moving on again already as she spoke. John was much relieved. He could have carried the woodland nymph as easily as the lady of the lake, but not so willingly.

Unfortunately Louise had hurt herself slightly after all. Pulling up one foot to avoid the beast, she had nearly overbalanced, and twisted the other. She limped—he could not see this—the few remaining yards to the edge of the clearing, but then she confessed.

"I'll get on all right if you just let me lean on your arm," she said. Was it a

parody of another voice that echoed in his ears?

"You'd better let me carry you," he said.

LOUISE RIDES HOME

"Oh, I couldn't," she said. "You mustn't. I remember so clearly how you used to, when we thought you a sort of big brother and I was a baby, but I'm not a baby any more, my dear Leroux."

"Not much heavier, I guess," said John, and stooped to lift her. She said no more, but accommodated her shape gracefully to his movements. She knew instinctively, better than any baby, how a baby ought to let itself be held for its own greatest comfort. She would not be stiff-necked,—her head rested naturally on her bearer's shoulder. He held his chin well up to keep it far enough from her face.

The screaming absurdity at first drove every other feeling out of his mind. If any man on earth shrank from sensational actions and fought shy of dramatic situations, he was the man. He loathed theatricality like the devil, and vainly imagined he would rather flee from the stage as a coward than deliberately play the hero. Yet here he was, for the second time in one week, in a quiet humdrum country-side where his own friends thought "nothing ever happened"—carrying a disabled damsel in his arms. Both perfectly content to be carried, too, in spite of this one's "mustn't."

There was a difference, and it dawned upon him now. The lady of the lake —it was certainly not on account of her age, for all Félice's unpleasant remark about "motherly feelings," but she was just a stranger flitting into his orbit and out again, worse luck! Louise, on the contrary, was a distinctly marriageable girl, in a circle he was proud to call his own.

Marriage was her natural goal, as her mother had frankly said. She was only keeping Paul Boisvert at arm's length, a very short arm's length, because she was "so particular" and thought she might find a better. In fact, she might already have thought of John himself as possibly good enough. He shivered at the idea. He had only thought of her as a little sister. He almost wished she had started to kick instead of snuggling her head down like that,—then he could have left her respectfully in solitude till he could fetch her brother and father to carry her,—or she might have stuck to her original plan of leaning on his arm. The other woman had made the same suggestion and he had rejected it without a thought.

This time there was no hill to climb, but there was a barbed wire fence in the way, and he could not throw her over like a sack of potatoes, or make her crawl through, as they were all in the habit of doing. There was a gate somewhere, and he went along the fence till he found it. By the time they reached the house he realized that she was no baby in weight.

"Would you like me to put you down now?" he asked, in tones as kind as he could manage, at the door.

"Yes, please!" If only he had not been so thoughtful as to ask! She had pictured herself riding into the bosom of an admiring family in his tender arms.

He set her down, gently enough, and supported her with one hand while he opened the door with the other. Napoléon, seeing her evidently disabled, ran to help her in, and set her in a rocking chair.

"I do hope it won't give you much trouble," John said, standing behind her mother, who was already rubbing the foot with her favorite cure-all of an embrocation.

"I'm sure it won't," she answered sweetly. "It will be all right by morning, no doubt, though I don't know what would have happened if I had had to walk." She told how their dear good Leroux had averted that catastrophe, and her mother looked up at John with a grateful smile.

John only waited long enough to kiss madame, threw a kindly "goodnight" to the men and a last word of sympathy

to the sufferer, and hurried away home to Joseph's, saying he must be up bright and early in the morning.

He took the long way round by the road, this time, and his hurry soon faded away. In fact, when the light of Marie's lamp came in sight he sat down on a wayside rock to collect his thoughts. They did not want to be collected. Those two women, that fate had thrown into his arms, kept gliding around and about in his head. Neither of them had taken possession of his heart, though the one had smiled in at the window as she passed, and the other he suspected of trying the door-handle. As between the two—and he could not escape the comparison—why, there was all the difference between sunlight and lamplight. After the radiant lady of the lake, Louise—dear good girl as no doubt she was, and a credit to her family, of course, and all that—was insipid. He might never have thought her so, if the other had not blazed out on his path. There was no saying what might have happened, with him and Louise, in course of time—if that dazzling vision had not broken in on time's placid course. And the disturbing vision had only lasted a moment—could not have lasted long in any case—Félice had only shown him what he must soon have discovered for himself,—soon, yes, though perhaps too late. The one woman was impossible, and had made the other so.

His heart was empty. It had been empty all along, but never before had he found himself staring into every corner. Its bare emptiness was ugly, painful; it made him ache, with a twinge of hunger.

Only a twinge, not a craving, or he might have done something rash to satisfy it. A man who has fallen head over ears in love, who has thrown open his heart in surrender to a woman,—when she turns away, refusing to occupy it, such a man often rushes out in his hunger-madness and drags in any woman ready to fill the void, if she has the merest scrap of character for him to drape

with his over-excited imagination.

As John had not fallen in love, the eclipse of his radiant vision neither urged him to find attraction in the little orb sparkling diligently under his nose, nor drove him seeking through remoter heavens for another sun. It is true that deprivation of one woman's company, and repulsion from another's, naturally suggested a third—his cousin Isobel. Her radiance might not be dazzling, but it was all her own and came from deep inexhaustible wells of character. A very—what, now? A very satisfactory sort of person! You always knew where to find her,—close by,—within hail, anyway,—but never too close, never shoving herself under your nose. A supporting sort of person, who never fussed over you, never said "I'm helping you" or even looked as if she knew it. A good one to have around in time of trouble: yes, and any old time! Hadn't he told her so out right?

"Under the umbrella, that last day, yes,—when she'd have packed her grip and gone, if I hadn't gone myself. I believe I said I couldn't get on without her. Pretty strong, eh? Wonder she didn't rap my knuckles for exaggerating,—only knuckle-rapping's a sport she despises. It was true. The old house would be as cheerful to live in as a tomb, without her. Moving about the country, of course, it's different, especially where everybody treats you as one of the family. But—my word, I wouldn't mind if she was here right now, listening to all about Mrs. Van Ruysen and Mademoiselle Thoreau, and laughing at the funny bits and throwing in 'That was nice of her,' or 'That wasn't quite so nice, but maybe she only meant' and so on,—always trying so to be fair, particularly behind their backs, where they can't defend themselves."

At this point however John's own sense of fair play pulled him up. Till that night he had been quite content to

HIGH TIME TO BE OFF

think of Isobel as a valuable appurtenance, so to speak,—gracing his distant city house while he made holiday. It was only his loss of another woman's society that made him wish for Isobel's now. A second—or third—string to his bow! Like a poor relation summoned at the last moment to fill a vacant chair at a baronial dinner because a disappointing duchess couldn't come. An insult to such a girl as Isobel, and not to be dreamed of.

It was high time he set off on that long hike he had planned. Before he lifted Joseph's latch, John had firmly made up his mind. He would finish up a few farm jobs he had definitely promised, pay one more visit to Félice—with the biggest box of candy ever—then out on the open road, four swinging miles an hour.

Which way? It did not matter in the least. A toss of a coin? It was too dark to see heads or tails. Nobody beckoned him in any direction, and if anybody did he would go the other way. He was at nobody's beck. Who was the last

wayfarer he had seen? A girl rowing north. Then he would go south.

ADVENTURE OF THE FUGITIVE GIRL

THE UNSUCCESSFUL SPIDER

On the morning of Sam Johnson's hasty return to New York, shocked, tired and disgusted, craving any pleasure that might compensate for the endless worries of his dislocated life,—a lady called him by telephone. Her voice pleased and soothed him wonderfully. It was fuller and rounder than the wife's, deeper than the witch's, more clear-cut than either.

Would he be in at lunch time? He would. The lady thanked him; she would call at ten minutes past one, on business.

The lady rang off, and Sam was left to imagine the nature of her business. He had had a few lady customers in his book trade, but this did not sound like any of them.

Tranquilly descending to breakfast that morning, Isobel had received John's first letter from Canada. After reading it through, to the "your affectionate cousin," she felt less tranquil. Yet why? She could not exactly say.

The letter was not only shorter but more abrupt in every part than any he had sent her from the south. She missed something she had been used to. In the last one, for instance, she remembered,—she had not kept any of his letters,—scattered among humorous details of his walks and swims, his fishings and golfings, had been various light allusions to herself. He said she "would have enjoyed" this, "would have smiled" at that,—he wished she could have taken a certain trip he had just returned from.

If only she had seen him writing this letter and that one, she would have understood the difference at once. In the

A REQUEST IN A POSTSCRIPT

one, everything had encouraged him to spread himself; in the other, everything was cramping him. In the hotel, alone, with leisure, comfort, light,—a writing table in his room, where he could draw inspiration from the sea and sky and pour it out on the paper under his hand,—everything to make writing easy and pleasant. And then—his attic in Joseph's farm-house, an oil lamp throwing as much light in his eyes as on the paper, a corner of the one crowded table cleared by pushing back everything else as far as it would go, a hard steel pen and sedimentary ink borrowed from Marie—his own fountain pen being dry—and the hour, the end of a long outdoor day when nature clamored for sleep.

Isobel's imagination was healthily active, but it needed material to work on. It failed to conjure up these two contrasting pictures of John, as he had given no hint of either.

What more could the drowsy young man do, in that attic, than jerk out the barest chronicle of things done? As for telling of all the people met, in that

prolific region, nothing short of a directory would have done it. Joseph's tribe, of course, he mentioned, and the old folk, and the only two of their children left at home, a decidedly handsome young man and a rather interesting girl.

The "handsome young man" and especially the "rather interesting girl"—there was no doubt about them. Isobel might have formed a vivid portrait of that girl and half a dozen possible explanations of the interest she had aroused in the not-too-easily interested John, but breakfast time was short and her eye came on this postscript:—

> "Would you mind taking father's catalogue, except the page about the old Bible, which we may as well still keep separate for a while—to his bookseller, Samuel Johnson,—you'll find his address on a lot of bill-heads,—and ask him what the books might fetch? Don't think I'm broke, but there are a few little things I'd like to get fixed on the old place and the books may as well be used to pay for them."

What did it mean, his making an exception of the old Bible? That he had heard of the great Gutenberg sale and knew all about its value already? No, the rest of the letter did not sound like that. If he had known of that windfall of $100,000 or double, he would never be hesitating to fix a "few little things" on the farm.

"What have you got to do with all that?" she asked herself severely. "It's none of your business. All you're concerned with is his errand to the bookseller,—a mighty small thing to do for him, too."

The telephone list still showed a "Samuel Johnson, Bookseller," at the address on the bill-heads, but the telephone girl told her the number had been changed. The new address was close by. She would call that very day, at the lunch hour, and take her chance of getting time to feed.

Isobel was naturally surprised to find in Samuel Johnson her alternately paralyzed and galvanized seat-neighbor of the memorable sale. But what surprised her more was to find a bookseller in a room totally devoid of books and even of book-shelves. Had she made a mistake? Holding the door open behind her, she asked the man at the table if he was the same Mr. Johnson who used to have the store mentioned in the directory.

"Yes, lady, till I had the misfortune to lose it. I'm out of business now, just winding up a few details. You hadn't heard of the fire, then?"

"No. How dreadful! Did you lose everything?"

"Everything, except what happened to be in the safe, and that belonged mostly to my customers. Of course the stock was insured, but that doesn't make it any less sad." He would not have dreamed of saying that to a man. But

Isobel did not detect the hypocrisy.

"Yes, it must have been awful," she said, with a fellow-feeling. "One gets fond of one's home books, almost as if they were living friends. But I suppose most of yours at the store were just stock-in-trade, so you would be spared the worst of that pain,—unless there were any great rarities among them. Were there?"

"NOTHING EXTRA-ORDINARY!"

"Oh, nothing extraordinary."

"That's a blessing. Just think if—you know I saw you at the Gutenberg auction the other night, Mr. Johnson—just imagine such a wonderful book as *that* going up in smoke!"

She paused in alarm. The man looked as if he was going to have a fit. He passed it off as a fit of coughing,—"something had gone down the wrong way," he remarked apologetically when recovered.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "I know how it feels, like being choked. But what I came to see you about was getting some books valued for sale; and if you've given up business—"

"Oh, but I haven't lost my interest in books, I assure you. The tastes and habits of a lifetime, we can't get rid of them easily if we would. I've promised to put through a few commissions for some of my old customers, and I might do the same for you." He had no objection to a new customer as good to look at as Isobel,—she would have read that interpretation of his words in his face, if he had not kept his back to the window.

"It's a library you've had a good deal to do with already," she explained, "and though its owner is not an old customer, his father was. You remember old Mr. Galt and his books?"

It was well for him that the light shone in her eyes. She thought him curiously slow to speak, but did not see that the power of speech had been knocked out of him. . . .

Who was this woman-torturer, catching him unawares with her red-hot pincers, those names of terror, Gutenberg and Galt?

"Certainly I remember." He forced himself to say as much as that, but his voice had absolutely no expression, as if produced by a machine.

"Here is the list." She was laying it on the table, but he reached out quickly, took it from her hand, and began methodically turning over the pages.

"Please sit down!" She took a chair at the opposite side of the table. "May I ask who—that is, what exactly is your connection with this matter?" He spoke without looking up for an instant. His eyes were hopping from line to line; his nervous fingers always had the page ready to turn long before he came to the foot.

"I am Miss Galt,—John Galt's cousin,—and I am staying in his home while he is away. He wrote asking me to do this for him."

So this was John Galt's cousin—living in his house—plainly in his confidence! And here had he, Sam Johnson, been telling her that nothing of value had been lost in the fire, after telling John Galt himself that the one thing of supreme value had been burnt.

The whirlpool he had set in motion now threatened to engulf him—there seemed no escape—but he was not in it yet. Mercifully, though unaccountably, Galt had not told the girl of his terrible loss. She had not even heard of the fire. It was almost too much to hope she had never known of the Gutenberg's existence in her cousin's library, yet, if she had, she would surely have mentioned it. The book was not entered in the catalogue—maybe John had destroyed all reference to it when the book itself was destroyed, so that he should not have a reminder of his misfortune staring him always in the face.

Sam tried to make himself believe this—but no, it would not do. The girl had just told him she had gone to the

HOW MUCH DOES ISOBEL KNOW?

sale. Why, unless because she had a personal interest in the great book,—because she knew, or rather imagined, a copy of it lay safe and secret under the same roof that sheltered her?

Could it be that the girl was simply bluffing? Did she know everything? Had she come deliberately, on her own or by her cousin's suggestion, with a show of ignorance, to lure him into confession and disgrace?

A few weeks ago, he would have laughed at such an idea. This girl was so simple and unaffected in her speech and ways, transparently sincere and incapable of playing a deceiver's part. Now, knowing from his own bitter experience to what depths of dissimulation an honest man might plunge, he could suspect deceit behind the smile of an angel.

All the same, he felt sure Isobel's ignorance was real. She had known of the treasure in her cousin's possession, but not of its destruction. Perhaps the confidence between the two cousins was not so very complete after all. She might be just a "poor relation" enjoying cheap quarters while he had no use for his house, and paying with little services like this. She would probably be quitting before his return, so she might never learn how fatally Sam had contradicted himself. Could he not think of some way, some trick, to make sure she did quit,—to loosen any tie there might be between them,—if possible, to keep her from meeting or wanting to meet that dangerous cousin of hers?

All the time his brain was wrestling with these difficulties, his eye still moved mechanically from line to line, his fingers went on turning over the pages.

At the end of the last page, he realized that he had not read a word, to understand or remember, since the girl had shot her name at him. He turned

back to the point he had reached then, and skimmed through to the end, to make sure the old Bible had not been entered under some other letter than B.

"And this is all?" he asked, looking up at her now.

"Yes."

He pretended to look over the catalogue again, but he was looking at her, from under his brows,—she was skimming a newspaper on the table while he seemed occupied. . . . She was no "poor relation." Whatever she might have or lack in money, she was rich in physique and personality. He was quite taken with her. Yes, for more than one reason he hoped she would not have much more to do with her cousin John.

"Let me see." Sam drew his chair to the end of the table, so they could look over the catalogue together. "I'm afraid the value of the whole collection is not very high. Still, there are some fairly good things,—moderately good. Here for instance—" He put his finger on an entry here and there, guessing one book might fetch $50, another $65, a third possibly $150, as he remembered that Mr. Galt's was a good tall copy. Only two or three others could run as high as three figures. "But,"—looking at his watch,—"couldn't we kill two birds with one stone, and talk this over while we lunch? If you'll do me the honor of becoming my guest, Miss Galt?"

Why not? It would certainly save time. He took her to a rather expensive restaurant, but that was "all in the way of business, Miss Galt," as he said going in. He would no doubt charge a fee for his valuation, and get a commission on the sale of the books if it came to that.

It was awkward, though, going over a catalogue together from opposite sides of a table, a small table crowded with implements of feeding,—quite impossible when the food came on. At Sam's suggestion, Isobel agreed to leave the catalogue with him and come back for it next day, when he promised to have an approximate figure against every item.

SAM FEELS HIS WAY WITH ISOBEL

With business out of the way, he encouraged her to talk of personal things. A fine girl this, queenly was the word. He would like to see more of her. Reminded him agreeably of Fiona, only this one had a good deal more pep. . . . But he must feel his way carefully,—she looked the sort that flared up dangerously on slight provocation. If she was engaged to John, or in love with him, a tactless word about him might set her off like gunpowder.

Sam asked safe questions about her taste in reading, and in amusements. He expressed surprise when she told him how seldom she went out. It was too bad, he said in a fatherly way. Even he, old as he was,—a deprecatory smile begged her not to take this literally,—he found the benefit of "a little nonsense now and then."

"I should have thought your cousin would take you out often," he said,—

and then, as if recollecting himself,—"but I forgot how ill he has been."

"Oh, he's not ill now. So far as I can gather, he's perfectly well and strong. But anyway he couldn't very well take me out—supposing I wanted him to—when I'm working in New York and he's up in Canada."

This hopeful view of John's health was discouraging, but Isobel might be mistaken. "So far as I can gather," she had said. John had not been very confiding in his letters to her, then. And that calm "supposing I wanted him to." If she loved him, or even liked him very much, of course she would be delighted to go out with him. Sam knew little of the modern girl except by hearsay, but this he took to be elementary.

"He seems to be enjoying himself up there,"—Sam thought he might venture as far as this. "You didn't know, perhaps, that I was raised on a farm in Vermont, quite close to John Galt's, and own the place still? I was there only yesterday, and heard interesting accounts of the young man's visit. Curious, but he seems to go by another name up there."

Isobel nodded. "Yes, they used to call him Leroux as a child, and they like to keep it up."

Sam felt he had misfired that time. What else did the girl know of her cousin's early mothering?

"Naturally," Sam promptly agreed with her. "The French family he used to play with still think him one of themselves, and, from what I heard, he may really become one."

"I don't quite understand," said Isobel.

"Oh, there may be nothing in it, but one of them was talking as if he expected John Leroux as a brother-in-law."

Isobel smiled sweetly. "How romantic!" said she. Then she discovered that time was flying and she must fly with it. As they went out, Sam asked if she would care to brighten her existence and his by going to a harmless musical comedy that night,—he had been given tickets by a friend who couldn't use them. Sam lied in vain; Isobel thanked him, but did not care to go out that night. She was beyond inventing excuses.

"Some other evening soon, then?" She could not say, but she had better make no appointments, her future movements being uncertain. He had to take that as final, but he did not take it well. This fine girl, now she had dropped into his life he hated to let her drop out again. Fate had given him this chance, and he was painfully aware of his childish inability to create chances for himself as other men did. He held her hand too long, as they said goodbye. She looked up at him in surprise. He had not lost all self-control, but there was a new expression in his face that chilled her. She pulled her hand away and left him standing at the door.

ISOBEL HAS A GREAT POSSESSION

A merciful over-dose of work at the office that afternoon left her no time to think of anything else; but when she closed her desk she was conscious that the day had been a dismal one.

The evening was worse. She read John's letter again as she ate her dinner, leaving her book unopened. What was there in that letter, now, to worry her? She still missed those rosy asides, those petty allusions to herself, that she had grown used to. Rosy? Yes, they had brought a touch of color into her workaday life, though they had neither quickened her pulse nor deepened the rose of her cheeks. But she had no right to expect them all the time. She was altogether too censorious, too *exigeante*. Did she want John to be always thinking about her?

The answer leapt out. Yes, she did!

This was alarming. What did it mean? She was too scared to blush.

That "rather interesting girl" he had met. . . . Isobel shivered. The idea of her, the high-minded Isobel Galt, being jealous! Contemptible, absurd, to wish the girl had been less interesting, but in spite of herself she wished John had been less interested. This was no mere distinction without a difference. A girl might be very interesting and yet fail to interest a particular man. The same man might find a dull girl's inanity sparkling, dazzling,—if he loved her.

And this girl was evidently the one Johnson had talked of,—the sister of that young French farmer who expected John as a brother-in-law. Well, Johnson was a worm, and on a worm's evidence you would hardly hang a dog. If the young farmer had really said what the worm reported, his wish might have been father to his thought. Naturally, anyone would want John for a brother-in-law; and of course, if John had shown some attention to the only unmarried girl in that family of old friends, that was only natural too.

"He doesn't write like a man in love," Isobel concluded with satisfaction after a third reading. A valiant conclusion! Talk about a wish being father to the thought! What did she know about a man in love?

What did she know about a woman in love, for that matter? A quite irrelevant and unnecessary question, but it would be asked, and again the answer leapt out:

"Everything!" For she was in love herself—with John. She had made the most brilliant discovery in the history of the universe.

Love! Now that she had it, she did not care to know what it was,—to

define, to analyze it. It was a great something not to be pictured or described, but just to be enjoyed. It had the effect on her of glowing light and heat, of golden sunrise warming and illumining the world. Most of all, it was something to be nursed with the joy of a mother fondling her first-born.

Nursing it so, Isobel was too full of joy to fret, as some would, over its difficulties. The idea of leading him on, of going out of her way to capture him, was just as detestable as before, when the motive would have been not love but ease. The fortune lying in that old book had curiously shrunk in importance. It could tempt her neither to reveal her love nor to suppress it.

If its hope came true, her scamp of a brother would certainly believe she had taken his odious hint. But that, and the grim possibility of all hope being killed by that interesting girl in the north, she gently brushed aside for the time. Let what would come, she had her love to nurse.

Away back in a corner of her mind she knew there lay a more primitive, more combatant spirit, eager to win at any cost, and ready to tear limb from limb any interesting girl who might dispute the prize. But not just now, in the first flush of her love's benevolence! "The inexpressive he" so filled her mind that no "she" mattered.

IF A PARCEL COULD FEEL!

At this point Isobel became aware that she was sitting on the edge of her bed and pulling off her stockings. She had been totally oblivious of her surroundings for hours, conscious only of him and her spiritual possession of him, a kind of possession nothing could take away.

She stopped to think, stocking in hand. Had she seen everything ship-shape downstairs before coming up? In particular, had she looked into that library closet, as her careful custom was? Yes, of course,—she had actually stood on a chair and patted a certain precious parcel on the top shelf. She had long felt a peculiar responsibility for its safekeeping, but until now a glance from the floor level had satisfied her.

Patted it? Why, she had kissed it! She smiled at the memory. She, the self-possessed unsentimental Isobel, yielding to emotional impulse like that!

Then she ceased to smile, blushed scarlet, and hid her face in her hands. It was not just the parcel that had drawn a vague impersonal caress, it was the little red circle her lips had sought and kissed. By the magic of love and unconfessed desire, the circle had been transformed; it was a pair of red lips that hers had flown to meet.

"I'm a little fool," she said,—and then standing up and tossing her head, —"I wouldn't give up such folly for all the wisdom in Gutenberg's old Bible!"

Flinging care out of the window, she tucked herself in, and slipped from waking bliss to blissful slumber.

Coming down in the morning, she wished—so strongly, she almost

imagined she would find the beloved looking up from his old familiar seat with his old welcoming smile. . . .

Well, suppose she did, would she give her secret away? Not for a moment! She was perfectly sure of herself, whenever and wherever they next met. She would come in as usual, greet him as usual, eat facing him as usual, pour out his tea as usual, go off to work alone as usual,—everything as usual. She would encase herself, had already encased herself, in a complete outfit of usuality. Under that carefully buttoned-up disguise her heart might beat as rebelliously as it liked, it could not burst a button. If he went off again, as he had gone before, without saying the only word she now desired to hear from him, he might turn at the steps for a second goodbye and still see nothing but a sisterly farewell smile.

She would not call on that bookseller again, even for John's sake.

She telephoned him to mail the catalogue when he had marked it, then hung up the receiver and let him imagine whatever he pleased.

The day's work was not quite so easy and usual as she had expected. Most of the time, the glory of her new possession buoyed her up and spurred her energies. But every now and then came a twinge of anxiety, and always on account of that too interesting girl.

But for that girl, Isobel could have supported John's absence indefinitely, she assured herself. She could tranquilly picture him wandering up and down the continent from Hudson Bay to Mexico, from Labrador to the Pacific, shedding sunshine on everyone and accepting it impersonally from all,—but when he stopped to exchange sunbeams with a particular individual, of her own sex, that was a different story altogether. Again and again that day the impulse

ISOBEL WILL GO

seized her to dash off and rescue her prince from the enchantress. She suppressed the impulse easily, for it was absurd, but she could not suppress the anxiety prompting it.

If only John would write—no matter what! His next letter might be a formal announcement of his engagement,—she tormented herself by imagining its very words,—but anyway it would end the misery of this suspense. He would expect her to congratulate him—and the other girl. So she would, if she had to strangle all sincerity to do it.

No letter came, but now she had to write him one, for Johnson had sent back the catalogue with his valuation. She gave John the total, and such items as were more than trifling; avoided reference to the bookseller himself; and said she was glad to hear John had been so warmly welcomed. She would always be interested to hear of the incidents of his holiday among his old friends, or out on the road when he started his long hike. As she supposed he

must have got his dog by that time, she would send it her love—this was perfectly safe—and she ended, as usual, his affectionate cousin. Such a letter was a mere sheet of ice, she said to herself as she folded it; but if she had written what she felt it would have set the envelope on fire.

How long she could have waited, starving for news, Isobel made no attempt to foresee. “For ever if necessary,” she might have proudly answered if compelled to say. The idea of her starving for news of John she would have laughed at. She had immense reserves of patient will-power,—it had carried her triumphantly through long trials before now. But this was a new kind of trial. Patience under harrows that she could see as they went over her, she could suffer long; but patience in the dark, suffering in ignorance a something deadly which she might prevent if she could see it, that might be too much even for her powers.

The question of endurance was decided for her, swiftly and sharply, by fate —in the form of an insignificant youth whom she had never seen.

“Say, dearie,”—it was Lottie who spoke, between adjustments of her complexion and of her typewriter, the morning after Isobel had written to John, —“you remember my boy friend you took so much interest in?”

Isobel had heard of several boy friends of Lottie’s, but could not recall taking much interest in any. She shook her head sadly.

“You don’t say you’ve forgotten!” Lottie went on. “I told you what a smart boy he was, and how he didn’t seem to be appreciated in this burg, and thought of trying his luck out of town somewhere, as he was fed up and wanted a spell of country life for a change.”

“Oh yes, of course I remember,” said Isobel. “And I told you about Lake Memphremagog.”

“Sure,—though I couldn’t twist my tongue around it like that. Crazy names they do give places. Well, you said your cousin John Galt came from up there, and talked about a lot of summer resorts where young men took jobs when they weren’t too proud to work around hotels to put themselves through college and all that. My friend hadn’t got no use for colleges, but it sounded good to him and he guessed he’d try it. My word, dearie, would you believe it, he’s back already, and hunting any old job, east side, west side, top side, bottom side, so long as it’s right down here in old Manhattan and not halfway to the country like the Bronx or Brooklyn. He’s had all the country he wants for a lifetime. And as if it wasn’t enough to be planted out in the wilderness a thousand miles from everywhere, they treated him like dirt under their feet. Them folks may be just nothing but dirt themselves, home where they belong, but see ’em condescending in a little thirty-cent summer hotel, and they spread themselves like they own all creation, including their fellow-creatures.

“And who should come dropping out of the clouds into that

hole in the woods one day but that same tall handsome cousin of yours, dearie. Come to think, there's nothing surprising about that, as he came from there to begin with, and they say he's got a lot of property there too. I'd have known him right off,—it's more than once I've seen him walking back here with you after lunch,—but my friend Eddie wouldn't have known him from Adam, specially as he don't call himself Galt up there but some French name. It was the other waiter—think of my Eddie being a waiter, and only deputy-assistant-waiter at that!—that knew all about him and told Eddie. And there was one thing he didn't need telling, having eyes to see with,—that cousin of yours is a gay bird and knows how to have a good time in the country if nobody else does.

LOTTIE EDITS EDDIE'S NEWS

"First of all he picks up a smart French girl and totes her around boat-riding on the lake, and brings her into the hotel for tea etcetera. And then he drops the little French girl and hitches up with a swell dame fresh from New York. Mrs. Van What's-it or something, society leader, cream of the élite, and everything that nobody else can be, this side of heaven. Well, she's staying at that hotel, and she falls for that cousin of yours, hot and heavy, and they go boat-riding alone together, and if she gets her feet wet he takes off her shoes and stockings and carries her in his arms like a baby! 'She's his baby' right enough, though they do say she's old enough to be his mother,—but what's a little thing like that, nowadays?"

Isobel received all this as St. Sebastian received the thousand arrows of his martyrdom, in silence. Fortunately the office work had to be done, and Isobel, without comment on the story, cut Lottie short by starting her own machine.

How she got through the morning without a thousand blunders in her work, she could not have explained. She seemed to herself to be two separate Isobels, one taking down dictation and typing letters with the usual accuracy, the other threading the mazes of a private labyrinth in pursuit of a man, himself pursuing a zigzag succession of other women. She could not, without giving her secret away, ask Lottie to produce the egregious Eddie for cross-examination. She felt sure there was some truth in the story, and if she would know how much, she must go and find out for herself. Having no one to advise her, to inform, or to help, she must take the business into her own hands.

Young Bassett was dismayed when Miss Galt, bringing in a dozen highly improved letters for his signature, declared her intention of quitting at once. She was sorry to inconvenience him, she would come back if possible,—but urgent private business called her away.

The young man said she had done such exceptionally good work that he would have a cheque made out at once for two months' pay as bonus. She had more than earned it. Warming up as he came with her to his office door, and shaking hands—an honor he had never conferred on any other stenographer—

he added that he hardly knew how he was to get along without her.

Remembering who it was had said that to her last, Isobel smiled rather wanly, as she withdrew from the presence.

After a hurried lunch she took the precious brown paper parcel in a taxi to John's bank. She cashed her cheque, leaving her balance in reserve, and went home to pack and write John a letter of explanation.

As she would not for the world explain, or even tell him where she was going, all she could bring herself to say was this:

ISOBEL WILL SEE FOR HERSELF

"Dear John,—

I am following your example and going off on a trip by myself. I am leaving myself quite free, and can't say exactly how long I'll take or how far I'll get, but I'll send Olga an address presently in case anything has to be forwarded. The house is all right, and I hope Olga will see that it stays so. But I thought I'd better take that valuable old book to be put in the vault of your bank, and I hope you'll approve. I've been a little anxious about it for some time, even if no one else knew of its existence.

Goodbye,

Your affectionate cousin, Isobel."

"That's worse even than his own letter, for omissions and abruptness," she thought, "but if he's filling his time as Eddie says, he'll hardly notice. We shall see."

In the privacy of her own room she hastily packed her trunks, to be called for, and only when the taxi was at the door did she let the maids know that she was going. They were speechless, which she found convenient. She was going to the country for a while, she said as she opened the street door, suit-case in hand, and would send them her address as soon as she knew it. Meanwhile, she needn't warn them to take good care of the house and themselves.

"They'll probably think I'm mad, for want of any better explanation," she thought as she went down the steps, "and perhaps I am. I'm a deserter, anyway. What of it? There was nothing else to do."

Nothing else than what? She could not say even that. She was hurrying to the scene of action because she could not keep away from it, but had no idea what part, if any, she would take in the action when she got there. All she knew was that she must get there and see. What she would do then must obviously depend on what she saw.

A LADY HERMIT IN THE HILLS

The train, north-bound for Quebec, dropped Isobel soon after dawn in Newport, at the south end of the lake. Putting up at a small commercial-looking hotel, of a kind that summer visitors would shun, she went straight to bed for a nap, and the forenoon was half gone before she awoke. The dining-room was shut against her. From accounts she had read of other women in love, she ought to have had no appetite. She was relieved to find herself hungry, for she had a healthy girl's strong prejudice against starting out for an adventure of unknown length on an empty stomach. She fortified herself at a lunch counter, carried away two large sandwiches and a slab of chocolate, paid her bill at the hotel, and marched down to the lake shore with her suit-case.

She had the air of one who knew exactly what she meant to do, and asked no questions, though she had only a vague general knowledge of the district. She did not want anyone to remember a strange girl making inquiries thereabouts.

Bargaining for a boat would have been easy, but for the suit-case. This looked as if she might not return. A boy would have to go along with her and fetch the boat back. She had not the slightest intention of taking a witness, however.

"I'll hire your boat by the day," she said, laying the suit-case decisively on the stern seat. "When I've done with it, I'll see you get it back, with full pay."

The boatman, impressed by her promise-keeping face, let her have the boat without exacting more than the one day's hire. But he scratched his head and wondered, as she

THE GIRL IN THE BOAT

pulled out into the lake. He had known one of these eccentric women to hire a boat, paying in advance, just for the pleasure of drowning herself in the middle of the lake, when she could have waded or jumped in at almost any place along the shore and got just as dead for nothing, besides saving people the trouble of hunting for her body.

Isobel had planned no course for her voyage, yet she had a powerful presentiment that it must succeed. Succeed, that is, merely in discovering the facts. She recognized that success in saving John for herself from the little French girl or the society sorceress, though the object of her fervent hope, was highly problematical. John was neither a child nor a fool—except so far as all grown men were more or less of both. He was a free agent. If he did not want to be saved, she thought, she could not save him.

This was over-modesty in Isobel, the result of inexperience, for many a woman of far less tact has saved a man from other women in spite of himself.

But she was proud as well as modest, much too proud to dash in and try to carry off a man enslaved if he evidently loved his chains.

Knowing not even which side of the lake the fatal hotel was on, she chose the side with most houses among the greenery. Keeping fifty yards from the shore, she rowed slowly northward, looking often over her shoulder to see anything ahead. She had gone several miles, when she found herself nearing a house rather larger than the average,—almost certainly a hotel; half a dozen people were lounging on the veranda.

Suddenly, a little farther north, a boat shot out from the shore. By the time she was abreast of the hotel, the other boat was so too,—directly between her and the building. A young man was rowing, and though he had his face turned to the shore she knew him at once. It was John!

In the thrill of the moment, at her first sight of him since he had become her man of men, she would have cried out to him, in ecstasy, in spite of her proud resolution,—but as the boats changed positions she saw his face, and it froze the cry on her lips. He was rowing very slowly, his eyes were fixed on a figure at an open window.

It was the radiant lady,—and her radiance was reflected in John's face. She had a flower in her hand. She raised it to her mouth. She made a gesture, as if to fling it to him. The motion, in Isobel's eyes, could have but one meaning. It was the flower of the heart that a woman's lips flung to a man's, in such a gesture.

And the man? He caught it, with a smile. His right hand let the oar slip while he made the answering gesture. The understanding between them was complete. If that was true,—and Isobel had no magic gift to reveal the falsehood of appearances—then the gulf between John and herself was also complete. Whether it might ever be filled or bridged, she did not speculate. The future was absolutely blank to her. Her one consuming desire was to get away from the horror of the present, to leave behind and out of sight that wretched world. Not the great globe, but that little world she had been living in, the petty stage where the smooth domestic drama of her life had without warning burst in a storm of tragedy.

She bent to the oars, and rowed hard, up the middle of the lake to the north. The west shore grew steep and rugged, even mountainous. Far more inviting, to her, than the milder beauty of the east. Back among those hills an escaping woman sick of the town, sick even of her own human circle, might find exactly the retreat she sought, with new activities, a different life.

Floating over that village yonder were three flags,—not only the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes but the Tricolor of France. She remembered John telling of a hill parish back from the lake where every single inhabitant was French. This might be the way in to reach it.

MONSIEUR MAKES AN OFFER

Nothing could suit her mood better. Away back among these people she could be as much alone as in a hermitage, yet surrounded by a lively folk whose ways had more than a spice of novelty.

A little steamer came chugging around a bend, stopped to land a passenger at the village wharf, and went on with its voyage. Isobel pulled in to the same village.

The passenger was sitting on a little pile of freight, where he and it had been landed, and no one else was in sight. He was a florid round-faced gentleman in a black suit and hat. He took off his hat on seeing the lady about to land and advised her to row up to the beach rather than climb the ladder up the front of the wharf. He even walked down to the beach and pulled the boat up so she could step out dry-foot. Then, with a courtly bow, he presented her with a printed card bearing the name "Alphonse Poirier, Notaire Publique, Ste. Jeanne d'Arc."

"At your service, madame!"

Then, seeing that madame pondered over the card in her hand, he seized his opportunity. Madame was seeing the country, was it not so? Madame desired, as who did not, a little pied-à-terre, a footing on the earth, all of her own, for herself and her family doubtless, in that most beautiful region? But so many who felt that natural desire were deceived by the proprietors of land along the shore, into thinking they had all the beauty down there in their own pockets. True, they had the lake, but that was only one thing, and for that, merciful heavens, what a price they asked! For a poor narrow little lakeside lot they demanded the price of a gold mine. Now in altogether lovely Ste. Jeanne d'Arc, just an easy drive of three-four miles back into the hills, nothing could exceed the beauty of the scenery,—mountains and woods and crags and picturesque torrents and waterfalls,—and the land was cheap cheap!

"I have just come into possession, madame, of a perfectly charming little place, ideally situated on the summit of a hill, endowed with views as grand as they are exquisite in all directions. This I should esteem it a privilege to transfer to madame for a mere bagatelle,—for a song, as madame would say. Does madame naturally ask how? I will tell her. The owner made the mistake of buying it for a farm. Now, if madame has a fancy to raise sheep, or goats, and perhaps bees—for the farmers around grow much buckwheat, and where can you equal buckwheat honey?—good, very good,—madame can make a most respectable profit. But the poor man who tried to make a farm of it had to give up, and as he could not pay the $227.50 which I had been foolish enough to lend him I have had to take possession, and am this moment returned from completing the legal formalities.

"For that ridiculous sum, in cash, the property is madame's, including a

house—well, naturally madame would not expect a palace, but a nice little log house. And all ready for occupation, too, for I put in a modest equipment of our own furniture last week, when my wife suggested that we might use it ourselves as a summer cottage rather than leave it empty. Madame will be welcome to use everything until her own furniture arrives, or may rent the equipment at a most moderate figure."

Isobel, listening to all this, could hardly believe she was not dreaming. The idea of her, the city stenographer of yesterday, buying a derelict farm to-day with the serious prospect of turning shepherdess and bee-keeper to-morrow! The love-lorn refugee from civilization dropping comfortably into a ready-made summer cottage of her own, complete to the very sheets and pillow-slips, in scenery guaranteed perfect by a Notary Public of the Province of Quebec!

Laughable,—yes, but who was there to laugh at her?

NOTARY AS DEPUTY-PROVIDENCE

Incongruous, on the surface, but really the most fitting provision for her needs that she could imagine.

As she seemed to hesitate, Monsieur went on: "Madame does not care to buy what they call a pig in a poke, naturally. Now, if Madame will do me the honor to ride in my buggy, which I expect to arrive at any minute, we can see the property by daylight, and if madame desires to enter into immediate possession, what is to prevent?"

Was there no hotel at Ste. Jeanne d'Arc, Isobel asked, in case she decided against the purchase and still would like to stay the night? No, the notary regretted to say. It was a good village, but visitors were few, and there was not even a tavern. However, he knew Madame Poirier would be delighted to put up such a visitor, for the night.

Every obstacle that humdrum commonsense could suggest, in fact, was swept out of her way by this chance-encountered notary. He made no pretence at being disinterested, yet he had fallen from the skies at her need like a deputy-providence.

The buggy, a faded antique but drawn by a frisky little bay mare, rattled down to the wharf before Isobel could think of any valid objection to the journey. The driver was himself an attraction,—a small barefoot boy with a swarthy face almost invisible under a spreading grass hat. For the rest, he wore khaki knickers and a pink shirt, with shoes and stockings in reserve under the seat.

"Bernard's always on time," said the notary, looking at his watch. "I don't let him come till ten minutes after the steamer's gone, because the mare might be terrified. She's a bit—er—skittish is the word, is it not? And Bernard's arms might not be strong enough to hold her in, once she started to caper. But Bernard's a fine driver all the same, and knows as much about horses as I know about law,—is it not so, my Bernard?"

The boy grinned and wriggled in pleasure, but said nothing. He handed the reins to Monsieur, and subsided into the fraction of seat left between the two grown-ups.

There was no room for the width of his hat, but he was glad to have it off, because now by craning his neck he could look up at the strange lady's face. This he did again and again. At any other time she would have tried to draw him into the conversation,—rejecting absolutely the idea that children should be seen and not heard,—but just now she seemed to have no energy left. She sat and listened to the rivulet of talk that flowed from the driver's lips, glad that he did not start asking questions. In that three mile drive she learned more about the people living under the aegis of Joan of Arc than a census-taker would in a month.

The road wound up and up among the hills, till it reached a little hamlet in a valley rather wider than the rest. The notary pointed out his own house, larger than any other, and unique in its possession of a croquet lawn, but he did not stop there. He believed in striking while the iron was hot. The lady had shown no excessive warmth toward his plan, she might become positively cool if his bellows ceased to blow. He drove on through the village, and then, by a steep and tortuous trail through the woods, to the heavenly hill-top.

After all his high-pitched praise, Isobel expected to be disappointed; but she was not.

The little shack was surrounded by trees, mostly pine and spruce and tamarack, but not too thickly. The music of a mountain torrent rose from a hidden ravine, not a hundred yards from the house.

From the windows of this watch-tower on the height she could look out between the tree-trunks for many miles in almost every direction. Through one opening she even caught a glimpse of the lake, far below. She could imagine herself watching over Cousin John as he skimmed its surface,—though as he would be skimming it in another

ISOBEL WILL BUY

woman's company, basking blissfully in the rival's sunshine, and oblivious of the hill-top watcher's existence, this exercise of her imagination would bring little comfort.

"I am satisfied," she said to the notary, after a careful examination of the interior had revealed an astonishing absence of dirt. "If there had been a loaf of bread or a bag of oatmeal in the place, I'd have taken possession right now. As it is, I had better accept your kind invitation for the night."

Monsieur Poirier was transported. He sent Bernard hurrying off with the buggy to warn his wife of the supper guest to come, while he led the guest herself down to the village by a charming footpath through the woods.

There was no feigning about Madame Poirier's welcome to the unexpected visitor. She had more than once given her husband a piece of her mind for

weakly lending money on a worthless farm, and in her joyful surprise at seeing the money come back so soon she would have given the eccentric "Anglaise" free board for a week. Eccentric was the mildest word she silently applied to a woman, evidently refined and presumably rich, who would dump herself in that corner of the wilderness when she might have her pick of lake-shore lots where people were coming and going all the time. But over the supper table the wife echoed and improved upon the husband's eulogy on the hill-top life. The conjugal team-play was perfect.

After supper the notary insisted on translating the whole of the French document which was to make Isobel Galt the legal owner of a Canadian farm, though she could read French well enough, and would have signed an Aztec or Babylonian document without question, on Monsieur Poirier's say so.

The notary by this time trusted her as much as she trusted him, for he was quite willing to take $25 cash and the rest in the lady's cheque. He only made one request,—that she should not let anyone know he had been the first to suggest her purchase. It would be enough, would it not, if she simply said she had happened to hear of the property and learned that the notary had it for sale. He particularly wished not to get into Father Brault's bad books, and the reverend father had peculiar ideas,—indeed, would like to control all sales of land himself, doubtless with the most patriotic intentions. Isobel promised to tell no more than the notary desired, and said she looked forward to meeting Father Brault with much interest.

She was tired out by a long and exciting day. Yet in the morning, after nine hours of unbroken childlike sleep, she found herself so fresh and elastic that for a moment she wondered why she had fled. Then all she had heard and seen and suffered came back to her, and she had no regrets for what she had done.

At the village store, which was also the Post Office, she bought a week's supplies. Monsieur Poirier, little Bernard and herself carried the parcels in procession up the woodland path. The notary made sure there was a good pile of split firewood in the kitchen, and fetched in a couple of pails of water from a spring, while the boy picked up armfuls of dry kindling. As they were leaving she remembered the boat, and arranged with Monsieur Poirier to have it sent back where it belonged, with the money due for its hire. She had already sent a wire, by telephone from the notary's office, as there was no telegraph office in the settlement, asking Olga to send up her trunks.

Left alone at last, instead of throwing herself down to weep, or giving other conventional evidence of despair, she explored her twenty-five acres with the keen interest of a healthy youngster who had just got an alpine estate as a birthday present. To keep her suit-case light she had come away without books, except a ten-cent copy of "As You Like It," but she had brought a sketch block, and she set to

work with truly Isobeline energy to reproduce in watercolor the countless beauties of her retreat.

PATCHING THE BROKEN HEART

"If you cannot mend your broken heart," as Sir Edward said to Lady Jane, "you can patch it up so that no one can see the cracks."

ADVENTURE OF THE ELUSIVE TREASURE, CONTINUED

"Here's a man on horseback coming up the hill," cried little Denise. The children of Félice were playing tag by the roadside, but stopped at the news. Men were common, and so were horses, but a man on a horse's back was rarely seen in those parts.

"And it's our own Leroux!"

They trooped down to meet him, shouting in chorus, "Leroux, Leroux, our own Leroux!" Luckily the horse was a mild-mannered beast, well broken to children, cars, and all other scares of the road. "I'd pick some of you up," said John, "but you see how I'm loaded." They shouted again at that, for the sack he had slung over his shoulders had something square inside, and that meant a box, and what a box meant when carried by Leroux the infant in arms could have told you.

At the word of command from Denise, the youngsters fell in, half on one side of the horse, half on the other, the girl captain leading the way, and that was the gay procession Félice met as it marched into the farm-yard. John was in high spirits,—who could help it? What really human man could stay gloomy with a dozen young adorers dancing around him? Good man Loranger was just coming home over the hill, with Bernard, so now the family was complete. The supper, always a feast, was that day a high festival.

John, inspired by the atmosphere, thought little and said less of going away. He was off on a bit of a hike, for sure; but when they all cried out that he mustn't be gone

ELSA PLANS TO FOIL LOUISE

but a very little time, he was inclined to agree with them. He would be among strangers till he got back,—then he would realize the full warmth of a welcome from a man's own people.

When Félice asked after the old home folk, John gave an entirely cheerful account of them all, taking particular care not to speak slightingly or coldly of Louise. He was sorry for the girl; he might have been too censorious; he was afraid he had blamed her for some of the vexation caused by his own disappointment elsewhere.

He did not stay long, but long enough to give Félice an impression that her sister's chances were much improved, in fact that Louise might be considered within sight of her goal. That night she wrote Elsa Van Ruysen a letter giving the news of John, as she had promised, and conveying her impression in rather positive and exultant language. His mother could now make her mind easy, she was glad to say,—John had not been seriously wounded in spirit, and showed

healthy signs of turning in a direction where old friendship and practical equality in education would ensure him against disappointment.

Félice would have bitten the end off her pen rather than send that letter if she could have foreseen its effect on John's mother. Instead of comforting, it exasperated her. She already disliked Louise, partly from the glimpse she had got of her at the hotel, but chiefly from the very fact that the girl had evidently set herself to capture John.

The lady was not of the sour or curdled kind, to damn most fiercely the sins she had herself committed. For a woman to take the initiative and use her gifts of sex-craft to win a man she loved,—she still thought there was nothing wrong in that. But, without any ground she could have described, she was convinced that this particular girl wanted John not because she loved him, but because she thought him rich.

What scored most heavily against Louise, however, was the circumstance that John's mother had picked another girl to be his wife. Since she had first intrigued to get a sight of the cousin living in John's house, and had taken a liking to her, she had gradually come to think of the pair as marked out for each other by fate and a mother's will. That was before she had seen her son. Now that she had seen him, and felt a sharpened sense of responsibility for his future, she was doubly keen to have him marry his mother's choice. She backed Isobel, with all the more zeal because she dared not show her interest openly.

Reducing John for the time to comparative poverty seemed an unmotherly thing to do, but she could think of nothing else in her power likely to be effective with the ambitious Louise. She would do it without compunction, for as soon as it had had its effect she could undo it. On Isobel, it would have no effect—at any rate no bad effect. If that girl, with her spirited independence, inclined to keep the rich cousin at arm's length because of her contempt for fortune-hunting, the vanishment of the fortune might be the very thing to bring the pair together.

"I'm afraid I may be making a fool of myself," she admitted—to her pillow, the night she returned to her daughter's home—"and taking all this trouble and risk for nothing. Likely enough Louise may think John rich even after he's lost the Gutenberg. I was never cut out for a wire-puller,—thank heaven!"

That Louise had never even heard of Gutenberg, or of the fortune that John had indirectly received from the dead hand of that old printer, did not occur to the amateur wire-puller. That John himself, though aware of the old Bible in his father's collection, had not yet heard of the epoch-making sale and still thought of the treasure as worth perhaps a thousand dollars, would have struck her as impossible, if such a notion had fluttered into her mind.

IRREGULAR, BUT IMPERATIVE

In the morning she left the house on foot, as she often did, but instead of sauntering down the avenue or through the park as usual she turned into the first little store with a telephone box and shut herself in, laying a plentiful supply of nickels on the shelf beside her. She rang up John Galt's lawyers. The firm name was unchanged since the dismal days when she had received all his communications through them. When she asked for "any member of the firm who had known John Galt senior," however, she was told that the last of that generation had died a month before. Any of the present partners would do, then, she said. After some delay, first the switch-board girl and then a head clerk trying to make her tell her business in advance, her pertinacity was rewarded. A deep bass voice informed her that the head of the firm was speaking, and asked who she was.

"Never mind that, please. I want to send a message through you to John Galt's son, if you will kindly take it down."

More delay. Could she not write? No, she could not. The matter was urgent, and she knew the young man would not be pleased if they refused to take the message.

"I do not refuse, madam, but you must recognize that this is a rather irregular way of doing business. Surely, madam, you have no objection to giving your name?"

"When Mr. Galt hears the message he will know who sent it. Now, you have a copy of his grandfather's will there, in the original German. Professor Herzmann, I mean."

"Really, madam,—"

"Don't interrupt, please. I'm not asking a question, I'm just saying what's so. I want you to look at a clause in the professor's will dealing with books. You will see that he says, 'I bequeath to John Galt the books forming the contents of my library at the present time,'—'die gegenwärtige zeit,' isn't it, in the original? Anything else was bequeathed to his daughter, as residuary legatee. It will be enough if you call your client's attention to those words, and just remind him that the Gutenberg Bible in his keeping was not among the contents of the testator's library at the time in question, as the correspondence shows. He must therefore be ready to deliver it to the owner when called for. That may be very soon. You've got that? Pass it on then. No need to say again it's irregular. It's not so irregular as it would be for you to let a client sell what isn't his. Goodbye."

Blushing for shame, and calling herself more mean names than she had dreamed of applying to the poor girl she was plotting to outwit, the woman crept home like a criminal. But, finding she had come out without her key, she threw off her hang-dog air, picked up her spirits, and by the time the door was

opened she had her never-failing smile ready for the opener.

The mysterious message reached John Galt when he called for his mail at a village post office down in Vermont. The lawyer confirmed the statement of the anonymous voice that the book mentioned had not been actually in the testator's library at the date of the will, having been sent for safekeeping to the office of his legal adviser. The correspondence showed the professor as certainly intending that book to become his son-in-law's property like the rest, but no good intention could override the explicit direction of the will. The words "at the present time" were probably not the professor's at all, but mere legal padding thrown in by the German lawyer. Yet there they were, and the professor's signature at the end gave binding force to every atom of verbiage in the whole document. But for those superfluous and fatal words, any book normally inhabiting the library might have been held to be part of its contents, though for the time being it had been away on a visit.

"Much ado about nothing!" John thought, after reading all this. It gave him a little shock that his mother could do this thing,—the message could have come from no one else. It clouded over the new and pleasant picture of her which had lately taken shape in his mind. She was well off, according to Félice, yet she could grab at a book worth a thousand dollars or so,—after saying not a word of such a claim all those years. Well, she might have had losses, like himself, or—somehow, the richer people were, the more they wanted.

"YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED—!"

Now he came to the tail end of the letter:—

"You may have noticed that a copy of this book, apparently less valuable than yours, lately fetched the unprecedented price of $106,000 at auction.

"Now that the question has been raised, though in a highly irregular fashion, a claim by the testator's daughter would appear prima facie to be well-founded. We would point out, however, that by refusing, as we are justified in doing, to admit the claimant's rights unless fully proven in the courts, we might prevent her from taking any action. From private papers in this office we believe she contracted a second marriage giving her both ample means and a position of standing in society. She would probably not wish to endanger that position now by disclosing her long-concealed identity. She might therefore, on second thoughts, consider it safest, as well as most generous, to withdraw her claim altogether."

John stared at the paper in his hand. That old book, lying all these years on a high shelf in a brown paper parcel that he had never taken the trouble to open —discovered to be worth a fortune, and discovered at the same time not to be his at all! A good thing the first discovery had not come earlier, or the second might have been a blow. As it was—well, it was a bit galling to think he had been sleeping on an unsuspected hoard of gold nearly all his life, and as soon

as he was awake to its existence it was snatched from under him. But why worry?

A SCRAP OF PAPER

John had been wandering about side roads, country lanes, letting them lead him wherever they happened to go; main roads he avoided because of the cars and dust. A vaunted highway, such as covered the maps with thick black or red lines—he would as soon have walked a railroad track. The only foot passenger sure of his life on a high road nowadays was a determined suicide. And John had not only his own life to preserve, but Paddy's.

Yes, John had picked up the promised dog at last. Or, rather, the dog had picked up John. Paddy had been chasing a car, either from love or hatred of its occupants, till he sank in exhaustion. John, sitting on a roadside log and lighting his pipe, expected to see the brave Irish terrier get up and continue the chase, or else make off in the opposite direction for some home he had rashly deserted. Instead, the animal, seeing John, came slinking to his feet, apologetic and ingratiating. An Irish terrier can worm his way into the stoniest human heart, more irresistibly than half of the dog fraternity. John surrendered without firing a shot.

"Go home!" he shouted as a matter of form, to ease his conscience, but the dog's wriggling body and wagging tail and ingratiating grin said, as plainly as if he had spoken the immortal words: "Entreat me not to leave thee. Whither thou goest I will go, and thy people shall be my people!"

So John and Paddy, turning their backs on the car-infested ways of the up-to-date world, wandered to and fro among forgotten hamlets and retiring farms, till the line of their march on the map resembled the course of a distracted spider pursuing an intoxicated fly.

THE ANXIOUS TRAVELLER

The village where John had just got his mail, however, he had named in his postal instructions to Olga and Joseph before the responsibility for Paddy's happiness had been thrust upon him. It was on the high road to the north, a port of call for infinite cars. One of these stood before the hotel where John and Paddy were eating dinner at an open window.

To judge by the baskets and other paraphernalia, the party had been picnicking along the road; but some little defect had developed as they arrived at this village, and their stay promised to be longer than usual. The lady, a smooth-faced, pink-and-white blonde, was tired, and proposed to go into the hotel for lunch and rest. Her husband, a dark, thin, anxious man, was unwilling to disagree, but evidently still more unwilling to leave the car. The very picture of hesitation, he glanced now at the door by which the lady had disappeared, now up the street towards the garage where the chauffeur was seeking help,

and now into the depths of the car.

Presently the chauffeur came back, and said he would have to take the car to the garage. His employer was much disturbed. He dived into the car and emerged with what appeared to be an armful of traveling rugs; but, in addition to a loose rug or two, there was a large and heavy oblong strapped-up bundle —externally a rug, but internally hard and angular. Throwing the loose rugs over this curious piece of baggage, he entered the dining-room and stowed them under the table where his wife was already seated.

John, having just finished his coffee, went out to the veranda for a smoke. There was no hurry. In fact, hurry would be a crime on a hot day like that, when neither he nor Paddy wanted to get anywhere in particular. Paddy made dashes into the street when other dogs came straying by, but as none of these either fled in provocative cowardice or showed a fierce desire to fight he finally yielded to the spirit of afternoon and lay down to snooze under his master's chair.

John had skimmed through the only available newspaper, and had taken out his lawyer's letter for a third or fourth reading, when the strangers' car drove up, repaired and ready for the road. The anxious man was more than ready. He hurried out with his rugs and bundle and stowed them carefully in the car.

His wife, however, paused on the steps, looking nervously up at the sky. The sun had disappeared. The clouds were black, and fitful blasts of wind were blowing up wild whirls of dust, of chips, of paper, of anything they could seize. One gust swept the envelope of John's letter from the veranda, where it had fallen, played with it on the road, then blew it high in air, and finally dropped it into the car.

The tall man, after begging his wife to hurry, turned back to look into the car, as he had done several times already,—and saw the scrap of white paper lying on his precious bundle. He picked it up, and read the name on the envelope. He could not have turned paler than he was, but he gasped like a fish thrown out of water. He crumpled up the paper and threw it across the road, ran up the steps, caught his wife by the arm, and almost dragged her to the car. She looked with growing apprehension at the black sky. The big storm drops began to fall, her sharp ear caught the distant roll of coming thunder, but she took her seat without a protest. The man jumped in after her and slammed the door. They drove into the teeth of the storm.

It was only when John missed the envelope that he identified it with the scrap of paper blown into the car. He ran across the road,—the rain was coming down in earnest now,—rescued the crumpled scrap from a ditch, and saw that he had guessed aright.

"But what I should like to know," he said to Paddy

JOHN GIVES UP THE RIDDLE

when they were safely under cover, "is why a harmless little name of two syllables like mine should scare a man stiff. You'd think he was a murderer and I was the avenger of blood on his trail.

"Do I look like a Man of Mystery, Pad? I don't feel like one. A desperately commonplace fellow, I should call myself. But I no sooner drop in to a plain ordinary village than mysteries come buzzing about me like mosquitoes. An innocent old postmaster hands me out a demand from a mother I've not seen for twenty years, for a hundred thousand dollars I didn't know I had, and the very envelope it came in is enough to send a perfect stranger crazy when it happens to blow into his car.

"What was that we were saying about adventures, Paddy? Only that was before you joined the family, old man. It was Isobel started it, so far as I remember, talking of adventures in those old books at home. What d'you think she'd say if she knew the oldest of the lot had been stirring things up like this? Wouldn't she be surprised? She might guess the riddle, but I give it up!"

But the storm was over. The sun came out and beckoned to the road. It shone so strongly in the wanderer's eyes, however, as he fared on to the south, that after half a mile he turned his back upon it. "One way's as good as another, Paddy," he said. . . . "No," he added, finding his pace quickened as he tramped along to the north. "This is the best way by a long shot. Home, Paddy, home."

To be sure, there was no hurry. He still sought devious byways, but always tending to the true magnetic north. Deliciously free, he might spend weeks yet wandering with his dog, exploring hills and valleys numberless, but near enough home to wind up at his own door whenever he wanted to.

And after that? He put the future aside again and again, but somehow it would not stay put. The dark days when he had no future were gone. Now that he had one, how should he spend it, and where? As for turning out Joseph and working the old farm himself, or building a new house on the hill-top behind, —no, emphatically no. But the hill-top idea and the farming idea both appealed to him strongly. . . . Well, he could surely hunt up another farm, with a hill-top, and raise sheep. It would fortunately cost much less than a farm in the lowlands.

That was an important point, now. The question of money was not so simple as it had been, when there was no future to provide for. He could get something for the New York house,—not very much, having mortgaged it heavily. Besides, selling the house meant turning his cousin out. No, he would manage to keep it on till—till she got married or something. He screwed up his lips,—that idea of Isobel getting married gave him a bad taste in the mouth. But why shouldn't she? It was only natural. . . .

“Come on, Paddy; we won’t think of unpleasant things, with home right ahead. Look over yonder. See that mountain? No, a dog’s eyes can’t see far. But you can take my word for it,—that’s the Owl’s Head. That’s the old owl that watches over our farm from the other side of the lake, and shakes his head when a small boy misbehaves, and nods when he’s pleased,—so little mother Félice used to tell me!”

In this exhilarated spirit he crossed the frontier. The road he trod was unfamiliar, but he couldn’t be far from home now. From some high point he might even be able to see the lake. He struck into a lane that looked as if it might lead somewhere. “And if it don’t, Paddy old boy, we’ll do as we’ve often done before,—get nowhere and come back again.”

The lane was shady and tempting; too steep and sandy for mud. Wet earth and freshened leaves exhaled delicious scent. The cart tracks grew faint and vanished. The

lane did indeed lead nowhere. But this was a most agreeable sort of nowhere.

WANTED, THE IDEAL ROAD-MATE

Climbing a rock high enough to overtop the shrubs and dwarfish trees around, he seemed to have the world at his feet: a world of wood and farm-land only, blue smoke curling up from hidden chimneys here and there, and over yonder a heavenly gleam of sunshine on the lake. For a while he simply sat and bathed in the beauty of the world.

Instinctively, however, he wanted to share his delight. A few men can enjoy an exquisite scene as keenly alone as in the most congenial company. They often lead happy lives. Almost independent of sympathy, they prefer to suffer as well as to enjoy in solitude and silence. John had been much alone, without boring himself; but if a companion offered he would be thankful and not ask too anxiously for a certificate of the man’s congeniality. Just then, of course, he was not alone; but the very fact that Paddy was a charming comrade awakened his desire for a comradeship more complete.

How Isobel would have revelled in that vagrant holiday and all the unexpected pleasures of unbeaten tracks! For all her system and regularity, which made her so delightfully dependable, she had a good deal of the adventurous gypsy spirit. She would be the ideal road-mate. How he would enjoy talking over his new farm scheme with her,—and how she would enjoy hunting for a hill-top farm with him!

Hers was the first name that occurred to him. Others only came up to brighten her image by the light of contrast. . . . Think of Louise on a hike! He could not. Farm girl as she was, she despised walking. The idea of tramping miles and miles for the pleasure of the thing she regarded as an eccentricity which in any other than John would be madness. For getting over a road she was more or less content with a buggy; but for pleasure on the road, give her

the most luxurious auto his money could buy. . . . The wonderful Mrs. Van Ruysen would make the dullest road interesting, but somehow he could not imagine her tramping along happily in brogues, or indeed covering any appreciable distance except in a chariot of fire, celestial or terrestrial.

Isobel, on the other hand—. By the way, it was Isobel also he had instinctively thought of when confronted by that lawyer's letter. She would have been surprised, of course, but she always had something sensible to suggest, when she knew advice would really be welcomed. What would she advise now? To let sleeping dogs lie? To wait for the blow to fall? He thought not. And on the spot he made up his mind to do what he felt sure she would have advised. He would tell his lawyers, if the mystery woman rang them up again, to insist on handing over the miserable hundred thousand dollar book immediately to the owner, if she would privately give proof of her identity and haul the thing away.

John put his hand in his pocket, to read the lawyer's message again, and pulled out with it a circular received at the same time. Another letter had slipped accidentally into the open envelope of the circular. It was Isobel's farewell.

JOHN IN LOVE

John whistled as he read. It was only the semi-whistle addressed to oneself, and represented in print as "whew,"—not the intelligent call of man to dog,—but Paddy, charitably supposing John's whistling apparatus out of tune, gave up the futile luxury of barking at a squirrel he had treed and came flying to the rescue. John gratefully caressed him with one hand while he held the devastating note in the other.

"What does it all mean, Pad? Don't tell me she just wanted a holiday all of a sudden and took it. Something's happened, something deadly, or she'd never run away clean out of my life this way, without a how or a why. It must be something I've done, I suppose, but I'd give my eyes to know what. Or has she —no, Paddy, don't tell me she's fallen in love with somebody, and doesn't like to say so! There can't be many men of her acquaintance, if there's one, that I can imagine her willing to marry. There's certainly none that deserves such luck,—but if men only got what they deserved all the first-class women like Isobel would die old maids. . . ."

"Like Isobel," did he say? Why, there was no woman like Isobel.

When an ordinary young man's opinion of a young woman has climbed to that degree of temperature, it may be said to have reached the boiling point, and in about one-fifth of a second you may expect to see it boil over. John's emotional speed, however, was not so high. The dear girl had unconsciously twined her roots into his soul. It was the simple truth he had spoken under that blessed umbrella,—he would not know how to get along without her. He felt this still more keenly now, when he had lost her. And yet, if Paddy had had the voice, as he surely—being an Irish terrier—had the emotional insight, to declare, "You are in love with her," John would have slowly and sadly shaken his head. He was very fond of his cousin, but he did not recognize the symptoms commonly said to be the proofs of love.

"What is commonly said," wise Paddy would have answered, "is quite commonly untrue. Some people's love blazes up like a rocket the instant you apply the match. That's the way mine acts, for I'm Irish. But you're not. I don't know where your oversea ancestors came from, but judging by the steady way you are satisfied to jog along these ancient trails I guess they were mostly English or Scotch. You may not blaze up in a hurry, you may never get into a fever about it, but if you're not head over ears in love with that girl, I'm a poodle!"

Absent-mindedly patting his silent adviser's head, John gradually reached the same conclusion. His heart was no longer empty, it was brimming over

with love of Isobel. To win her he would go through fire and water. But first he must find out where she was, and she had been careful to give him no clue.

Olga, now—she must have Isobel's address, but had doubtless been instructed to keep it to herself and only use it for the forwarding of mail.

Ah, there was the dear and ever-helpful Félice. He would get her to write Isobel and discover her hiding-place. Then he would fly to the attack. He could not confess his love, to a third party. But he would not need to. Félice would not be too inquisitive. She would consider it perfectly natural that he should want to keep track of the cousin who had lived so long in his house and might have gone off in a fit of mental aberration?

TO DARE OR NOT TO DARE

But when he pictured himself at that stage dashing in to capture his princess, a wave of cowardice swept over him. How dare he demand her surrender to him, of all men, she being the queen of women, as gifted as she was gracious, a doer of deeds,—and he an undistinguished do-nothing? How dare he?

A few years back he would have dared anything. Looking back to his college days, he saw himself taking people's breath away by unexpected bursts of daring. Then a chance attack of violent pain brought him under the spell of a doctor who persuaded him there was something very serious the matter. Perhaps there was. At all events, so new was pain in his experience that he gave in. He had to "take care of himself." A few months of that, and he had come near kicking over the traces. His father had died,—if he himself did, there was no one to worry or suffer on his account. He might as well just have a good time and pass out.

The coming of the cousins had changed all that. Jack's company alone would have helped him to carry out his reckless resolve. Isobel, as a newcomer and his guest, had rarely ventured to advise, and only as time went on brought a gentle and motherly influence to bear upon him. He had still looked calmly forward to an early end, but by degrees had lost the feeling of "the sooner the better." Life, even inactive life, was no longer intolerable.

And now, with his love aflame and her love to live for, the intolerable thing was death. With the fear of that removed, his first impulse was to dash in and storm the citadel, but under the wave of cowardice he saw no hope of success. Not only was he unworthy of her, but if he pressed her she would have to give her reason for refusal, and that might hurt worse than the tacit refusal in her letter,—for the letter, if it did not mean she had cut herself right out of his life, meant nothing.

He began now to puzzle over that unknown reason of hers. The only explanation he could conceive was the one he hated above all to admit,—that she had been captured by somebody else.

Now John, though an ordinary man—as he often reminded himself—in

most respects, had one extraordinary gift, instinctive and unselfish consideration for others. A womanly gift? Well, more women have it than men.

It was touch and go, therefore, whether he would not draw off the field without striking a blow for himself, as soon as he was sure she had made another choice. Who was he, to interfere with her liberty and give her pain because her choice did not give him pleasure?

Instead of yielding to this meekly considerate spirit, however, he found the idea of a possible rival had the opposite effect. It was just the sharp stimulus his flagging courage needed. If another man had wormed his way into Isobel's heart, he ought to be driven out of it in short order, for he could not have been admitted on his merits. In fact, Isobel must have been deceived; and John even convinced himself that she could not truly love the fellow whether she thought she did or not. That he, John himself, had just admitted the insufficiency of his own merits, and the extreme unlikeliness of her truly loving him without a miracle, had now no force whatever. His fighting blood was up. He would go in and win or perish in the attempt.

A glance at the envelopes before he stuffed them back in his pocket brought him suddenly down from that high pitch of exaltation. The postmarks, that he had not noticed before, showed that both letters had been awaiting him at the village post office for nearly a week.

"If we're not too late, Paddy," he sighed. Anything might happen in a week. Isobel might be married by this time, to the miserable worm who had wriggled into her too trustful heart. He wouldn't lose another instant, anyway.

As he strode down the trail to the village, her letter again open in his hand, he noticed at last what she said about the Gutenberg Bible. His eyes had seen the words, but his brain had passed them over,—it was only her going away that mattered anything.

JOHN AS ISOBEL'S MIND-READER

"I wonder," he thought, "if that book and all the money it meant had anything to do with her going. Some girls, I reckon, would have stayed on that account if they'd had a dozen good reasons for going. If I'd been ugly as sin, that hundred thousand would make them forget it. Handsome is as handsome pays, eh, Paddy? Sounds a bit cynical, and maybe I'm wrong about the way they'd act,—an old bachelor can't pretend to know all about woman, like our wise farmer Joseph. But I do know how one girl would act. If she just inclined to me a little in a mild cousinly way, thinking me poor, then discovering me to be rich would stiffen up that independent spirit of hers, and she'd be as cold and distant as the north pole rather than even seem to care for the money. If she loved me, she'd be extra careful not to show it, but she'd take me when I asked her, rich or poor; it wouldn't make any difference whether the hundred

thousand were dollars or dirt.

"And it turns out they're neither. They are nothing. And I'm back where I was."

No, not where he was when that fascinating cousin Jack came along and launched him on Spending River. And perhaps this was just as well, for what he had then possessed might still have made him look rich to Isobel and held her aloof. Unless—? Unless she loved him very much, of course, and he had no reason whatever to think she did. It all came back to that, whichever way he looked at it.

He was not exactly poor, or he would not dream of asking her to share his poverty. By selling the old house, mortgaged as it was, he would still have a nest egg of capital. Now, too, he was able to work,—and would, like a team of mules, for her sake. It was just as well the rich old book had got out of the way, before he knew its fabulous value. It might have tempted him to be lazy again.

Lazy? Yes, and worse, maybe. What a temptation to be lying around the house! And he had never known it.

Temptation? The story of the old book came back to him now, as he had heard it in scraps from his father. The thing had been leading people into temptation and getting them into trouble from the year One, or anyway from the year 1456, when its last page came off the press. He could just imagine old Gutenberg swollen with pride as he put the first set of pages together and slapped himself on the chest and bragged—"I have printed a book! The very first book ever!" At least, he would have done all that and more, if he'd been in business here and now. He'd have hired a band and carried the First of Books through the streets in procession.

Then came that lurid romance of great-grandmother, chased from the dead tyrant's palace, with this book alone of all his gifts to her; the mysterious persecution it had seemed to bring upon her,—upon her son, too, John's grandfather, murdered for its sake. And now her grand-daughter, John's own mother, after rising above temptations once irresistible to her, had fallen at last under its fearful attraction. What fatalities its fascination had brought about in the three and a half centuries before its recorded history opened, and what new tricks of fate it was now starting, only itself could say.

If the thing had not been a book, especially a Bible, of all books,—if it had only been a mineral gem with its baleful glittering eye, all this would have seemed not so unnatural. The Ruby of Fate, for instance, red as a siren's lips and cold as her heart, was said to have drawn crime as steel draws lightning, on every one that held it, from generation to generation. John believed in no such nonsense, but he saw how easily credible it would appear to the primitive untrained intellect, in every age.

“IF THAT OLD BOOK COULD SPEAK!”

But to think of a Bible, fount of all virtue and inspiration of the saints, playing the siren part of a satanic stone,—this was grotesque, impossible. That all these crimes could be committed for a Bible, even for the rarest specimen, long before the competition of collectors had sent its price sky-high, —behind all this John suspected mystery, but what that mystery might be defied his wildest guessing.

“If only those old books could talk,” as Isobel had said, “what adventures they would have to tell.” Could any of them astonish the world with a more unbelievable tale than this Father and Pioneer of Print?

If the book had found voice at that moment, it might have been excused for an indignant protest. “Those violent and sanguinary deeds,” it would say, “can’t be more mysterious to you than my present situation is to me. I can’t even tell you what that situation is! Where am I? All I know is that I am shut up in the Egyptian darkness of a brown paper parcel. You think I control the fate of others! I cannot even control my own. Tossed blindfold here and there, the experience of the last few weeks would surely have turned my ink white, if my printer had not discovered the secret of immortal blackness. At one and the same moment I have apparently been in three different places,—assured by Sam Johnson that he has got me in his den after saving me from fire, by Jack Galt that he has got me in a steamship cabin after saving me from an unappreciative owner, and by his sister Isobel Galt that she has got me locked up in a cupboard after saving me from Jack. All three of them quite sure of it, too! A most ambiguous and undignified position for a Gutenberg. I have never been in three places at the same time before, and it makes me dizzy.”

THE TRICK THAT FAILED

All three were sure that they had the treasure: Isobel, Johnson and Jack. At least two of them must be wrong.

Jack, of course, with the thing under his very hand, in the bag which he allowed no porter to carry off the steamer to the Liverpool landing stage, had the best of reasons for knowing he had it. From the time he packed it in his baggage at Cousin John's, and right across the Atlantic Ocean, he had taken infinite precautions to keep it in his sight,—more care than a mother takes over an only and delicate child.

He listened with amusement, on the landing stage, to the fencing of nervous or deceitful passengers with suspicious customs officers. His own flask was empty, his last cigar smoked. He opened his baggage for inspection and calmly waited for his turn.

Here came an officer at last. A good-natured looking man, for a customs officer.

"Anything to declare?"

"Nothing at all."

"What is this?" asked the man, pulling a heavy brown paper parcel out of the bag.

"Only an old book!" Jack put his hand in his trouser pocket,—not ostentatiously.

"Open it, please. We've got to be extra careful these days. We've had a lot of stuff coming in the middle of old books with the guts out of 'em,—new books, too, for that matter,—and this is a big un, and heavy."

Jack folded back the paper. The man opened the book, first one volume, then the other. "All right," he said, holding the parcel for the passenger to tie up again.

Jack stood still as if paralyzed, staring at the book.

THE TWO PARCELS

The officer looked up at the passenger's face. Something was wrong, he could see. The man had already run his hands through Jack's trunk, but now without a word of apology he opened it again and examined every article in it minutely, even tapping the lid, the bottom and the sides, for sounds of hollowness. With equal care he gave the suit-case a second overhaul. Then he chalked all three pieces of baggage and passed on.

Jack shivered, and crammed the parcel back into his bag without even tying the string. . . .

He found himself presently in a train pulling out of Liverpool,—bound for London, apparently, for he found a ticket in his pocket. He must have got to

the station in a taxi. That is, his body must. His mind had been suddenly transported to America.

It flew back there now. He saw himself sitting close to Samuel Johnson's desk, with the bag at his feet. He saw himself take this parcel out of the bag—surely this very parcel—and put it back again after enchanting the bookseller with the sight of its unique contents. Then, saying he would leave the parcel after all, he had reopened the bag and taken out another parcel instead, made up to look exactly like the first.

He must have taken out the same parcel he had put in!

He could hardly believe it. He had been so careful, he remembered, to put the Gutenberg in on one side of the bag and pull out the make-believe from the other side. Yet here was the sickening proof of his mistake.

He had left the treasure with Sam after all, and then, by going the length of arson to destroy the proof of his fraud, had prevented all possibility of getting the thing back.

The second crime, with all the destruction it had caused, worried him far less than the first—which he had failed to commit.

He went over the deadly scene again and again, lifting that heavy parcel out and laying it back, lifting it out and laying it back, till he actually felt his arm ache with the exertion. A Sisyphus, eternally rolling his boulder up the slope, to have it roll down again every time, could hardly suffer more.

The witching loveliness of rural England spread out its lure in vain before him. His dull eyes saw none of it, saw nothing but a trick that failed. His fellow-passengers asked him to chip in for a game. He vacantly agreed, but could not keep his mind on the play, on anything but the trick that failed. He alleged fatigue and shut his eyes, but could not shut out that trick and its incomprehensible infernal failure.

In London, he registered under a false name at an obscure hotel, and shut himself into his room. He took out the parcel, with loathing. Then, faintly stirred by curiosity as well as disgust, he threw off the paper and opened the books. Twin folios, in old brown leather,—ponderous dissertations on theology by some forgotten eighteenth-century divine.

"Let me see, now, let me think!" He paced up and down the room, cudgeling his brains and pausing now and then to look at the title page or turn over the leaves beyond.

"What was it I put in that damned parcel? I hardly noticed. Two big old books out of the same cupboard. What did it matter, if the size was right? What does it matter now? But I wish I could think. . . . Seems to me it was more like poetry." He ran through the volumes again. At the end of one the author had worked himself up to a dozen pages of verse. "This looks more like it. I suppose this is it. What else could it be? Devil take it!"

At the accommodating tobacconist's next day he found a cable, evidently timed to meet him on his arrival in England. It read: "Deep regret. Store burned. Total loss. Writing. Johnson."

Only what he expected,—only what he had hoped, the day before. And now that it had come, he raged.

Strolling aimlessly through the West End, he looked in at the Piccadilly Hotel. Some of his smoking room shipmates had said they would put up there. He found one, a New Yorker, sitting near the entrance opening a batch of mail. "Excuse me while I go through these," the fellow said, and handed him a morning paper. "Care to look over this?"

Jack turned over the pages, glancing at the headings. At the foot of a column this New York telegram caught his eye:—

THE JOHNSON BOOK FIRE

The safe at Samuel Johnson's store was opened yesterday. All the contents were found uninjured. They included the many rare books entrusted to Mr. Johnson by his clients for sale.

"The infernal scoundrel!" Jack burst out.

"Who is?" asked the American, looking up.

Jack's eye raced over the page. He put his finger at hazard on the longest of three murder reports.

"Oh!" said the American, in mild surprise at Jack's emotional virtue, and turned back to his mail.

"The damned scoundrel," Jack repeated, to himself this time. "He's got it after all. I never thought of books going into a safe in a book store—or by God I wouldn't have taken the trouble to—. A cupboard was good enough for old Galt, and he knew the value of things. But if Johnson had a safe for rare books, of course that was the first one he'd take care to put in it. He must have put it in, such a thing as that, worth six figures at least, though he takes jolly good care not to let the papers get wind of it. He says it's burnt, and he'll swear to it. And who's to prove it wasn't? Who's to prove he ever had it, except me? And I can only prove it by telling the world I stole it!"

For one wild moment he thought of rushing off to America by the first boat and bluffing the rascal into surrender of his booty. But by that time the bookseller might have discovered that Jack was not the real owner of the Gutenberg.

Supposing the bookseller still imagined Jack to be John,—well, Sam could hardly bluff to the extent of denying he had received the book,—how else could he explain the $500 he had advanced on it? But of course he could save himself by swearing black and blue that the thing had been left out of the safe,

disgraceful as such a confession would be. He would keep the thing in hiding, as Jack had meant to do, until John's death; then, with his trade connections and experience, he would dispose of it in some roundabout way a good deal more easily than Jack himself could.

"I'll get it, all the same! I'll send him a dose of soothing syrup by cable as soon as his letter comes, and then wait till he's pretty sure any danger's passed. Then I'll sneak back over there and worm it out of him before he thinks I suspect him of having it,—if I have to take him by the throat and make him tell me where it is. Damned if I won't!"

The heat of Jack's wrath fell several degrees that spring in England. Not because the English spring was chilly,—that, indeed, fosters heat among newcomers from oversea in the otherwise unheated dwellings of the British Isles. No, but because of his almost continuous good luck at cards.

Almost,—not quite continuous. If the luck had been unbroken, the adventure of recovering the Gutenberg might have lost a good deal of its interest for him,—it involved an expensive journey to America, an indefinite call for energy when there, and difficulties of all sorts which might crop up in the course of its prosecution. A steady income of, say, $10,000 a year net, from unvarying success in backing his own hands and other men's horses,—for a "cert" like that he would magnanimously sign away all claim to the hundred thousand book he had first stolen and then idiotically left in the clutch of another thief.

BACK ON THE TRAIL

Unfortunately, steadiness is the one quality a gambler's income steadily lacks. The losings of one Saturday and Sunday wiped out the whole previous week's winnings. The week after, he broke even by Friday, and finished a glorious Saturday by cleaning out a Californian "realtor" and a contractor from Illinois.

These timely reminders—that a cosmopolitan Englishman with skill acquired on two continents was not always a match for the stay-at-home breed, and that America, if not one vast wide-open gold mine, was still the gold-digger's happiest hunting-ground,—turned him back to the great Gutenberg-hunting scheme. He hastened to buy his passage while he had the price of the best accommodation in a crack boat and a bit over for transatlantic contingencies.

The voyage was one long disaster—for Jack, that is. Certain gentlemen, apparently strangers to each other, who took turns in allowing Jack to practise his skill upon them, landed richer than they sailed, by almost the exact amount that Jack and three other self-confident young passengers had brought aboard with them.

Cousin Jack, therefore, suffered the extreme humiliation of cutting down tips to a figure that any self-respecting steward would sniff at if offered by a

second-class passenger. Even at the cost of that mean economy, he had no more money in his pocket when he set foot in New York than when he left it,—less, in fact, for then he had just bled the honest bookseller of $500. He had now a whole campaign to make, and no funds to make it on!

Must he play right now the card he had meant to keep as a last resource? Should he risk a frontal attack on Johnson, demand the return of the book entrusted to him, and meet his bluffing account of its destruction by bluffing threats of exposure? If he only knew that Sam had not yet come in touch with the real John Galt, Jack would not have hesitated,—but what were the chances of that? True, he had deceived the bookseller into thinking John had gone to Europe, but there had been plenty of time for John to come back—and, as Jack found out by telephoning the house, John had actually been to some place in the south, and then gone up north. Passing through New York then, he might have found some message from the bookseller awaiting him, and the cat would be out of the bag.

"Go for him anyhow, and take the chance, old man," was Jack's final exhortation to himself. "You've got to live." And off he went to the bookseller's new address as given in the telephone directory.

As he neared the place, his courage began oozing out. When he spied the very man he sought, entering the street door just in front of him, he turned coward. He stopped short, pulled some old papers out of his pocket, and made believe to be going through them as though for an address he had forgotten. Just then Sam Johnson, waiting for the elevator, happened to look back towards the door, and spied Jack, only known to him as the genuine John Galt.

Sam had elaborately rehearsed for the first meeting with his unconscious victim. Such a meeting he supposed must come, but he feared it almost as much as the policeman's hand which often clutched his throat in dreams. He hurried into the elevator, but instead of getting out at the fifth floor, where his office was, he went on to the top and there took the next car down to the street.

Jack, meanwhile, had whipped himself up to the point of ascending to the fifth floor,—but the name "S. Johnson" on the office door was enough. Without trying the handle, he turned back to the elevator and pressed the button—just as Sam's car passed. The elevator man, having only one passenger, and feeling unusually considerate

HIDE AND SEEK

owing to the tulip a stenographer had just stuck in his buttonhole, was going to stop and retrace the few feet to pick up the waiting young man.

Sam, in a panic, protested that he was in a terrible hurry to catch a train. The elevator man shrugged his shoulders, and went on down without stopping.

"My word, but that was a close shave!" Sam said to himself as he dashed into the street, wiping the beads of sweat from his face.

“Good Lord, but that was a narrow escape!” said Jack, dashing into the street a half minute later. He did not recognize Sam’s back hurrying away a few yards ahead of him. In fact he took for granted Sam was up in the office labeled with his name, humming “Will you walk into my parlor,” like the spider to the fly, waiting to pounce on his defrauder the moment the door opened. Worse than that, Jack had been almost paralyzed by a sudden hunch as he stood outside that office door that Cousin John himself was sitting inside with Sam,—the two victims joined in league to entrap their despoiler. Out in the street now he still shuddered at the hallucination. “Fancy plays a thousand tricks with nerves upon the rack.”

FIONA SENDS SAM INTO EXILE

Fiona was coming back that day.

Sam had been glad to have her away, unable to observe him, while he was getting used to the new dark background to his life,—a dark background from which a gloriously bright future was to spring, like figs from thistles. After a while he had been glad of her absence because it gave him freedom, a totally new freedom to kick up his heels. This freedom had promised him immense enjoyment, but had not kept its promise. The frustration of his adventure into the amorous, the discovery of his hopeless incapacity to swagger into vice when he had swaggered out of virtue, was very bitter. Since then especially he had looked forward to Fiona's return with eagerness.

The old farm house was not nearly ready, though he had promised it would be. He had not been up there since his discovery that John Galt was staying up there too, and farmer Tim had neither the authority nor the inclination to hurry the work. As soon as it was done, Tim and his wife would have to move into a still older shack, till a new cottage could be built for them—and they did not like it.

Sam would keep Fiona in New York, therefore, for a week or two, until the carpenters and plumbers saw fit to finish the job and remove their tools. It was lucky for him he had not told her this, for he instantly changed his mind at the sight of John, as he thought, back in New York and coming to see him. Fiona had looked forward to being whisked off north to the ideal country cottage, neat and complete, which she would only have to admire and enjoy. She now found herself whisked off according to programme, but, as Sam warned her almost with tears, not to anything neat and complete.

Fiona, as usual, made no complaint. She did not even allow herself to feel much disappointed,—that would be ungrateful of her, after spending a delightful and irresponsible holiday while Sam had been left toiling and moiling in the loneliness of town.

"WHEN NO MAN PURSUES"

Afraid that Fiona's disappointment would be acute when she saw the mess at her destination, Sam suggested leaving the train at Albany and hiring a good car to make the rest of the journey by road.

"Perfectly charming," she said that would be. "Why, we'll make a second honeymoon of the trip, you dear old Sam!"

Dear old Sam felt that way too, until that scrap of paper, the torn envelope bearing the name of fear, John Galt, fluttered into the car in front of a village inn. Then the sentimental bridegroom became a hunted bear. He had just given

John Galt the slip in New York, and here was John Galt already ahead of him in Vermont.

A mere coincidence? Possibly, as both Sam and John had interests drawing them to the same place. But that explanation was too simple for Sam. He was condemned to torture himself by any supposition, likely or unlikely, if only it was cruel enough. John, then, must be pursuing him. The young man had given no hint, in his messages, that he doubted the fire story. But Sam feared to meet him as much as if John Galt had witnessed the crime and now took a ghastly feline joy in hunting the criminal, to scare him at last into agonized confession.

So malign and persecuting an aspect did the avenger take on, in a terror-smitten mind, that Sam now imagined John as deliberately flipping that envelope into the car from some place of concealment in the hotel.

Poor Fiona, for the first time since the fire, realized that a great change had come over her husband. She did not press him to tell her what the hidden trouble was, or even show that she knew there was any trouble at all. She ignored his bearishness,—after all it was only negative,—and set herself to drive it out by her most diverting tenderness.

For six chaotic days after their arrival at the farm they had to share the house by day with the carpenters, plasterers and plumbers. Fiona, with all her love of cleanliness and tidiness, suffered less than Sam did,—for as long as strangers were about he dared not carry out his ingenious plan for concealing the stolen book. He locked the parcel first in a cabin trunk. This he kept under the bed in the one bedroom ready for use, and he was never easy if he had to be out of sight of the bedroom door. He rarely left the house, and never went beyond the barn-yard.

“I’d give anything to get this over and done with,” he said, the second day at supper,—a meal thrown together with difficulty owing to competition between the cook and the carpenters for the use of the kitchen. “The mess is getting on my nerves—and I should think it would get on yours worse, Fiona.”

“I wouldn’t have the excuse you have, Sam,—such a lotus-eaters’ paradise as you sent me to, while you had to stay in the turmoil of town—after a calamity that would have completely upset you if you hadn’t such splendid control of yourself, dear boy. Now what were you thinking of giving these men to hurry them up?”

He had not thought of giving them anything, but she took up his empty ejaculation and credited him with the idea.

“I’d give—I’d give a hundred dollars—well, say seventy-five among the five of them, if they clear up and clear out by Saturday night.”

“Fifteen dollars apiece is a lot extra, for four days,” said she, meditating, “when they’re getting a good price for the job anyway, and the sooner they finish this the

quicker they can start somewhere else. I think it might be done. . . . Sam dear, will you let me try and do it? It's the responsibility of this house, on top of everything else, that's been wearing you down, and I want to take my share. Just let me do it my own way. I know I'm not clever like you, and I can't set up for a diplomatist, but I'd like to try my hand."

He smiled,—a rare event, those days. "As you please, my dear. You're the boss for the rest of the week. Give your orders, madam!"

It was amusing, a pretty piece of play, to see the modest self-effacing wife take the initiative. He had no doubt that she, as a woman, would succeed better than he could hope to, her enterprise being the persuasion of men.

"First of all, then," she said, "you go off on a real quiet restful holiday,—wherever you like, so long as you keep out of hustling places. This farm house is going to be the hustlingest place on the American continent all the time you're gone."

"Impossible! It wouldn't be safe for you, Fiona." But it was not Fiona, it was the parcel under the bed, that he saw in danger.

"It's the impossible I've set out to do, isn't it? You must give me a chance, and I tell you plainly there's no chance unless you keep out of sight as long as the men are here. You can't keep out of sight in the house—unless you prefer to stay in bed!"

Early next morning therefore he got Tim to bring over the buggy, with that once-famous trotter Monarch in the shafts. He smuggled out, along with his suit-case, the parcel masquerading as a bundle of rugs, and stowed it under the seat.

"Goodbye till Sunday," said Fiona genially,—and he turned Monarch's head to the north as the plumber's car drove up from the south.

Distracted Sam had driven the men near distraction. He had pushed and pulled, had hinted, questioned, and remarked, till they had got beyond the stage of the retort sarcastic and nearly reached the fatal stage of "do-it-yourself-and-be-damned!" All that was now changed, as if from night to day.

One woman can easily keep three men working at over average speed for the normal union hours, if she is an over average cook. If she not only feeds them mouth-wateringly thrice a day, but charms them between meals, by an irresistible blend of snacks and smiles, she can keep six men working at double speed till the owls come home to roost.

Fiona knew better than to make them nervous by close and continuous hovering. She was never far away, but it was always some household duty of her own that kept her near them, not the obvious anxiety of an employer.

The cash bonus of course she mentioned incidentally, at the start, but she did not emphasize it, still less claim credit for liberality. She made light of

everything she did for them. Those delicious buttered scones, for instance—she "happened to have a lot of sour milk and thought she might as well use it up that way as any other." These she brought around on the whitest of tray-cloths just as the men were starting work, that first day, with a smile and word implying complete mutual understanding,—"We may be in a hurry, but a trifle like this won't keep us back any." The exquisite fruits of her own preserving, treasured for very special occasions,—she ladled them out into soup plates instead of saucers, remarking: "It seems a pity to keep last year's stuff when this year's fruits are coming in already."

When the men went home that first night, late but light-hearted, they carried bags of her sweet cookies to the children and her grandmother's cherished recipe for the same to the wives. Also a sealed letter to a store-keeper,

who sent out next morning a box of mystery. Its contents, turning up incidentally on Saturday as she cleared out the drawers of a bureau, proved just the very thing, as everyone agreed, to be taken home as souvenirs of a record house-finishing.

SAM CROSSES THE FRONTIER

Up hill and down dale rode Sam,—more up than down, to Monarch's great disgust,—around the south end of the lake and north again, through beautiful shady lanes softened with a sprinkling of pine needles, and open sun-bathed valleys with hard bumpy roads. Neither beauty nor bumps could distract the driver's mind from his precious cargo and the risk he ran by trotting it over the country in an open buggy. Approaching every turn of the road, the fear-haunted man imagined a justly offended John Galt springing out to seize old Monarch's head and demand the opening of that parcel under the seat. That would be the end of all things, like the breaking of the seven seals on the dread Book of Fate in the Apocalypse.

Not even a customs officer sprang out upon him as he crossed the line. He breathed more freely now, with the lake between him and vengeance.

The way was strung thinly with farmhouses, some painted, more of them whitewashed, the rest of bare grey boards, but all sociably close to the road. At last he saw a small village ahead, one straggling row of houses facing across the road to a hill stream chattering in its rocky bed.

"This means lunch, old horse," he said. "The first person we see we'll ask about a hotel—if there are any persons."

But not a sign of life could the hungry traveler spy until, some way ahead, a hand was thrust from an open door and flung out a plate of scraps. A dozen chickens fluttered around from the shady side of the house to pick up the scraps. Sparrows flew down from everywhere, stole crumbs from the chickens,

and tried to carry off a chop-bone. A pinto cat crept out from under the porch and stole the chop-bone from the sparrows. A yellow dog, till then a helpless prey to lassitude, dashed over the road and stole the bone from the cat. As no bigger dog happened to be in sight, and Sam had no use for a chop-bone without the chop, there the stealing ceased.

Having driven by the last house without finding one that offered food to man or beast, Sam was in the act of turning, to drive back and inquire at the post office, when he heard the voices of children coming down a hill path through the wood. Next minute they romped out on to the road, and along with them came a tall auburn-haired girl with a touzly boy of ten, carrying a big basket of berries slung on a stick between them.

The girl was Isobel Galt!

Sam, thanking heaven his face was concealed by a panama hat, shook Monarch's reins and scurried back through the village without a glance at the post office.

Those Galts! Could he never shake them off?

Driving out of the village at the other end, he overtook a black-robed figure, evidently the curé.

"Veuillez me conduire jusqu'au lac, monsieur?"

The curé might have been threatening pains and penalties for furious driving at six miles an hour, instead of merely asking a lift to the lake, for all Sam knew. The only French he could remember consisted of "Oui" and "Je ne sais pas." As the agile curé had climbed in and taken his seat before Sam could guess which to say, the question seemed to have answered itself.

"Vous êtes très gentil, monsieur,—you are very kind," the curé said with a bow and a smile.

Father Brault was a keen champion of the old French language and customs. It was he who had planted and

"DID MONSIEUR NOTICE—?"

fostered that solid block of French settlement in the hills. With the help of his friends in Montreal and Quebec he had enabled his people to buy out any English-speaking farmers in his parish. This had not been difficult. The hill soil was none of the richest. Most of the farmers, too, were well on in years and glad to follow their sons to the West or retire from work altogether.

The French champion spoke English excellently, however, and loved to practise it when he had the excuse that his companion could speak nothing else. He was affable to the point of exuberance.

Thawed by his passenger's warmth, Sam was drawn out of his cold reserve and talked freely of his business career. The discovery that this wanderer had spent his life among old books raised the curé's interest to the highest pitch. He was devoted to old books, he said. Though too poor to be what might be

called a collector, he was proud of his little collection, especially of his Bibles. Unfortunately, those he most coveted were far beyond his reach.

"Did you notice, monsieur,—you must have noticed,—the wonderful price paid the other day for the first printed edition of the Latin Bible, the famous Gutenberg? If any book deserved to fetch as much money as would build a church, it was that. Of course, my little library contains none of the absolutely unquestioned genuine copies surviving of the Gutenberg edition, but there is one—at any rate a singularly close imitation. I have never had an opportunity to compare it with one of the undoubted originals. You have seen one, I suppose, monsieur?"

"I attended the sale you mentioned," Johnson answered.

"I should dearly like to show it to you, monsieur. I hope monsieur will be in this part of the country very soon again, and will pay my humble library a visit. I am only going to Montreal for a day on business, to help one of our young men to marry and buy a farm among us."

Johnson's first impulse was to say he was most unlikely to be in that district again. Any place where he was liable to encounter one of those Galts was no place for him.

That "imitation" Gutenberg, however, had excited his curiosity, and his cupidity. About once in a month of Sundays a genuine article was taken for an imitation, he knew, though an imitation was being taken for a genuine article every hour of the day and every minute of the hour. This might possibly be one of the exceptions. If he judged it to be genuine, he might pick it up for a song, by confirming Father Brault's belief that it was an imitation. Sam agreed, therefore, to come back soon.

Father Brault dismounted on the wharf. The bookman, rather than wait for the steamer to come in with passengers who might recognize him, turned his back on the lake, and drove inland till at last he found the dreariest of hotels in the most commonplace of villages.

"It's not so picturesque," he said to the famished Monarch as they stopped, "but it won't be haunted."

Here he dragged out a wretched existence for the rest of his exile. Professing to be seized with sciatica, he kept to his room with his precious burden. He saw nobody but the landlord's daughter, who brought up his meals, and once or twice the landlord himself, who played a very poor game of chess when business was very slack. Monarch, on the same programme, tied up in a stall with plenty to eat and nothing to do, had the time of his life.

THE PEDLAR COMES

Fiona had no visitors, those days, to speak of. That is, none she thought worth speaking of when Sam came home. The farm house was on a side road, rarely used except by the farmers along it.

There were the pedlars, of course. The first to come drove a gaudy rig advertising his cures for every ill but credulity, which, as the foundation of his business, the Medicine Man hopes to be incurable.

Next came a pedlaress, or pedlarine, driving her own car. She was the aristocrat of the profession. She had climbed to the high peak of pedlarism. Her car was stocked with the gorgeous garments of society butterflies, discarded not for age or obsolescence—few showed signs of wear—but simply lest folk might say—"There's Mrs. Maglory in the same dress she wore at the Maglimmers' last week: her husband's going broke, or she's lost control of him."

Mrs. Tim was hardened to pedlars, and simply waved them away. For the second-hand fashion-monger she had a positive antipathy, considering her in some way responsible for the Sins of that Society from which her gauds were derived.

Fiona might have waved the Medicine Man away if she had seen him coming, but she was busy at the stove when he tied up and walked into the kitchen. As soon as he had rattled off his list of diseases, she told him that neither she nor her husband had any. When he suggested that they might have a dozen or so without knowing it, and they had better take a few of his specifics regularly anyway, as prevention was better than cure, she flamed out at him like a smouldering fire when a reckless cook throws oil on it. The Medicine Man fled, and marked the Johnson house for avoidance thereafter.

If Sam had witnessed that engagement he would have been proud, but also surprised, and a little afraid. He had never known his wife to take the whip in hand. Now she had learned how to use it on pedlars, might she not be tempted to use it on a husband?

A little surprised at herself, Fiona kept on her guard against over-indignation when the next pedlar came along. But she had little need. He was just an old-fashioned pedlar who knew his place and touched his shapeless hat respectfully, if he did not quite take it off. He was so courteously grateful for being invited into the kitchen that Fiona nearly invited him into the parlor.

His battered and blistered old spring-wagon was drawn by a hide-on-hoofs, once a young and active horse, but now in the last stages of resignation. This man brought up to the house the regular pedlar's box slung in front of him, a

marvel of many compartments and unsuspected trays packed with the immemorial cheap trinkets, requisites, and knick-knacks of the old-fashioned rustic girl.

The pedlar's prices were curiously uncertain and elastic. He evidently thought more of buying than selling. Boxes for the stuff he meant to buy filled most of his wagon.

Looking around him with fervid admiration at the clean fresh walls of the kitchen, he began,—"I'm sure, lady, you must have run across a lot of old things that won't look at all well now the house is made over as good as new, and I'm open to buy them."

"Let me see what you've been buying," she said, and started out to look in his boxes. He was not prepared for that. The boxes were all empty,—he had neither bought nor attempted to buy a thing before reaching the Johnson farm.

"I'm very sorry, lady," said he, "but I bought so much,

A SPECULATION IN POETRY

I had to go back and unload at the depot, where I ship to my store in Pittsburgh. Oh, lady, if you could only see the old junk I've picked up around here, and knew the prices I've given, you'd wonder how I could live. The fact is, I'd never make a cent of profit, but for the hard work I put into making old furniture look new,—and the wife, she's a marvel turning old clothes into new. It's not only old clothes and furniture I take in, either, it's anything and everything—anything not too big to go on four wheels.

"Lady, I gave a poor old man $2 for the manuscript of a whole volume of poetry he'd written forty-five years ago. I couldn't understand what it was about, and he'd forgotten, but it sounds like real hand-made poetry. He'd spent fifty times that two dollars in postage, sending it to all the publishers, and he reckoned it was no good, as they all said so,—all except the ones that wanted him to pay the printing,—they said it was a work of genius. Fact is, he was sick and tired of seeing it around the place and just about ready to pay anybody that would cart it away. He didn't tell me all that till I'd paid him the $2. I may get a friend of mine in the printing trade that can't pay what he owes me, to print it by way of offset, and then I can carry it around with me and sell it retail. I reckon that'd be doing a real good turn to folks that never spent a red cent on poetry before. I'm keener on books than anything else, if the truth must be told. And I reckon there's an old book or two lying around here that ain't no use to a soul, lady?"

"I don't believe there's a book in the house," she said. "Nothing to read but a few old magazines and newspapers,—though we'll soon change all that."

"Not one, lady? It don't matter what language it's in, Greek or Latin, all's fish that comes to my net. I can sell 'em all sooner or later,—but often I'm in no hurry to sell 'em till I've read them."

"You don't read Greek and Latin, surely?"

"I can't make much of the Greek, lady, on account of the fancy shapes of the letters, but as for Latin,—why, I taught myself Latin helping father in his junk store. Believe me or not, lady, I get more pleasure reading page after page of Virgil than going to the movies! Of course, there's words I don't know the meaning of, but I can make a stab at it. I know enough to make out how the story's going, as a general thing. And anyway I love the roll of the lines when I say them to myself, and the sense don't matter so much. It's like music to me, —pretty near equal to the best jazz I ever heard. 'Arma virumque cano' and so on—that's the sort of thing to warm you up.

"It's great, that Latin poetry, and now I'd like to try my hand at the prose. You don't happen to've noticed a book of Caesar's, or Cicero's—or a Latin Bible, of course that'd be best of all."

"I told you," Fiona said, but smiling indulgently on the pedlar with a soul so far above peddling,—"we've no books here yet at all."

The pedlar was most humbly apologetic for his stupidity. "Forgive me, lady, I thought perhaps you only meant books you could read, not counting Latin Bibles and such like. Maybe you can tell me where I could get a sight of one, even if I can't buy it."

"I've no idea at all," said she, "but my husband knows a lot about all sorts of books, and I'm sure he'll be glad to advise you, if you happen to be driving out this way again. He'll be home by Monday."

With a shrug and a sorry-I-troubled-you smile, he turned back to his assortment of knick-knacks.

"Lots of nice little things, lady, ain't they? Can't I tempt you just a bit,—a lady of your taste, too?"

She bought a glass emerald brooch and ruby tie pin, hoping to find unsophisticated youngsters who might appreciate them. He thanked her profusely.

"It's foolish of me, lady, to waste my time and yours on what's not business—the more Latin I read the less money I'll make, my father always warned me right enough."

He was making off, when the lady in pity called him back. He turned quickly and seemed rather disappointed that it was only for a cup of tea. He drank it, though, and declared himself grateful. It was excellent tea, accompanied by excellent cookies. He was again on his way to the rig when Fiona remembered that she had something in his line after all.

"If you buy everything," she said, "there's a heap of stuff in the front room I'll be glad to let you have."

The stuff proved to be the surplus or dregs of rubbish that even thrifty Mrs. Tim had not thought worth taking over to the other house,—empty bottles

beyond her capacity to fill with home-made sauce and vinegar, tattered garments stripped of their buttons, and boots that a cobbler would scorn to patch even for his own children.

The pedlar looked pathetically at Fiona. “You don’t really ask me to buy these, lady, do you now?”

“I didn’t ask you to do anything,” she said. “You offered to buy anything and everything, and I thought you meant what you said.”

“Well, lady, I won’t go back on my word. I’ll give you ten cents for the lot.”

Fiona agreed at once. This was better than persuading Tim to dump the rubbish in a hole, or paying some one else to haul it away.

Five sacks that patient pedlar brought, and filled, and carried out to the wagon. Then, before putting the dime in Fiona’s hand, he looked her full in the face and said, in a voice hard with conviction,—“Lady, that’s ten dollars and ten cents more than the lot’s all worth!”

He was just driving off, when Fiona called after him from the door,—“If you want to see a Latin Bible”—he stopped short, and held his breath—“I wonder I didn’t think of it before, but you’re almost sure to find one at the public library when you get home.”

He made a gesture which she took for an eccentric farewell. It was just as well she could not hear his words—these, uttered when he had turned his back on the lady and her advice, were strong enough to galvanize old hide-and-hoofs into the activity of a panic-stricken colt.

As soon as he had got one bend of the road between him and that exasperating house, the pedlar, whose name was Jack, dumped all the Johnson junk in a ditch. Shaking his fist in Mrs. Johnson’s direction, he exploded.

“Damn the woman! Making a scavenger of me! Me! If it weren’t for that tea and those cookies I’d say Damn the woman”—which he had said already and continued to repeat at intervals. “But there’s one thing certain,—she don’t know that infernal book’s in the house. Probably she never heard of it. Honest Sam’s a cautious cuss, and he’s kept the thing dark from his wife,—but he can’t keep it dark from me!”

THE SECRET OF THE CRADLE

It was a tired yet beaming Fiona that welcomed Sam back, late on Sunday afternoon.

"It's done, my dear boy," she proclaimed from her seat on the verandah. "Finished on the stroke of midnight."

"I knew it would be, old lady," said he, pulling up for a moment on his way around to the barn, "but I ought to have been back this morning to help clear up, at least. I found myself so far away that it's taken me nearly all day to get home, going at Monarch's best."

She noticed that phrase—"I found myself"—but let it pass. She had an impression that Sam had been losing himself and having to find himself a good deal lately. She had cleaned up the whole house that Sunday morning and afternoon, with broom and mop and duster, and even with shovel where the rubbish was thickest. If Sam had been thinking of her as he used to, thinking how to save her trouble, he would have spent the last night nearer home. Since that terrible fire he had not been the same man. Yet its net result had been to give him the freedom he craved, to live the ideal country life he longed for. Why should he worry?

Sam managed to get the horse out of harness and into a stall without fetching the farmer to help. His burden, that ridiculous rug-package, he hid under hay in the loft, meaning to take it over to the house after dark. Then he remembered that Tim would be poking around in the hay with a fork when he came to feed the horses. Sam looked about for a better hiding place. There was none. A common barn was not equipped with shelves or closets. He would have to carry the thing to the house in broad daylight.

Peering through a crack in the rear end of the barn, he saw Tim smoking on the doorstep of the shack. Tim, unless he went to sleep smoking, could see everything. Sam settled himself down to wait, but he could not wait long, or Fiona would come to see what had become of him.

Tim rose, yawned, stuffed the pipe in his pocket, and—came towards the barn. Sam dumped the package into the manger of an empty stall, until Tim had climbed to the hay-loft. Then he took the thing in his arms and scurried over to the house, in too much haste for more precautions. He had a horrible suspicion that Tim's wife was spying on him from the shack window, when she was snoring away on a rocker in the kitchen with a handkerchief over her face to keep off the flies.

Once the treasure was locked away in its trunk again, Sam could sit and talk to his wife without looking as if he saw ghosts. He did his best to make the

story of his trip interesting to her. He could not make it amusing,—only an impartial witness could have done that. The comedy of the hungry bookseller turning tail and fleeing from his dinner at sight of a red-headed girl emerging from a forest,—the grave merchant nursing a mysterious bundle of rugs and straps like a baby, never leaving it a moment, taking it up to bed with him at a hotel and barricading the door against invasion,—these would have irresistibly appealed to the sense of humor in any observer ignorant of its underlying tragedy.

"Come along and see how everything looks," said Fiona, when Sam had done. He went all over the transformed dwelling with her, and words of admiration in plenty came from his lips, but all the time he was looking out for the best place to hide "it." There was no place where an infant could have failed to discover it.

Behind the barn stood an old log shack, once a smithy. Sam remembered with joy the musical hammer, flying sparks, and sizzling hoofs. Forge and anvil were now gone, but the lower storey was still used as a workshop. Sam climbed the ladder to the loft. At one end, the angle of gable wall and high peaked roof had been boxed in to make a pigeon-house. Tim kept no pigeons; but a few strays now made a home there. Not a bad place that, perhaps. Quite unused, and not likely to be suspected. But suppose Mrs. Tim took it into her head to make a pigeon pie,—or suppose the same idea prompted a passing hobo, or even a neighbor's boys, to make a night raid—the poor birds could protect neither themselves nor the fabulous treasure entrusted to them. Sam would as soon have entrusted his heart to the eagle's nest on top of Mount Skycrack, like the giant in the fairy tale,—to have it stolen and himself destroyed.

NOAH'S ARK

Among the other household truck poked up into that loft, as too old for use, too ugly for ornament and too precious to burn, Sam spied a cradle. It was a heavy contraption, of inch-thick boards, and rather like a ship. To his parents it had been sacred because once occupied by himself, their only child. What thrilled him now was its possible value as a dumb accomplice in his crime.

"We expected twins, from what a gypsy prophesied to your mother," his father had once said, explaining the magnificent dimensions of that cradle. Not only was it wide enough for two, but its steeply-sloping sides were high enough to keep an infant from climbing out, for some time after he had learned to crawl. Still later, as no second baby had come, the cradle was turned into a cot for the growing Samuel by simply inserting a deck midway between keel and gunwale. This reduced the depth by half, so that his mother need not stoop so low to reach him; and by that time it was no longer necessary to keep him from climbing out.

Sam had always thought of that cradle as a Noah's Ark lacking the roof.

Now, by a flash of inspiration, not necessarily from above, he saw in it exactly the ark he needed to carry his precious cargo in safety and secrecy through the dangerous months to come.

He hurried down to Fiona,—in another minute she would have called up to know if he had fallen asleep in some old armchair.

"A mess of old stuff up there!" he said. "I'll clean up that by myself, if I didn't clean up anything else, old lady!"

In the morning he collected what tools he could find, besides a broom by way of camouflage, climbed into the attic, and set to work tearing out the false bottom or deck from his ship-cradle. To his astonishment, the space below was not empty. It was in fact chock full, and Captain Kidd's treasure could hardly have thrilled him more,—for it was full of MONEY! Money of a sort. A very brief examination showed what sort, and calmed the thrill. It was counterfeit money,—crisp and clean bills, thousands of them, tied up in neat bundles. Sam had a good deal of experience in scrutinizing gravers' work, and they could not have taken him in for a moment. Even to the non-expert, of average eye-sight, there was something fishy about their look.

"Is it possible that my good old father—" Sam checked himself. No, a thousand times no!

Most likely, the fixing of the cradle had been done by hired help. Sam had dim recollection of a hired man who had always been a mystery to the family, —evidently city bred. He had taken great pains to please, as if anxious to keep his job. Maybe he had belonged to a gang of counterfeiters scared and scattered by the police.

Sam easily imagined a thrilling story to fit the case: the arch-criminal taking refuge in that corner of the woods, in the guise of a farm laborer; seeing in father Johnson's cradle-improvement order a perfect opportunity to keep the gang's product safe till the storm blew over; fleeing again—his disappearance had been sudden and mysterious—on a rumor that his hiding-place had been discovered; possibly captured and sent to gaol, where he died before he could tell his accomplices where the goods were.

PROS AND CONS OF COUNTER-FEIT

"Anyway, here they are," said Johnson to himself. "What shall I do with them? I can't afford to have them found here. I suppose I ought to pass them over to the police." But he shuddered at the very idea. He would have no contact with the police. He had better burn the things. But. . . .

At this "but" he stopped putting into words, even into unspoken words, the dangerous thoughts invading his mind. . . . Was it quite out of the question for him to make some use of those—those specimens of engraving?

Not in his own country, of course. He was so unfamiliar with the criminal class that he had no notion where or how to find a "fence," the common

receiver of stolen goods, and maybe it was only a special breed of “fence” that could palm off forged money on the community. And, if found, such a rascal would have Johnson at his mercy, liable to constant attacks of blackmail, for the rest of his life.

In some foreign country, perhaps? There was a Russian nobleman who had come into the store trying to sell Mr. Johnson a few old prints he had saved out of the revolutionary wreck. How that man had raged against the “wild beasts” who had got control of his native land! He was ready to fight them with any weapon. Such a man might find means of shipping false American bills to friends in Russia who could cheat the Bolsheviks with them,—and he would not give Sam away. But he might expect Johnson to give the bills away! Whatever happened to them over there, it was very doubtful whether Sam would ever get a red cent out of the deal.

Yes, he had better burn them—after a while. Not immediately: something might turn up. And yet, if he kept them even a day he must find some new hiding place for them. . . . No, he had too much on his mind already. He had come so near distraction that if anyone had offered him the gift of a second Gutenberg, all ready stolen, on the sole condition of his keeping it dark like the first, he might have refused.

He would burn them, then. . . . Easier said than done. The only fire was in the kitchen stove. It would take more than a few minutes, it might take an hour, to burn these close-packed wads of paper in the kitchen stove. Even if he broke up the packets, it would be a long job. He could not do it without Fiona’s knowledge, and she must not know anything about it. She would ask how he had found the stuff. There was no answer he could invent that she might not discover to be a lie, except the true answer; and she must not on any account know of his opening up the old cradle.

A bonfire, then. Unfortunately, Fiona’s cleaning up had been so thorough that the carpenter’s scraps were all neatly piled in the shed for kitchen use, and Tim had cleared the yard of older rubbish the day before the owner’s arrival. What was there to make a bonfire of?

Sam looked grimly around him, on the old furniture, old trunks, and parts of old implements and vehicles. “You’ll all have to go, to the last stick, if I can’t burn the stuff without you,” said he.

He dared not leave his job unfinished till nightfall,—the cradle gaping open, its contents piled on the floor,—however unlikely it was that anyone else should climb that ladder. On various pretexts, he came down at intervals, occasionally visiting the house, to look out of the smithy door and see if the coast was clear. When at last all the other inhabitants were out of sight, he smuggled his parcel over to the loft.

Before tucking it in, where he had so often been tucked himself, Sam had

half a notion to open it and take one more look at the treasure, which he had not seen unwrapped since that fatal day in the store. Only half a notion, however. He still felt a strong disinclination to break the seals put on by the owner. While at one moment he persuaded himself that the book would never be discovered in his hands, at the next he imagined the unlikeliest accidents revealing his secret. In that case, he would have to say that the parcel had just come back to him: some one else had saved it—a fireman or policeman—and put it away somewhere, meaning to find Mr. Johnson and give it to him, but had forgotten all about it until then.

THE SEALS REMAIN UNBROKEN

If Sam had really yearned to feast his eyes on the hidden treasure, of course, he would have brushed aside all shadowy objections and broken its seals without scruple. But the curious fact was that the book had a repulsion for him quite equal to its attraction. It had brought a huge flock of troubles buzzing about his ears, and these troubles would never cease till he had got rid of it. He valued it only for the money he would gain by parting with it. He hated it.

The sound of Tim whistling as he approached the smithy would have settled the matter in any case. Sam had to hurry up. He laid the parcel in its bed, waited in perfect silence till Tim had found what he wanted down below and gone out of earshot again, then tremblingly replaced the concealing deck. This had originally been nailed in, as Johnson knew to his cost, for he had splintered the wood in several places by wrenching it away from the rusty nails. He now used screw-nails, looking forward to the happy time when he would want to open the casket again and take out its treasure for good. He gathered handfuls of cobweb and dust, and rubbed them into all the tell-tale breaks where the light inner color of the wood was exposed.

Now he began hauling the rubbish out and piling it up in the yard. The larger pieces he had to let down by ropes. The whole business was so extremely awkward that before it was done he was not only covered with sweat and grime but furiously out of temper.

When the pile was big enough to afford concealment, he began stowing the “money” in an old sack. This time he examined each bundle carefully, as he had not when he first discovered them. It was still as plain as ever that the bills were imitation, and a poor imitation at that,—a good enough reason, perhaps, why the makers had never come for them. But coming to a little bundle of thousand dollar bills, which he had not noticed before, he was struck by the distinctly better workmanship of the bill on the top of the bunch. He took it to the window, and compared it with the rest, in every detail.

“Jehoshaphat! It’s the real thing! This is no fraud, it’s the pattern they were making the imitations from.”

Now he took up each bundle again, in turn, and discovered one genuine bill of each denomination the crooks had attempted to counterfeit. Besides the big one, there were a fifty, a ten, and a five. Each of these was on top of its bundle. He ran all the rest through his fingers, in case by some fortunate folly the crooks had let other good material slip in with the bad. No such luck!

Slipping the real money into his pocket, he crammed all the rest into the sack, threw it down into the smithy, and climbed down after it. After a wary glance around, he pushed it into the middle of the junk pile. Then he brought down everything else that looked as if it might burn, and heaped it on top.

There was Fiona now, at the kitchen door, calling him to dinner. Had she been there long enough to see the sack deposited? No,—at least she made no remark about that. She did suggest that the pile was rather large to be set afire so near the buildings.

She was right, Sam saw at once. He was not going to move that pile, however. He pulled one or two articles off the top and let it go at that. After dinner, as there was no wind, he poked a lot of straw in among the junk, and struck a match. The blaze roared up straight, a pillar of fire.

JACK MAKES A DISCOVERY

It was just at this point that the pedlar came driving around the bend of the road and stopped to look on. Neither Sam nor Fiona, watching the bonfire, saw him coming, for their backs were turned that way, and they could hear nothing but the roaring flames.

A gentle breeze rose and fell, rose and fell again. The flame wavered with it, gently, from side to side. Then a sudden gust smote the pillar of fire and bent it over, drove it hard in a lashing tongue till its tip nearly scorched the smithy wall. Fiona cried out in alarm. Gust followed gust. Again and again the fire leapt at the dry old logs.

At the first gust, Sam had started for the pump and fetched a bucket of water. Fiona ran into the house, brought a bucketful from the kitchen, and was going to throw it on the flames.

"Don't do that!" he shouted, almost fiercely. "Let it burn!" He would let nothing interfere with his bonfire and expose its false paper heart. Fiona, though surprised by his eagerness, let him take the water from her hand and throw it, with his own bucketful, on the smithy wall, to keep that from catching.

The wet logs began to steam. The flames were licking them. They would soon dry up again in that terrific heat. Instead of running for more water, however, Sam dashed into the threatened building. He rushed up the ladder, at a rate only equaled once in his boyhood when the herd bull had chased him into the smithy. The loaded cradle he found too heavy and clumsy to carry down the ladder. With trembling, fumbling fingers he roped it up and lowered it gently to the ground. With a great effort, he lifted and carried it into the house. Then only did he go after water and keep splashing it on the log walls till the fire died down and the danger was past.

The pedlar had missed nothing of the spectacle. The bonfire interested him mildly. He could see the skeleton of a chair and rickety bamboo table crowning the pile, and he wondered at Mrs. Johnson burning rather than selling a good two dollars' worth of furniture, when she had condescended to accept ten cents for five sacks full of lesser junk.

The bookseller's anxiety about a single article, of all the building's contents,—his rescue of one old cradle and nothing else,—this was much more interesting to the pedlar.

"What's the old ruffian up to now?" he asked himself. "It looks like an old-fashioned cradle. Quite a sentimental ruffian, then. Curious, how heavy it seems. You'd almost think there was a baby in it, or something. . . . 'Or

something?’ . . . Yes, there’s one thing Johnson would walk through that fire a dozen times to save. I’ll bet my false beard he’s hiding the book in that cradle.

“And to think of his saving me the trouble of finding it out—as good as showing me, just when I was going to make him!” For Cousin Jack, who had crossed the Atlantic, and disguised himself most uncomfortably, with the sole object of wresting that book from Sam, had planned an ingenious little trick to discover its whereabouts. The idea was not original, for Sherlock Holmes had tried it in his search for a compromising royal photograph in a certain lady’s possession. Jack had meant, on his next call as pedlar, to start a smudge, or otherwise raise a scare of fire m the Johnson house, and then to notice what articles the man and his wife rushed to save. Though this was one of the few Sherlock tricks that had failed, Jack was now confident of its success, quite sure that Sam would fly to the rescue of great Gutenberg at the very first alarm. And that

MR. RENWICK PAYS TEN CENTS APIECE

was exactly what Sam had done, without Jack’s having to lift a finger or light a match. Mighty obliging of him!

Pedlar Jack therefore did not pay his intended visit, but drove back the way he had come.

His next step was to get into the Johnson house some time when both its inhabitants were away, and steal the book.

So simple, this,—but not so easy. Did the Johnsons ever go out together? And, if they did, how was he to know when? He could ask no one to help him. If he allowed anyone to know that he had a secret at all, the fellow would try to find out what that secret was. No confederates for Jack! Playing a lone hand was the only way to cut the risk and keep the profits whole.

Shedding his beard and frowsy clothes in the cheap room he had hired as a pedlar, he registered at the best hotel in Newport as Bastable D. Renwick, of Cleveland. Next, he made a tour of the town in search of old books. He could not find any,—no, not one, even at the auctioneer’s. Worn off his feet, he had almost given up the chase when an audacious notion seized him.

He walked into the public library and asked if they had not a lot of old books they had no use for, weeded out of gift collections. Yes, the librarian said, there was a heap of such siftings in the basement. They were generally sent off to the keeper of a book-dump in New York, but Mr. Renwick could make an offer for any he wanted.

Jack spent a dreary half-hour plodding through the dust-heap of dead books. He picked out about fifty, simply because they were printed in the eighteen-somethings and were all bound in old brown leather. The librarian was glad enough to get ten cents apiece, saying frankly that the dump man would not have given more than five.

With this job lot of fossil literature piled in a corner of his room at the

hotel, Jack called up Sam by “long distance.” It appeared that “Mr. Renwick” had just returned from a trip to Europe, where he had picked up a number of rather interesting items in the book line. He wanted expert advice as to their profitable disposal. On his way home he was spending a few days at the lake, and friends in New York had strongly recommended him to take the opportunity of consulting Mr. Johnson, who was known to have lately retired to that district. He congratulated Mr. Johnson—and, might he add, Mrs. Johnson—on their taste in selecting such an exquisite locality, and hoped they would forgive him for breaking in on their privacy to drag in business.

“Don’t mention it,” Sam replied. “I’ll be glad to give you any little service, if a meeting can be arranged.”

“That is easy,” Mr. Renwick declared, “if Mrs. Johnson and yourself will do me the honor of lunching with me here to-morrow. I do hope you will,—both of you. I shall be making two new friendships, and I’ll value that at least as much as any advice you can give me in the way of business.”

There was a note of hesitance this time in Sam’s reply. Would Mr. Renwick mind waiting a minute?

“He hates to leave that thing in the house alone,” Jack guessed, “so he doesn’t want to bring his wife. But if she wants to come she won’t be left behind, judging by what I’ve seen of her.”

Jack guessed right.

“I don’t think you’ll find it at all interesting,” said Sam, repeating Mr. Renwick’s invitation to Fiona, with a hand over the transmitter.

“I might, though,” she answered cheerfully. “I’ll chance it. Yes, tell him I’ll come with you.”

Sam gave this answer accordingly, with a poorly feigned air of hearty appreciation. The pleasure Jack expressed at Mrs. Johnson’s consent was not at all feigned. He felt the treasure already in his grasp.

At the nearest garage he promptly hired a car for the following afternoon. As he insisted on driving alone, he had to pay a deposit which nearly swallowed up the winnings of a hectic three days’ play in New York.

About the time next day when he reckoned the Johnsons would be starting in their buggy, Jack quit the hotel, leaving for his guests this apologetic note:

> “Very sorry. Called away suddenly. Please go ahead with lunch, and if I’m not in when you’ve finished look over books in my room. Back soon as possible.
>
> “B.D.R.”

Hurrying to the garage, he rushed his car out of town, and made a wide detour, by roads he had explored as a pedlar, to avoid meeting the buggy. About two hundred yards beyond the Johnsons' gate, and well out of sight of the house, he parked the car where the road was level almost from fence to fence, so that he could start quickly in either direction. Then he strolled towards the gate, with a watchful eye on the farmer's shack. As Tim had just come in from the field and was watering the horses behind the barn, while Mrs. Tim was dishing up dinner in the kitchen, Jack saw no one and no one saw him.

Once in at the gate, he darted to the front door. It was locked: but he had no need to use the jemmy in his pocket. With a knife he pushed aside the fastening of a window, and in a moment he stood in the living room. A glance around,—then a dash through the whole house looking into every room,—in vain.

What? No cradle?

Johnson might have taken it back to the smithy, and Jack had no wish to expose himself by crossing the yard. He came back to the living room for a more thorough search. Diagonally across one corner stood a couch. He had already looked casually under it, and even over the back of it. Yet now, when he pulled it out, there was the very thing he had been looking for.

It was plain enough, from the splintered wood and the shiny heads of the screw-nails, that the cradle had lately been tampered with. Jack loosened the boards of the "deck" with a screw-driver, lifted them out, and pounced on the brown paper parcel underneath.

He had been sure of finding it there, ever since he had seen Johnson rescue that cradle from the threat of fire. Yet he had known he might be mistaken, he had been prepared to ransack every corner of the house, and the discovery that he had again guessed right brought him infinite relief. He screwed the deck boards into place, and the cradle looked exactly as it had before. Pushing it back into its corner, and the couch in front of it, he gave a sigh of intense satisfaction. He had won back the treasure without a blow or a word,—without giving the bookseller a chance to discover that Jack was not his cousin John.

"Slick and smooth as clockwork," was his own way of putting it. "All I've got to do now is to sell the thing,—which we may consider as good as done."

He had yet to learn whether cousin John was dead or alive. If alive, and likely to live a while longer, the sale might require more secrecy and bring less profit. That was a pity, but could not be helped.

Jack picked up the parcel, to carry it off, but paused. "My word," said he, "I shall be glad to see my little old friend Gutenberg again, with his flourishes and his autographs,—the dear old Koh-i-noor and Everest, as Johnson would say." He looked at his watch. "Plenty of time for just one look, then hustle into

town and out again before Mr. and Mrs. have lapped up the soup. The hotel can keep that precious lot of books, to pay its bill. I'll have to call in at my other room to pick up the suit-case. It wouldn't do to leave that beard, and anyway I'll have to wear it to the livery barn to get my horse and rig. Then a long slow ride across country,—positively Jack Pedlar's last appearance on the American stage! No fear of Johnson trying to track

THE BREAKING OF THE SEALS

me down, even if he finds out his little Guten-bird has flown,—which he probably won't for a long while, unless he gets very hard up and wants to realize. He can't give out that the thing's been stolen from him without confessing he stole it himself."

Jack had got the seals broken and the string untied, by now, sitting on the couch with the parcel on his knee. Folding back one thickness after another of brown paper, he discovered—two large volumes of epic poetry, luxurious in type and margins, but not resembling glorious Gutenberg in any point whatever except size.

SET A THIEF TO BLUFF A THIEF

Stunned by the shattering discovery, Jack could not even think.

How many minutes he passed in that state, he had so little idea that on coming quite to himself he looked in alarm at his watch. The hands hardly seemed to have moved since he had seen them last. The Johnsons could barely have reached the hotel. There was plenty of time.

He threw the books on the floor with a bang, and swore with fury unrestrained.

How the devil—the mildest of his conjurations—how, in the name of everything infernal, had those piffling poems got into that parcel? What hellish magic had spirited the Gutenberg out of the parcel without breaking the seals he had put on it? Where was the treasure now, after giving the slip to both its stealers? These puzzles worried him. If he could sit down and work them out in cold blood, no doubt he could find the right answers, but in his rage he could not think steadily enough.

Such questions could wait, anyway. One thing could not wait. He made a great effort to concentrate his mind on this: what should he do with Johnson? Should he depart empty-handed, as he had meant to depart with a fortune,—unseen, unheard, and leaving no trace?

Never! He would tackle the rascal now and take the risk of recognition. Nothing venture, nothing win! If chance favored him at the start, if cousin John's features were still unfamiliar to the bookseller, he could bluff to the limit of Sam's cash there-and-then available. No promises, no futures of any sort! Before they came due, John and Sam would almost certainly have met. Jack had heard disquieting

reports of his cousin's presence in that very neighborhood.

THE SECRET DRAWER

Once more he took his screw-driver and disintegrated that cradle, with a temper as sour as the first time it had been gay. He tied up the monstrous epics, in the brown paper marked with that swindling red circle, found a stick of black sealing wax in Johnson's desk, and made fresh seals on top of the old. Luckily he still wore the signet ring with the family crest.

Dumping the worthless parcel in the bottom of the cradle, he once more screwed on the cover. Then he went back to search the bookseller's desk, on the off chance of finding some consolation prize.

The desk was an old-fashioned escritoire, of many and varied compartments. Most of these were quite uninteresting, but accidentally he hit upon a small secret drawer. In it lay four clean crisp bills, first a petty five and ten, then a fifty, and finally, to his surprise and delight, one of $1,000.

He fingered them lovingly, and put them reluctantly back—for the time.

Encouraged by this find, he ransacked every drawer, closet, cabinet and box in the house, but drew a blank. A jewel case stood on Mrs. Johnson's bureau, but it was empty. "She's put on every glittering gaud she's got, for my lunch," thought Jack.

"I couldn't very well take her jewellery, any way. They might come down on me and call it stealing. What I get out of her husband—they may call it what they like, they can't come down on me."

He settled down to wait for the couple's return, but soon became restless. Johnson would not wait indefinitely at the hotel for "Mr. Renwick," especially with a treasure left unguarded at home. Still, it might be well to hurry him up a bit. Jack therefore rang up the hotel clerk. "Mr. Renwick speaking," said he. "You've got a Mr. and Mrs. Johnson lunching there, and I was to have met them. Please tell them I've been unavoidably detained and can't get back this afternoon at all. I'll call up Mr. Johnson to-morrow."

As he expected, Johnson hurried through the lunch as fast as his wife would allow, and found five minutes quite enough for the examination of those pitiful books of Mr. Renwick's. The afternoon was still young when Jack heard the buggy coming home. He had gone out and taken a seat on the veranda, leaving no sign of having entered the house.

A wave of cowardice now almost overwhelmed him. He would give anything to avoid the encounter he had just been trying to hasten. But one glance at his adversary's face restored his courage. Johnson had almost collapsed at the sudden appearance in the flesh of the victim whose face had haunted him day and night.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "I want you please to stay over with Mrs. McElroy till I've got rid of this fellow. He is a bit unbalanced—not dangerous, but apt to be disagreeable, especially when ladies are around."

Fiona agreed, of course, though she begged him to be very careful not to irritate the man, and to keep him at arm's length if possible. Sam had to pass close by the veranda, driving in at the gate, and felt obliged to give the visitor a perfunctory salute with the whip. "He'd like to strangle me with it," Jack truly surmised. Then, driving around to the McElroys' shack, Johnson tied the horse up and walked back to his own house. He said to himself that he had only to lie consistently, and all would be well. He marched up the steps with fair assurance, and stretched out his hand. Jack, with complete assurance, rose to meet him, and they shook hands with all the good-will of deadly duellists.

"I hope you haven't had long to wait," said Johnson, opening the door with his key and leading the way into the living room.

"Not too long," said Jack, sitting down on the couch.

Then he paused. He would make Johnson introduce the

subject.

"I'm glad to see you looking so much better." Sam thought this a good opening, as he had to make one.

"It's remarkably kind of you to say so,—to take that much interest in my health, Mr. Johnson."

Sam wondered what exactly the young man meant by that. "How can I help it, my dear Mr. Galt? You were not looking at all well when we met last."

"And the news the papers gave next morning wasn't calculated to make me better, eh?"

"It was indeed a calamity."

"Oh, I don't know. You were insured, weren't you? And the books in the safe, the valuable books you were keeping for your clients, I saw later on that they were all saved. That must have been a relief to you, when you'd thought everything destroyed. After that wire of yours, I'd given up the Gutenberg as lost. I've been moving about so much ever since, I must have missed the good news in your later messages."

Sam had to moisten his lips before he could say: "The Gutenberg was not in the safe."

The man's torment was so obvious that his tormenter avoided looking at him, and kept his eyes fixed on the landscape visible through the window.

If Johnson had actually held the treasure in his power as he thought he did, if its riches were falling into his pocket as he believed, Jack would simply have denounced the rival thief and enjoyed his grovelling humiliation. But as things stood he must not appear to notice the man's distress.

"If I let him see that I know he's keeping the book to cheat me out of it," he said to himself, "I must go on and make him hand it over,—I couldn't ask him for another advance on it or he'd smell a rat. If I let him swear the thing was burnt, and then tell him it's right under this seat, that would have to end everything between us. It would be poor satisfaction just to wipe the floor with him, if I went away as poor as I came. No, I'll have to let him think me a blind fool for not seeing through his pretences. I'd let anyone think me the damnedest fool on earth for a thousand dollars."

When therefore Johnson said, "It was not in the safe," Jack quickly took him up and went on:

"No wonder you thought at first it was burnt, then. You must have been immensely relieved when you found it safe and sound after all. It shows how careful you've been ever since, to bring it up here with you and keep it under your own eye—and under no one else's."

Stretching his arm down over the back of the couch, he rapped the cradle sharply with his knuckles.

"You may be surprised that I knew it was here." He looked up now at

Johnson, and, as he expected, read dumb amazement in the amateur criminal's face. "Not by magic, quite,—though I did have a comfortable intuition, or hunch, that you'd bring it with you rather than leave it in the city. I happened to be driving by when you were burning that pile of trash, and saw you drag this cradle out of danger when the fire threatened that old shack. Somehow I knew at once it was old Gutenberg you were carrying,—you couldn't have anything else here to compare with it for value. It was a happy inspiration of yours, to protect it in a casket that must have had pleasant old associations for you and couldn't excite anyone's suspicion. I suppose it wouldn't be safe even as far out in the country as this, if once the city gangsters got wind of it."

Jack had been rattling on at high speed to keep Sam from getting in his natural protestation that the book had really and truly been destroyed. He could afford to draw breath now, having effectively choked off any possible denial. Johnson could hardly brazen it out now, when Jack was

ANOTHER LITTLE ADVANCE

obviously prepared to challenge such a denial, and the opening of the secret receptacle would instantly prove its falsehood.

"I'd like you to go ahead and arrange for the sale of the thing,—I suppose by auction, but you'll know best. That copy sold the other day fetched $100,000 or better. This one ought to fetch double that, from the way you sized up its points. If you think it can be kept here safely till then, all right. I'm knocking about so much, and have such urgent business to attend to, that I can't look after it myself. But if I leave it I'll want another little advance of $1,000 or so,—and as a matter of form you may as well give me an acknowledgment this time."

He got up at last and walked over to the desk to write. Opening the top, he paused to say: "Strange, but this is exactly like an old desk of my father's. You and he must have got them from the same place. Here's the pigeon-hole he kept receipted accounts in; here's the one he poked newspaper clippings into. And here's the secret drawer. It was no secret to me, though I believe he'd forgotten its existence, for he never used it, and I kept foreign stamps in it, and old copper cents, and some little fossil shells that grandfather brought from Germany."

Absent-mindedly Jack pulled open the drawer as he spoke.

"And, Great Scott, here's the very thousand dollars we were talking about, to clinch our agreement. Yes, and here's a little more. I should like this fifty, if it wouldn't inconvenience you,—there's a ten and a five left, I see. I'll be needing something fairly small before I can get the thousand changed at the bank."

By silence, Johnson agreed. What else could he do? But, standing almost behind the seated young man, he "gnashed his teeth with his fists" over the

young man's bent head.

Jack found a sheet of note-paper, and wrote: "Received of John Galt for safekeeping and disposal according to owner's instructions one Gutenberg Bible, first issue, apparently perfect."

"You won't mind giving me an acknowledgment, too," Johnson ventured to suggest, "for the money advanced?"

"That's all right," Jack agreed. But, he thought, it would not be all right if that acknowledgment took the form of a separate document which he had to sign. It was true that John Galt was his own name, but writing it on such a document would be forgery. He would not leave a line of his handwriting behind him, so he simply added to what he had already written: "The undersigned having advanced to the owner $1,050 on account."

"That will cover it," he said, getting up and handing the pen to Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson questioned nothing. He had not the courage to suggest, still less to insist on, the condition "At owner's risk." He signed his name, and Jack put the completed document in his pocket,—with the $1,050.

"You'll likely hear from me before long," he said, going out, "but I don't suppose anything will be doing in the sale line till fall. Anyway, there's nothing I can tell you about the book that you don't know better yourself."

Johnson tried to throw a semblance of cordiality into their farewell handshake. "Goodbye, Mr. Galt. When the time comes to sell, we'll surprise the world. Everything will be done as it should be. You won't have to complain of me, I assure you."

"I'm sure I won't," said Jack, with an appreciative smile. And he was gone.

Sam did not look after him as he left the house. Turning back, he dropped limply on the couch.

"I suppose it had to come," he said to himself, "I suppose I ought to think myself lucky it was not worse. He just took for granted I must have done the right thing. It pays to have a good name. I'll get my commission after all. I thought it was all gone, everything, when he put his finger on that infernal cradle."

"IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE"

Fiona, coming over from Mrs. Tim's as soon as she had seen the unbalanced customer depart, found Sam in a more tranquil and genial mood than he had shown since her return.

"You got rid of him with less trouble than you expected, then," she said.

"No trouble at all," said Sam. "And he has put quite a profitable piece of business in my hands."

ADVENTURE OF THE FUGITIVE GIRL, CONTINUED

THE RESCUE FROM THE RAPIDS

A touch of the sun,—that's what makes her so obstinate," muttered the curé of Ste. Jeanne d'Arc, as he picked his way down the path through the woods from the old hill-top farm. "Here she is and here she'll stay, says she. Well, we shall see about that!"

He had nearly persuaded young Derome to marry and buy that farm, with the help of a loan from certain friends at Montreal, when this young Englishwoman had dropped from the clouds and snapped it up. It was worse than annoying.

Leaving the shade of the woodland path, Father Brault marched into his village on the dusty *route du roi*. At the little post office store, as his daily custom was, he stopped for his mail and a chat with Panet, the postmaster.

Bernard the innocent sat in a corner of the store on the little mail bag, dropped by the carrier an hour ago. The bag was unopened. The postmaster knew just what would be found in it,—newspapers and government notices, maybe a letter or two for the priest, and an "account rendered" reminder from that plaguy jobbing house at Montreal.

A cushion conveniently low, that bag with its double-handful of paper contents, for the boy's engrossing business. With infinite care, he was pulling thick wads of faded winter fur from the hide of an apprehensive yet grateful retriever. The operation was nearly finished,—the dog shone afresh in the glossy fine brown hair of summer.

To-day Father Brault was so taken up with the problem of the obstinate woman that he never asked for his mail;

nor did he notice his little friend Bernard on the mail bag.

IRRITATING EFFECT OF GOOD TEMPER

"She won't budge," he complained to Monsieur Panet. "She is quite gracious about it,—oh yes, too gracious,—so calm and pleasant that she almost irritates me. If only she would lose her temper, I might be able to do something with her!

"I offered her more than the farm is worth, cash down,"—he poured a stream of imaginary dollars from one hand to the other,—"comme ça. But no, she said it was just exactly the beautiful little resting-place she had been looking for, out of the—what was her barbarous word? Out of the hurrlee-burrlee, yes.

"I told her how it was dangerous, that deep ravine beside the house, with the rapids and the high fall below. She laughed, and said Derome didn't want the place, for that very reason. He had told her so,—the scamp, I'll have a bone to pick with him,—said he wanted a farm to raise something more than

beechnuts and blueberries, a farm where the children wouldn't fall over a precipice every time they looked out of doors.

"As for her, she loved the music of the torrent, she said. Also she had no children to run any risk."

"She told me," said Panet, "she was enchanted with both the place and the people. And there's no denying, she is extraordinarily kind to any one in trouble. As for the children, instead of grudging the berries they pick, she says she would love to have them up there all the time. Why, she goes picking with them, gives them all she gets, and then carries her own basket down to the village for them! She seems to love all children; and even Bernard there"—the man lowered his voice—"they say she loves him most of all, because he is a bit of a fool!"

"If she is so fond of our children," the curé said sternly, "they may grow too fond of her. It is a great peril. She is not one of us. Here, she is like a wolf in the sheepfold." The humor of the comparison struck him as he uttered it. Gracious, generous, without a trace of *brusquerie*,—yes, and perfectly sincere, he would charitably presume,—but as shepherd he must regard her as an intruder.

"The good heavens will surely point out some way to get rid of her," he devoutly hoped.

"*Bien sur*," his parishioner echoed, "no doubt they will." But inwardly he hoped the good heavens would take their time about it. Madame was a most agreeable person,—and she never tried to beat him down in price, like so many of his own folk.

"Get up, Bernard," he went on, "and let Father Brault have his mail."

Father Brault patted the boy on the head, took his letters and papers, and went out into the sun.

Bernard stood staring vacantly after him,—but behind the dull face a bright idea was burning.

The boy was devoted to Father Brault. Others treated him kindly enough,—in fact, because he was a bit of a fool the whole parish regarded itself as his collective guardian,—but no one except his mother and the curé patted him on the head now, he was getting so big. Oh yes, he remembered with a twinge, the lady on the hill-top did, and gave him cookies too,—but Father Brault, who could not make a mistake, said she was a wolf, and wanted her driven out.

The dull eyes sparkled. He might be a fool at his catechism, but he knew how to do what Father Brault wanted done. Only a year or two ago, hadn't the boys driven out that drunken interloper Minard, who had squatted on that very hill farm and made himself such a nuisance?

The house was haunted,—really and truly haunted, everyone knew that. Unfortunately, you couldn't depend on a ghost to come just when it was

needed; so, after the parish had waited for it a long time, one of the boys had dressed up in white and played the ghost's part, dancing and screaming around the house at midnight, till the sot jumped out of the window and fled.

THE GHOST

Isobel awoke in the middle of the night, and sprang out of bed. Was that a wolf howling? She went to the open window. The howls came from a small white apparition under an ancient elm, grotesquely waving long sheeted arms.

Isobel smiled. She had heard all about poor Minard and how the parish had got rid of him. Still, the parish had shown no sign of wanting to get rid of her. Father Brault did, to be sure, but the curé was too much of a gentleman to have prompted this childish folly. It was some schoolboy's prank, no doubt.

The apparition, seeing her at the window, began leaping up and down, howling wildly at intervals. As she did not move, it vanished behind the big elm, leapt out again with a yell, slipped yelling behind an old maple, and kept on dancing from tree to tree, appearing and disappearing,—to and fro, between the path on one side and the gorge on the other.

"You'd better run away home," she called out at last, and went back to bed.

The ghost kept up the racket a little longer, but then apparently took her advice and went home, after one loud parting yell. The muffled roar of the torrent soon lulled Isobel to sleep.

In the calm of the morning, she stood looking out of the cottage door. The comedy of the night came back to her, and she smiled as she turned to the east, where the sun was rising across the ravine.

The smile died on her lips. A white sheet fluttered in the morning breeze, caught on a bush overhanging the cliff. She ran and peered over the brink.

Down there, on the very edge of the rapids, thirty feet below her, lay the figure of a boy, face down, hanging limp across a stick of driftwood,—a dead uprooted pine. The jagged wheel of roots had caught on a submerged rock, and raised the butt end above water; but most of the trunk was afloat. The torrent was tugging at it hard, and might tear it away any moment. The boy was motionless,—except his feet, which touched the water, and tossed as it swirled about them.

The cliff rose sheer from the water,—no beach, no ledge, not an inch of foothold in sight, up or down stream.

She flew along the brink of the ravine. Beyond the first bend, the edge had broken away, leaving a cleft above and a steep slope of loose rock and earth jutting into the stream below. Without a thought for herself, she scrambled and slid to the bottom, then plunged into the torrent. It swept her off her feet. She struck out, swimming. It flung her against a hidden sharp-edged rock. Bruised, and almost breathless, she swam on.

She was past the bend already. There was the tree with its precious burden, close ahead. If the racing current drove her on to it, the boy might be shaken off, or tree and all might break away. She felt for the bottom, struck it four feet down, and desperately tried to make a stand. Bracing herself against the tremendous weight of the current, she bent back till the water swirled over her ears.

She drew a few long breaths, then cautiously advanced one foot,—lost her balance in the act, and felt herself dashed against the tree. Gripping it tight, she pulled herself along to the boy, and lifted his head.

It was little Bernard, the innocent.

He was alive,—but Isobel had barely assured herself of that when the tree broke loose and slipped away down stream, turning over as it went. She grasped the boy and held his head above water with one hand while she gripped the floating pine with the other. Now and then she touched a stony bottom, but she could never get a good foothold, still less control the wild craft and steer it ashore.

ON THE BRINK OF THE FALL

Faster and faster the torrent tore along. The loaded tree was helpless as a withered leaf, in the clutch of the rapids. The banks were lower now, and easy to climb—if they could only be reached; but they might as well be a thousand feet high, for all the help they gave.

Faster and faster still! The dead pine shuddered, as if it knew the worst spot in the rapids was near,—and the rapids ended only in a cataract, a fall of fifty feet, a leap to sure destruction on the piled-up rocks below. The helpless woman knew it, if the helpless tree did not.

And then, as hope took flight, the tree stopped with a jerk; it caught between two rocks, on the very edge of the fall.

The hand that gripped the tree was crushed between wood and stone. A little streak of blood ran over the brown curving water and whisked away out of sight.

With the same wounded hand, Isobel grasped the rock. She pulled herself and her precious load out of the fiercely tugging stream, and sank to rest on that island of refuge,—a smooth rounded boulder not more than one yard wide.

She held the unconscious boy in her lap,—how long, she never knew. She was almost unconscious herself. If she had been alone, she would surely have collapsed, and nothing could have saved her. With that poor helpless body in her arms, the mother instinct held her up and saved them both.

She screened his head with her body from the sun. Instinctively, again and again she dipped her hand in the stream and bathed the poor white face with water—and blood. She did not see the blood, for her eyes were closed. Her own head she never thought to moisten, hot and aching as it was.

A dog’s bark somehow mingled with the fire in her brain. “Curious

mixture," she thought, and smiled, half dreaming.

A shout, too. She smiled again,—the rapids were shouting,—or was it that pitiful ghost once more trying to scare her? No, the little ghost lay still in her arms. Realizing that, she tightened her slackening grasp, and opened her eyes.

Surely, that must be the black-robed curé away there on the bank,—the old doctor, too,—other men—and women. Why, the whole village must be there! A brown dog jumping crazily up and down, between barks,—like last night's ghost.

Father Brault was now shouting again. In the roar of the fall she could not catch his words, but she understood him at once,—he was going to throw that rope in his hand. She nodded. Gripping the child with her knees, she held up her arms free for action.

He flung the rope, in a clumsy townsman's way,—and it fell short. Young Derome snatched it from him—he had worked on a ranch out west, had Derome,—and at his second try she caught the flying rope.

Slipping the noose under her armpits, she signalled the men to move higher up stream. Then she stepped boldly into the water, lay on her back holding the boy above her breast, and trusted the men to haul her through. They hauled with furious haste. They had need, for her head was under water,—they could only see her hands, and the boy she carried. Holding her breath till she felt like bursting—the rope, too, cutting cruelly into her tender flesh,—she cared nothing, if only she could keep her hold on the boy.

She was nearly exhausted when they lifted her ashore, but she struggled to her knees and drew the child into her lap.

The doctor bent over her. "I'm all right," she said firmly, hiding the wounded hand in her dress,—"attend to the boy." In few words she told how she had found him. Of her struggle in the rapids she said nothing, but the men and women around her knew: they had the rapids always with them.

BACK TO THE HILL TOP

The boy would do well, the doctor presently said: see, the color was coming back to his face already,—he was opening his eyes. The men would carry him down to the village, and madame up to her house.

She smiled, and rose, with the least possible help from the priest's eager hand. "My house is nearer," she said. "Take him there and let me nurse him."

They looked at each other. "Assuredly, that shall be as madame desires," the doctor took on himself to say,—with a glance, and not an inquiring glance, at the curé. Father Brault bowed, in humble silence.

They carried the little boy up the hill, Isobel holding his hand. He pressed hers tight, her sore and swollen hand, but she never winced.

In the little log house, as the doctor and Isobel took off his torn wet clothes,

he told the story of the night, in broken tearful sentences. He remembered slipping on the edge of the cliff and shooting down, to be caught by the mass of roots at the bottom. Bruised and almost stunned, hardly knowing what he did, he struggled through the roots on to the thick butt end of the trunk. Then, as he felt he could not keep awake, he must have instinctively thrown himself across the trunk,—the only position which gave him a chance of hanging on though unconscious. Again and again during the night he had come to, and always found himself in the same position. The last time, he had felt cold water on his feet. The tree must have sunk a little since his fall. He had tried to pull himself up, but drowsed off without succeeding. That was the last thing he could remember.

When they told him how the lady had risked and almost lost her life to save him, he looked at her in wonder. “I thought you were—” he began, and stopped short.

“We all make mistakes sometimes,” she said, smiling, and kissed him. He gave a great sigh of relief. She fed him, and he fell asleep.

“I will take care of him now,” she said, “till his mother comes. You can trust him with me, I think?”

“Bien sur,” the doctor agreed, “and yet—.” He looked doubtful, as if he thought madame might collapse and need care herself, when the excitement was over. Two of the women volunteered to stay with her.

“I’m perfectly all right,” she insisted, and they went.

Half an hour later, when Isobel looked out of the cottage door, again she saw a figure standing under the ancient elm. Outwardly, it was robed not in white but in black. Inwardly, the curé wore the white sheet of penitence. She greeted him with a smile, and held out her hand, her bandaged hand. He stepped forward, touched it gently, then stood bareheaded before her.

With a courtly though humble air he began, as he had carefully prepared: “Madame, as one of our poets has said, ‘Through raging waters is the way to safety, and wisdom by the teaching of a fool!’—”

Then he broke down, and with simple earnestness exclaimed: “My dear madame, I came here the first time asking you to go. I come now in the name of all my people, who affectionately, beg you to stay and make your home among us.”

DISCOVERIES RUN IN PAIRS

A proud man now was Alphonse Poirier. He had kept secret his responsibility for planting the intruder in Ste. Jeanne d'Arc. Now he boasted of it. It was he who hitched up the little bay mare and drove over to give Madame Loranger the news of her boy's dire peril and marvelous escape. The Lorangers' farm was over a mile away. Little Bernard often spent the night in the village, at the Panets', so his absence had given his mother no anxiety.

Félice had heard little Bernard speak of the English lady on the haunted hill-top as a sort of fairy godmother, but had never seen her. Full of gratitude, she drove back with the notary at once, leaving wise little Denise in charge of the house and family.

Isobel welcomed her at the door. "He's just gone to sleep again," she said, "and the more sleep he gets for the next day or two the better, I should think. But that's all he wants. It's wonderful that such an experience has had no worse effects."

"It's a miracle that he escaped with his life, madame, and though I thank the good God for the miracle, you are the angel who worked it." She stood on tiptoe to embrace the angel, before kneeling at the couch to kiss her own child.

It might be some time before he awoke, so Monsieur Poirier drove off to his business, promising to come back in an hour. Isobel, whose energy had kept well up as long as she had the boy to watch, now felt an overpowering drowsiness, and went up to her room for a nap. The mother, left alone to watch her son, had no eyes at first except for him. But his sleep was very peaceful, and presently she began to notice her surroundings.

Isobel had not added to the furniture left by the Poiriers. A few of her own trifles, such as crockery dogs and cats and a brass Indian elephant, perching here and there, were enough, with a naturally contented spirit, to make her feel at home. The only pictures were a few gaudy colored prints tacked on the logs by the Poiriers. All this had little interest for Félice, but suddenly her eye was caught by a photograph. It was pinned on the wall beside the window where the table stood, so that Isobel would have it facing her whenever she sat down to a meal.

Félice jumped up and stole to the window. Yes, it was the portrait of John Galt!

Then this woman—who was she? Many girls might possess John's photograph,—nothing strange in that,—but John had only spoken of one, his second cousin Isobel. The likeness in hair and features was evident. Félice made up her mind that this was Isobel, and stiffened at the thought.

The girl came down very soon, and busied herself heating broth—for all three of them, she said, though she had made it for the child. On her way to the stove she paused beside the window for a moment, and smiled at the face in the photograph.

"Yes," Félice said to herself, "this is the girl who would steal our John from Louise. She has saved my boy, and I could forgive her anything for myself, but should I sacrifice my sister to please her?"

Then she softened again, and was ashamed of her hardness. If these two loved each other, any attempt or even wish to keep them apart would be a crime. But did they? To be sure, John had come to Félice with a story of Isobel's disappearance from his house, and had asked her to try and find put the runaway cousin's whereabouts, but he had given no hint of more than natural cousinly interest in the girl. As for Isobel's sentiments, they could speedily be discovered.

"I have never yet heard your name, madame," said Félice, going up to the stove and taking her bowl of broth from the girl's hand.

"BUT HOPE TO BE!"

"I don't wonder," said Isobel. "It's short enough, but I'm told it's neither easy nor pleasant for tongues only used to your musical French names. It is Galt, Isobel Galt,—not 'madame', by the way, though everybody here calls me so. I'm not married."

"But hope to be!" said Félice, nodding towards the photograph.

Isobel drew herself up, and her lip curled, as if for an indignant or contemptuous retort, but she could not utter it. Of course she hoped to marry John, however little she expected the hope to be fulfilled. She scorned to deny it. Denial would be useless anyway, for the sudden question had taken her unawares and a violent blush had answered "Yes!"

"Forgive me, my dear," said Félice. "I can't help taking an interest in your affairs after this,—and always will."

Isobel assured her that she warmly appreciated this interest, but changed the subject to Madame Loranger's own affairs, especially little Bernard and his brothers and sisters. Félice, having learned all she was most anxious to know about Isobel, talked willingly of her own family,—careful always not to reveal her knowledge of John.

When Bernard awoke, he seemed so well and strong again that his mother thought it safe to take him home as soon as Monsieur Poirier arrived with the buggy. She was anxious to get home as soon as possible, not only to relieve little Denise of the family responsibilities, but because John Galt was coming back that afternoon.

That was the same afternoon, as it chanced, when Samuel Johnson set out on his promised excursion to see the curé's collection.

He hesitated long, debating whether he should take the Gutenberg with him. To judge infallibly whether Father Brault's copy was an imitation or not, he wanted to compare the two side by side. To carry out the owner's instructions and arrange for the sale of the book, he must of course open the parcel, but for safety it should be left in its hiding-place as long as possible, till it had to be photographed and described for the auction catalogue.

At the last moment, with Monarch already tied up at the gate, he seized a screw-driver, opened the cradle, snatched out the parcel, and drove off, holding it under the dustcloth on his knees.

The day was hot, the road was dusty. As Monarch slowed down to climb a stiff grade, a young man resting on a roadside log hailed the driver. Would it hurt the horse to give a man a lift to the top of the hill?

The young man did not look like a bandit, and he had an Irish terrier for company. Bandits no longer kept dogs, having learned the danger of such clues since the unfortunate experience of Bill Sikes. Still, you never could tell. Johnson could not refuse, but he trembled for his treasure till at last the stranger jumped down at the hill-top.

Before a neat white farm house half a dozen children were crowding around the door, intent on the bottle-feeding of an orphan lamb. Hearing the rig drive up, the little girl on the doorstep, holding the lamb, looked over the heads of the rest, and cried: "Oh, here's our dear Leroux come back!" At that all the rest leapt up like a juvenile geyser and poured down to meet the traveller, shouting "Leroux! Leroux!"

Not one of them had a look to spare for the driver who had brought him,—but John himself, turning to wave his parting thanks for the ride, caught a glimpse of horror and amazement before the man turned away his face and drove hastily on.

Well did that driver know that "Leroux" was John Galt's name among his French-Canadian friends!

TWO JOHN GALTS!

From the first Sam had noticed something vaguely familiar about that young man's face. The likeness was vague no longer: it was that of father and son.

And, as this must be the true John Galt, it was a swindler and thief who had come as John Galt to the store, shamming fatal ill-health, with John Galt's treasure in his bag,—who had left the most valuable book in the world as a stumbling-block to wreck a good man's peace of mind,—who had even come brazenly back and bluffed him into that fatal admission of the treasure's survival and hiding-place.

Sam's imagined victim, the poor consumptive, had not been his victim at all, but his victimizer. That was the bitterest pill of all. Sam's wrath burned fierce against the unknown, not for robbing John Galt of a fortune, but for

getting fifteen hundred of Samuel Johnson's good dollars on stolen and therefore worthless security, and, worst of all, for stealing an honest man's honesty and plunging him into a welter of risks and vexations.

Had John never discovered the theft? If he had, surely it would have come out in the papers. Then the thief, pretty clearly a kinsman, must have left behind in John's library another parcel, made up to look just like the one he had stolen. Some time, however, John would discover the crime, and would know the criminal. When that inevitable time arrived, the thief might buy forgiveness by telling where the booty was to be found, in Samuel Johnson's possession!

Monarch had been sauntering along, for lack of any reminder of the bit in his mouth; but suddenly he felt a terrific jerk on the reins.

The paralyzing question had just occurred to Johnson: was the booty in his possession after all? If the thief had palmed off a substitute on the owner to begin with, might he not have played the same trick on Sam when he had the house and cradle at his mercy the other day?

Not another step could he go till he knew. Pulling the horse to one side, and taking chances of being seen, he cut the string and tore off the paper.

Just as he feared, the volumes he found inside were—rubbish.

He forgot for a moment where he was going. But wherever it was, he could not go there now. He turned, right about. Monarch, headed for home, put on speed. Sam pulled him in. He must get home to Fiona, but he must have time to think.

He passed again the children playing, heard the young man's deep good-natured voice mingling with theirs, and turned his head away. This fresh wound was so raw, their pleasure hurt him.

He said to himself that he must not dwell on it or he would go mad. There was no real danger. He was not of that kind. What wits he had were too firmly anchored to be torn adrift by trouble; but he could suffer terribly.

In self-defence against suffering he tried to persuade himself that the gain was greater than the loss. It was certainly great. No more gnawing misery lest the guilty secret should escape. No more need for sneaking and dodging to avert suspicion. It was an ill wind that blew no good.

The crumbs of comfort grew to whole loaves, as he viewed the trouble in this optimistic light. The reign of terror had been broken. At a price, of course, —a mighty high cost,—$200,000 or so. But he must turn his back resolutely on the might-have-beens and look only on the bright side. Easier said than done, but time would make it easier to do. Time, and Fiona.

It was a thoroughly subdued Sam Johnson that settled down once more to a life of conventional honesty. It was Fiona who now took the lead, and he was quite content to have it so. She never flourished the sceptre he had dropped

into her hand, but she found it quite unnecessary to make him believe he was doing his own will when he was doing

BLESSINGS OF ABDICATION

hers. He wanted her to lead. He had made a mess of things,—she never suspected how. He was freest and happiest playing second fiddle. Once, later on, he resisted her, and once only,—when she suggested he might find recreation in a visit to New York for a great book auction culminating in "a newly discovered copy of the Gutenberg Bible, finest in existence, containing the unique autograph of the Father of Printing."

THE FINDING OF ISOBEL

John Galt, unconscious of the havoc he had wrought, he and his book, in the life of the man who had kindly given him a lift up the hill, found it less easy than usual to delight the little Lorangers. He was mighty glad he had brought the dog—who, for that matter, had refused to be left behind. Paddy saved the situation. All the children took him to their hearts, and he took them to his, diverting their attention when his master's mind went wandering.

Félice ought to have had a reply from Isobel by now. If not, that would mean that Isobel was not going to write,—in fact, that she was resolved not to be found. But where was Félice now? The notary had called for her, little Denise said, and she had gone off without saying when she would be back. That itself was strange.

Ah, here was Félice at last, in the notary's rig. She had little Bernard in her arms, and handed him to John, who lifted him down. His mother insisted on installing him in a rocking-chair brought out for the purpose; but that was the limit of invalidism the boy could stand. When he had told the story of his rescue, to the marveling brothers and sisters crowding about to hear, they wanted to know how he got in the river, so he jumped up and acted over again his role of ghost.

Félice meanwhile had taken John up to the house, where she gave him her own account of the boy's adventure, not making light of the rescuer's heroism, but giving no hint of her identity, or even her nationality.

John took for granted the woman was a French-Canadian who had somehow incurred the curé's displeasure. But he had not enough curiosity in the matter to ask questions,—his

FÉLICE BOWS TO FATE

interest was absorbed in another girl, and he only said to himself, as Félice told the thrilling tale: "That's just what Isobel would have done!"

So, when the tale was done, he said: "That's fine! There has always been a lot of heroic spirit among your people, Félice. One of these days I should like to meet such a brave girl. But—have you heard from that cousin of mine yet?"

The little mother got up, came over to where he sat, put her hands on his shoulders and looked him keenly in the face. "John Leroux, my son, is it just your kindness of heart that makes you anxious about that girl, or do you love her and want to find her for yourself?"

"That's it, Félice! I do. I've got to find her. Got to! You understand?"

Félice understood only too well. "Your cousin's a lucky girl," she said, with a gentle sigh.

“You think too much of me, Félice. I tell you, I’ll be the luckiest of men if she’ll look at me, when I find her. You don’t know her, Félice.”

Félice looked at him, and smiled. “I feel as if I knew a good deal about her already. Enough, anyway, to make me glad if I can bring you together, in spite of—”

The idea of Félice being disappointed on account of her sister did not occur to John. Louise had faded out of his mind.

“I hope you don’t imagine I’ll be any less your boy when I’ve got Isobel, little mother?”

“No, no, John, of course I don’t. And it should not be long now. I’m sorry she hasn’t written yet, John. But stay here till to-morrow. I’m going down to the village, and we’ll go to the post office together. I have an idea there must be some news for you by then.”

John smiled. Another of Félice’s intuitions. Well, they had often come true before. He stayed.

Driving down to the village next morning with John and Bernard, who was now as lively as ever, Félice did not stop at the post office. “The mail won’t be in yet,” she said. “We’ll have time to show you a little of the country. Get up, Marbot!”

Leaving the high-road, they climbed through the woods by a pleasant winding lane. Presently Félice said: “There’s a beautiful view from the top of this hill that I should like you to see, John. And the brave girl you said you’d like to meet lives up there, too. I’ll send Bernard with you to show you the rest of the way, while I drive back to the store to do my business. I’ll come up for you in about an hour.”

John laughed. “That sounds like an order, and you are the little mother that must be obeyed. Very well, I’ll go and enjoy the view, and even try to enjoy a chat with your heroine,—but I hope she speaks better English than I speak French.”

“Oh yes, she speaks English. But I think she will understand you whatever language you speak, John.”

He dismounted first, and she whispered to little Bernard: “As soon as you’ve got him up to the house, leave him there and run down to me.”

The boy was disappointed. So near his delivering angel, it seemed cruel to make him turn his back on her without a word, let alone a cookie. But a glance at his mother’s face showed a twinkle in her eye. There was something strange about this order, but maman could never be cruel. Therefore, with an idea that it was a new sort of game, he led John up the path in high spirits. At the first glimpse of the house through the trees, he said, “That’s where she lives,” and bolted full speed down the hill again.

As the boy was notoriously foolish, John did not allow this curious conduct

to put him out. Strolling on by himself, he had come within a dozen yards of the house when its mistress appeared in the open door.

"John!"

Where was now her mask of coolness? Where the cloak of usuality that she had meant to button herself up in, if ever he should happen across her path? Torn off her and gone, to the last button. Her heart, uncovered, leapt out to meet him.

And he? For days and days he had conned over what he would say when he found her,—filling in a gap here, sharpening a point there, shaping victorious answers to her invincible objections. In the end, he had said to himself, he would win, he was sure of that, but he was not so sure of his weapons and only too sure of his beloved enemy's defensive talent. The siege might be difficult and long. And now his armaments had vanished like hers, at a breath,—at that one word "John." No need for siege or storm,—she was his! Her face, transfigured, transparent,—her tone, vibrating in ecstasy,—proclaimed a love not just beginning to unfold but in full bloom.

Another moment, and she was in his arms.

ADVENTURE OF THE ELUSIVE TREASURE, CONCLUDED

JACK INTERPRETS A MESSAGE

Bold as brass, Jack marched up to the house in New York he had left as a thief. His sister had never let fall a word to his discredit, so Olga let him in as a matter of course, when he cheerily greeted her and said he would occupy his old room. To avoid revealing how completely he had cut himself off from the family, and how ignorant he was of their movements, he had telephoned the house, under a false name, on arriving from the north that morning, and had learned from Olga that both Isobel and John were away. Neither of them had said anything yet about returning.

Jack made for his cousin's home chiefly for the free food and shelter he could expect nowhere else. He did not really hope to find the treasure there. How or when it had been spirited out of Johnson's possession he could not imagine, still less what course it had taken in the last flitting. However, the thing must have gone somewhere, and by some mysterious means it might have found its way back to its owner. If so, when the fabulous price bid for a much poorer copy had revealed the extraordinary value of the treasure, of course John must have put it in a safer place than that old unprotected house.

It was evening when Jack arrived, and he said he had already dined. He would make himself at home in the library till bed-time. There, when sure that Olga and Bridget had climbed to their sleeping quarters at the top of the house, he tried the door of the closet, the home of all the old folios. It was not locked. As he expected, the vanished treasure was not there. He searched every corner of the library, on the off chance, and found no trace.

"MRS. JOHN GALT"

He slept none the worse for that, and had the best of appetites for the lunch that Bridget served, remembering his old habit, when he came down about noon. He fell naturally into another old habit, making a night of it at poker, bridge, or any game he could win more at than the average of his chosen friends. As the days went by, it almost seemed to him that no break had occurred in his old irresponsible existence under that hospitable roof.

One morning, however, Olga told him with great delight, which she evidently expected him to share, that Mr. John was coming home next day. "And the day after, Mr. Jack, he's going to be married at St. Christopher's Church." Jack showed as much joy as he could, to conceal his intense disgust. "Who's the happy girl, Olga?"

"Your own sister of course, Mr. Jack. Who else could it be? And think of you not knowing!"

"I've been travelling about so," he said, "I must have missed her letter

telling me all about it."

"Won't Mr. John be pleased to see you, Mr. Jack! I suppose you'll be 'best man,' now."

Mr. Jack smiled knowingly, as if to say "You'll see," and turned back to his newspaper.

He sat for a while after lunch, running over his list of acquaintances and wondering whose friendship he could cultivate to produce a harvest of hospitality. He could think of none.

The telephone interrupted him. "Is that you, Mr. Galt?"

"Yes, speaking," he said without hesitation.

The speaker at the other end, evidently John's lawyer, had to inform his client that the lady whose message had already been reported to him had just visited the office and produced sufficient proofs of her identity as Mrs. John Galt. The lawyer had therefore made the surrender as instructed, and understood that the lady intended to act upon it the day after to-morrow. The bank had been notified to expect her visit and give her possession of the book."

"That's all right," said Jack,—it seemed a safely obvious reply.

"We could not help noticing," the lawyer added, "the coincidence of that date with the date fixed for another event of great interest to you."

"Thanks," said Jack, "I noticed that too. That's all the news, eh? Well, goodbye, old man!"

"My word!" he went on to himself when the telephone was out of hearing. "Here's a pretty family skeleton I've dug up! I'd no idea cousin John was such a hand at keeping things dark. He must have got married away back, when he was a college boy, likely. The first Mrs. Galt has got wind of his taking a second, and started blackmailing him, and he's had to buy her off.

"But what a price! I'll bet 'the book' is the Gutenberg,—it was the only book of value he had,—though how the devil he ever got it back beats me. She's taking mighty good care to get it before he's married, in case he changes his mind. But he's a great stickler for keeping his side of a bargain.

"Ah, I see her little game. She's not going to keep her own side of the bargain. She's not satisfied with compensation, she's going for revenge. She'll turn up at the church and raise Cain. I'll be there to see, you bet! My pretty sister won't like it, not a little bit. Serves her right! Riding the high horse, and slapping my face for saying she could feather her nest by doing just what she's going to do now.

"And,—by thunder, I see it all at last! I'll swear it was Isobel that tricked me out of the big prize. That last evening—I left it in my bag when I went out, and there it was just the same when I came in, so it seemed. But I remember finding some socks of mine she'd been darning: I guess when she brought them up to my room she went to put

them in my bag and recognized the parcel by its marks. John must have told her about the red circle on it. What does she do then but make up another parcel looking just the same and let me go off with it thinking I'd got the real thing, when she'd put it back where I took it from! She played the very trick on me that I'd played on Johnson. I never dreamed she'd be up to it,—though as she's my sister it's no wonder she's clever.

"And after all the trouble she took to save it for John—and herself, of course,—up jumps my Lady Blackmail and snatches it away from both of them!"

Jack had half a notion to stay and face his cousin, on the chance that Isobel had not told John of her brother's attempt to rob him. Of course he could not wait and face his sister too, when they came home from the honeymoon. But would there be any honeymoon? If he knew anything of his sister, when the first Mrs. Galt turned up at the church Isobel would refuse to go on with the wedding. However, he concluded on the whole he had better keep out of the way till he saw what happened. So he slipped off with his suit-case—taking care not to carry off anything he did not own, this time—and telephoned Olga later that he had been suddenly called out of town.

GUTENBERG BREAKS HIS BACK

No promise of excitement transfigured the face of St. Christopher's Church as the hour of the wedding drew near, and the passing crowds paid no more attention than usual to its dark untrodden porch. Jack, however, took interest enough to make up for the indifference of a thousand. Walking up and down, occasionally dropping into a store when he feared his vigilance might be noticed, he never strayed far from the porch.

It still lacked half an hour of the appointed time, when a taxi slid up to the sidewalk. A lady stepped out of the taxi. She was carrying something under her cloak. A corner of the cloak blew back and showed a dark brown object with glittering spots of gold.

"If the fool hasn't brought it with her!"

Here was the prey thrust under his nose when he had lost all hope of seeing it again. Jack's hunting impulse carried him off his feet. Without a thought he slipped into the porch behind the woman and snatched the treasure from her.

At that moment a crushing blow on the head turned day into night and sent the world spinning. Félice, following Elsa from the taxi with the second volume, had lifted it up with those sinewy rustic arms of hers and brought it down on the robber's head with the force of a maul on a fencepost. She reminded Elsa of Moses dashing the tables of the law on Mount Sinai.

Jack, dazed and reeling, dropped the book from his nerveless hands and staggered out of the porch. Recovering his senses, he dashed up the street, turned the corner at the end of the block, and then, dropping from a run to a quick walk, fumbled his hat into something like its original shape. The mild interest excited among other pedestrians by his battered appearance evaporated, and from that point neither history nor geography has any record of Jack Galt's activities or whereabouts.

THE JEWELS SHINE AGAIN

"Did you hear it?" said Elsa, picking up the fallen volume. The attack had been so instantaneously defeated, it had left less impression upon her than the curious crackling sound the book had made by striking the ground.

"It sounded as if the book was full of pebbles," said Félice, "and so did this one when it hit that wicked man's head."

"Come in quick," said Elsa. She led the way through the church into the vestry, and laid the volume on a table under the window.

"Oh, how terrible!" Félice cried. "The back of that beautiful book is broken from top to bottom."

Elsa Van Ruysen was horrified too,—but in a moment horror turned to delight. She had seen something, as well as heard. From one end of the loosened back projected a little spot of red.

"Is the good book bleeding?" asked Félice, awe-struck.

"Bleeding not blood but rubies," said Elsa. She gently pulled the red spot. It was the end jewel of a necklace of sixty great red gems,—of sixty glowing sunsets.

"See, Félice! This bulging round back is more than the mere back of a book, it's a jewel casket!"

Félice had for once lost her tongue. She just gazed.

"Now let us look at yours," said Elsa. "There's no time to lose."

The back of the second volume was not quite so badly broken, but the leather wedge acting as stopper to the cavity was loose, and a hair-pin pried it out. By degrees, Elsa extracted a sapphire necklace almost as long as the other.

The two women looked at each other,—Elsa triumphant, Félice blankly amazed.

"I can't believe my eyes," Félice gasped. "I feel as if I was living in a story-book. Things like this"—she pointed at the shining little piles of gleaming red and blue—"I never dreamed they could really happen."

John's mother sighed. "It's not the first time I have felt like that, wondering if I could have really done what I had, and wishing it were only a dream. This time, I'm glad it's not. Aren't you? As for wonder,—the strangest things we hear, and don't believe, can't be more strange than what has happened to real folk like you and me, and my father, and his poor mother before him, and our John and his Isobel too. I wondered for a moment at these treasures bursting out of that old book,—but only until I remembered the mysterious tragedy of our family since first we got it. For these are my grandmother's jewels, Félice! I know it, though I never knew of their existence."

She picked up the gems in both hands and touched them reverently to her lips. "That's not for themselves," she said, "but for her, poor woman, and for my dear old father. These are the secret of their mystery, revealed at last. Three generations of men have been hunting for them,—hunting to this very hour. Well, if it had not been for this last of the hunting thieves the secret might never have been discovered, so we ought to thank him, whoever he is. The book would have been locked up in some great collection, and the last thing its owners would dream of allowing would be any tampering with that glorious binding. . . .

"I can see it all now. When that unfortunate woman escaped from the palace—. Did John ever tell you her story, Félice? No? I can imagine why. But ask him to,

and now he can't refuse. They took away everything she had except this Bible, everything they could find. And because they suspected she had smuggled out some of the jewels the prince had given her, they persecuted her. At last some one guessed the missing jewels had been hidden in this old Bible, and killed my poor old father trying to make him give it up.

"Now, Félice, these things are mine, all mine. The book is only mine by law, for I am sure father meant to leave it to my husband. But the jewels are mine by right as well as by law. I won't keep one of them myself. I've inherited too much from my beautiful grandmother already,—all that I have been. I want nothing of hers, nothing to remind me of her, poor soul. The things would be no use to me unless they were turned into money, and I've more of that than I need.

"Am I right if I do as I like with my own, Félice? You won't question that?"

"Surely not. How could I?"

"You have said it, remember!" And Elsa slipped the ruby necklace over Félice's head. "It's mighty becoming to you, my dear. And supposing you don't want it to wear, it will pay off your mortgage and buy a new farm for every one of your boys, if you have another dozen of them.

"Now don't say a word. I'm giving this to John's real mother. I turned out a sham mother, though I did bring him into the world. One day—I feel as if one day I must come back to him. Not here, where others might be hurt. Perhaps in that hill-top hermitage of Isobel's. She won't drive me out, I know.

"But you will always be his true mother, Félice, as you have been since he was a deserted baby. A mother like you would laugh at thanks, and scorn the idea of pay. This is neither, Félice. It's just a little present—a whim, to please myself,—but it comes from a very grateful heart."

Félice could only throw her arms around the woman's neck and kiss her.

"The rest is for them, Félice. They won't be any the happier for its price, but they may be happier to know I wanted them to have it, and have wanted all the time, when they thought I did not." She opened the door into the church. "They'll be coming any minute now. The minister's waiting for them at the door. There's John now, bless his heart! You know what you've promised to do, Félice."

Félice smiled. "I'll manage it, my dear," she said, and slipped into the church as the bride entered from the street.

Isobel had begged for the simplest of weddings, and had her way. Olga and Bridget had called at her hotel, and acted as her escort. This pleased them much, but could not make up for the orange blossoms, wedding marches, and all the pomp and paraphernalia they expected when their time came. They and

Félice were the only spectators, it seemed. But the vestry door was ajar.

The vestry had another door, a private door leading into a long dark passage and the street. This door closed gently as the ceremony ended and the wedding party filed into the empty room.

A great book lay there on the table, open.

“What’s this?” exclaimed the minister, astonished.

Félice smiled, and pointed to a few words penciled by a woman’s hand below the ancient signature of Gutenberg: “To John Galt, with his mother’s love.”

“John,” said Félice, with her hand on the passage door, she would like you to take Isobel out here for a moment.” And then, as he paused in wonder —“It’s the only thing she can let you do for her, John.”

They passed out, and Félice shut the door behind them. They could barely distinguish a woman’s figure in the darkness

radiant as she was. She took John’s face between her hands, and kissed him twice on the lips. She kissed his young wife too, and slipped the sapphire necklace over her head.

THE END IS ALWAYS A BEGINNING

Without a word, she pushed them back towards the door, then turned, and she was gone.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *Unsought Adventure* by Howard Angus Kennedy]