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"'Let me have it!' cried Huckins. 'I have lived in this hole for fifteen years, till I have almost rotted away like the place itself!'"

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CYNTHIA WAKEHAM'S MONEY

BY

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

AUTHOR OF "THE LEAVENWORTH CASE," "HAND AND RING," "THE MILL MYSTERY," "THE DEFENCE OF THE BRIDE," ETC., ETC.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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CYNTHIA WAKEHAM'S MONEY.

BOOK I.

A VILLAGE MYSTERY

I.

A WOMAN'S FACE.

It was verging towards seven o'clock. The train had just left Marston station, and two young men stood on the platform surveying with very different eyes the stretch of country landscape lying before them. Frank Etheridge wore an eager aspect, the aspect of the bright, hopeful, energetic lawyer which he was, and his quick searching gaze flashed rapidly from point to point as if in one of the scattered homes within his view he sought an answer to some problem at present agitating his mind. He was a stranger in Marston.

His companion, Edgar Sellick, wore a quieter air, or at least one more restrained. He was a native of the place, and was returning to it after a short and fruitless absence in the west, to resume his career of physician amid the scenes of his earliest associations. Both were

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tall, well-made, and handsome, and, to draw at once a distinction between them which will effectually separate their personalities, Frank Etheridge was a man to attract the attention of men, and Edgar Sellick that of women; the former betraying at first glance all his good qualities in the keenness of his eye and the frankness of his smile, and the latter hiding his best impulses under an air of cynicism so allied to melancholy that imagination was allowed free play in his behalf. They had attended the same college and had met on the train by chance.

"I am expecting old Jerry, with a buggy," announced Edgar, looking indifferently down the road. The train was on time but Jerry was not, both of which facts were to be expected. "Ah, here he comes. You will ride to the tavern with me?"

"With pleasure," was Frank's cheerful reply; "but what will you do with Jerry? He 's a mile too large, as you see yourself, to be a third party in a buggy ride."

"No doubt about that, but Jerry can walk; it will help to rob him of a little of his avoirdupois. As his future physician I shall prescribe it. I cannot have you miss the supper I have telegraphed for at Henly's."

And being a determined man, he carried this scheme through, to Jerry's manifest but cheerfully accepted discomfort. As they were riding off, Edgar leaned from the buggy, and Frank heard him say to his panting follower:

"Is it known in town that I am coming to-night?" To which that panting follower shrilly replied: "Ay, sir, and

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Tim Jones has lit a bond-fire and Jack Skelton hoisted a flag, so glad they be to have you back. Old Dudgeon was too intimate with the undertaker, sir. We hopes as you will turn a cold shoulder to him—the undertaker, I mean."

At which Frank observed his friend give one of his peculiar smiles which might mean so little and might mean so much, but whatever it meant had that touch of bittersweet in it which at once hurts and attracts.

"You like your profession?" Frank abruptly asked.

Edgar turned, surveyed the other questioningly for a moment, then remarked :

"Not as you like yours. Law seems to be a passion with you."

Frank laughed. "Why not? I have no other love, why not give all my heart to that?"

Edgar did not answer; he was looking straight before him at the lights in the village they were now rapidly approaching.

"How strange it is we should have met in this way," exclaimed the young lawyer. "It is mighty fortunate for me, whatever it may be for you. You know all the people in town, and perhaps can tell me what will shorten my stay into hours."

"Do you call that fortunate?" interrogated the other with one of his quiet smiles.

"Well, no, only from a business view. But you see, Edgar, it is so short a time since I have thought of any-

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thing but business, that I have hardly got used to the situation. I should be sorry, now I come to think of it, to say good-by to you before I heard how you had enjoyed life since we parted on a certain Commencement day. You look older, while I——"

He laughed. How merry the sound, and how the growing twilight seemed to brighten at it! Edgar looked for a moment as if he envied him that laugh, then he said:

"You are not tripped up by petty obstacles. You have wings to your feet and soar above small disappointments. My soles cling to the ground and encounter there difficulty after difficulty. Hence the weariness with which I gain anything. But your business here,—what is it? You say I can aid you. How?"

"Oh, it is a long story which will help to enliven our evening meal. Let us wait till then. At present I am interested in what I see before me. Snug homes, Edgar, and an exquisite landscape."

The other, whose face for the last few minutes had been gradually settling into sterner and sterner lines, nodded automatically but did not look up from the horse he was driving.

"Who lives in these houses? Old friends of yours?" Frank continued.

Edgar nodded again, whipped his horse and for an instant allowed his eyes to wander up and down the road.

"I used to know them all," he acknowledged, "but I suppose there have been changes."

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His tone had altered, his very frame had stiffened. Frank looked at him curiously.

"You seem to be in a hurry," he remarked. "I enjoy this twilight drive, and—haloo! this is an odd old place we are coming to. Suppose you pull up and let me look at it."

His companion, with a strange glance and an awkward air of dissatisfaction, did as he was bid, and Frank leaning from the buggy gazed long and earnestly at the quaint old house and grounds which had attracted his attention. Edgar did not follow his example but sat unmoved, looking fixedly at the last narrow strip of orange light that separated night from day on the distant horizon.

"I feel as if I had come upon something uncanny," murmured Frank. "Look at that double row of poplars stretching away almost as far as we can see? Is it not an ideal Ghost's Walk, especially in this hour of falling shadows. I never saw anything so suggestive in a country landscape before. Each tree looks like a spectre hob-nobbing with its neighbor. Tell me that this is a haunted house which guards this avenue. Nothing less weird should dominate a spot so peculiar."

"Frank, I did not know you were so fanciful," exclaimed the other, lashing his horse with a stinging whip.

"Wait, wait! I am not fanciful, it is the place that is curious. If you were not in a hurry for your supper you would see it too. Come, give it a look. You may have

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observed it a hundred times before, but by this light you must acknowledge that it looks like a place with a history. Come, now, don't it?"

Edgar drew in his horse for the second time and impatiently allowed his glance to follow in the direction indicated by his friend. What he saw has already been partially described. But details will not be amiss here, as the house and its surroundings were really unique, and bespoke an antiquity of which few dwellings can now boast even in the most historic parts of Connecticut.

The avenue of poplars which had first attracted Frank's attention had this notable peculiarity, that it led from nowhere to nowhere. That is, it was not, as is usual in such cases, made the means of approach to the house, but on the contrary ran along its side from road to rear, thick, compact, and gruesome. The house itself was of timber, and was both gray and weather-beaten. It was one of the remnants of that old time when a family homestead rambled in all directions under a huge roof which accommodated itself to each new projection, like the bark to its tree. In this case the roof sloped nearly to the ground on one side, while on the other it beetled over a vine-clad piazza. In front of the house and on both sides of it rose a brick wall that, including the two rows of trees within its jealous cordon, shut off the entire premises from those of the adjoining neighbors, and gave to the whole place an air of desolation and remoteness which the smoke rising from its one tall chimney did not

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seem to soften or relieve. Yet old as it all was, there was no air of decay about the spot, nor was the garden neglected or the vines left untrimmed.

"The home of a hermit," quoth Frank. "You know who lives there of course, but if you did not I would wager that it is some old scion of the past——"

Suddenly he stopped, suddenly his hand was laid on the horse's rein falling somewhat slack in the grasp of his companion. A lamp had at that instant been brought into one of the front rooms of the house he was contemplating, and the glimpse he thus caught of the interior attracted his eyes and even arrested the gaze of the impatient Edgar. For the woman who held the lamp was no common one, and the face which showed above it was one to stop any man who had an eye for the beautiful, the inscrutable, and the tragic. As Frank noted it and marked its exquisite lines, its faultless coloring, and that air of profound and mysterious melancholy which made it stand out distinctly in the well-lighted space about it, he tightened his grip on the reins he had snatched, till the horse stood still in the road, and Edgar impatiently watching him, perceived that the gay look had crept from his face, leaving there an expression of indefinable yearning which at once transfigured and ennobled it.

"What beauty! What unexpected beauty!" Frank whispered at last. "Did you ever see its like, Edgar?"

The answer came with Edgar's most cynical smile:

"Wait till she turns her head."

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And at that moment she did turn it. On the instant Frank drew in his breath and Edgar expected to see him drop his hand from the reins and sink back disillusionized and indifferent. But he did not. On the contrary, his attitude betrayed a still deeper interest and longing, and murmuring, "How sad! poor girl!" he continued to gaze till Edgar, with one strange, almost shrinking look in the direction of the unconscious girl now moving abstractedly across the room, tore the reins from his hands and started the horse again towards their place of destination.

Frank, whom the sudden movement seemed to awaken as from a dream, glanced for a moment almost angrily at his companion, then he settled back in his seat, saying nothing till the lights of the tavern became visible, when he roused himself and inquired:

"Who is that girl, Edgar, and how did she become so disfigured?"

"I don't know," was the short reply; "she has always been so, I believe, at least since I remember seeing her. It looks like the scar of a wound, but I have never heard any explanation given of it."

"Her name, Edgar?"

"Hermione Cavanagh."

"You know her?"

"Somewhat."

"Are you"—the words came with a pant, shortly, intensely, and as if forced from him—"in love—with her?"

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"No." Edgar's passion seemed for the moment to be as great as that of the other. "How came you to think of such a thing?"

"Because—because," Frank whispered almost humbly, "you seemed so short in your replies, and because, I might as well avow it, she seems to me one to command the love of all men."

"Well, sirs, here I be as quick as you," shouted a voice in their rear, and old Jerry came lumbering forward, just in time to hold their horse as they alighted at the tavern.

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II.

A LAWYER'S ADVENTURE.

SUPPER that night did not bring to these two friends all the enjoyment which they had evidently anticipated. In the first place it was continually interrupted by greetings to the young physician whose unexpected return to his native town had awakened in all classes a decided enthusiasm. Then Frank was moody, he who was usually gaiety itself. He wanted to talk about the beautiful and unfortunate Miss Cavanagh, and Edgar did not, and this created embarrassment between them, an embarrassment all the more marked that there seemed to be some undefined reason for Edgar's reticence not to be explained by any obvious cause. At length Frank broke out impetuously :

"If you won't tell me anything about this girl, I must look up some one who will. Those cruel marks on her face have completed the charm of her beauty, and not till I know something of their history and of her, will I go to sleep to-night. So much for the impression which a woman's face can make upon an unsusceptible man."

"Frank," observed the other, coldly, "I should say that

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your time might be much better employed in relating to me the cause for your being in Marston."

The young lawyer started, shook himself, and laughed.

"Oh, true, I had forgotten," said he, and supper being now over he got up and began pacing the floor. "Do you know any one here by the name of Harriet Smith?"

"No," returned the other, "but I have been away a year, and many persons may have come into town in that time."

"But I mean an old resident," Frank explained, "a lady of years, possibly a widow."

"I never heard of such a person," rejoined Edgar. "Are you sure there is such a woman in town? I should be apt to know it if there were."

"I am not sure she is here now, or for that matter that she is living, but if she is not and I learn the names and whereabouts of any heirs she may have left behind her, I shall be satisfied with the results of my journey. Harriet Smith! Surely you have heard of her."

"No," Edgar protested, "I have not."

"It is odd," remarked Frank, wrinkling his brows in some perplexity. "I thought I should have no trouble in tracing her. Not that I care," he avowed with brightening countenance. "On the contrary, I can scarcely quarrel with a fact that promises to detain me in your company for a few days."

"No? Then your mind has suddenly changed in that regard," Edgar dryly insinuated.

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Frank blushed. "I think not," was his laughing reply. "But let me tell my story. It may interest you in a pur suit that I begin to see is likely to possess difficulties.' And lighting a cigar, he sat down with his friend by the open window. "I do not suppose you know much about Brooklyn, or, if you do, that you are acquainted with that portion of it which is called Flatbush. I will therefore explain that this outlying village is a very old one, ante-dating the Revolution. Though within a short car-drive from the great city, it has not yet given up its life to it, but preserves in its one main street at least, a certain individuality which still connects it with the past. My office, as you know, is in New York, but I have several clients in Brooklyn and one or two in Flatbush, so I was not at all surprised, though considerably put out, when one evening, just as I was about to start for the theatre, a telegram was handed me by the janitor, enjoining me to come without delay to Flatbush prepared to draw up the will of one, Cynthia Wakeham, lying, as the sender of the telegram declared, at the point of death. Though I knew neither this name, nor that of the man who signed it, which was Hiram Huckins, and had no particular desire to change the place of my destination at that hour, I had really no good reason for declining the business thus offered me. So making a virtue of necessity, I gave up the theatre and started instead for Flatbush, which, from the house where I lodge in upper New York, is a good hour and a half's ride even by

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the way of the bridge and the elevated roads. It was therefore well on towards ten o'clock before I arrived in the shaded street which in the daylight and in the full brightness of a summer's sun I had usually found so attractive, but which at night and under the circumstances which had brought me there looked both sombre and forbidding. However I had not come upon an errand of pleasure, so I did not spend much time in contemplating my surroundings, but beckoning to the conductor of the street-car on which I was riding, I asked him if he knew Mrs. Wakeham's house, and when he nodded, asked him to set me down before it. I thought he gave me a queer look, but as his attention was at that moment diverted, I could not be sure of it, and before he came my way again the car had stopped and he was motioning to me to alight.

"'That is the house,' said he, pointing to two huge gate-posts glimmering whitely in the light of a street-lamp opposite, and I was on the sidewalk and in front of the two posts before I remembered that a man on the rear platform of the car had muttered as I stepped by him: 'A visitor for Widow Wakeham, eh; she *must* be sick, then!'

"The house stood back a short distance from the street, and as I entered the gate, which by the way looked as if it would tumble down if I touched it, I could see nothing but a gray mass with one twinkling light in it. But as I drew nearer I became aware that it was not a well-kept and hospitable mansion towards which I was tending,

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however imposing might be its size and general structure. If only from the tangled growth of the shrubbery about me and the long dank stalks of the weeds that lay as if undisturbed by mortal feet upon the walk, I could gather that whatever fortune Mrs. Wakeham might have to leave she had not expended much in the keeping of her home. But it was upon reaching the house I experienced the greatest surprise. There were walls before me, no doubt, and a huge portico, but the latter was hanging as it were by faith to supports so dilapidated that even the darkness of that late hour could not hide their ruin or the impending fall of the whole structure. So old, so uncared-for, and so utterly out of keeping with the errand upon which I had come looked the whole place that I instinctively drew back, assured that the conductor had made some mistake in directing me thither. But no sooner had I turned my back upon the house, than a window was thrown up over my head and I heard the strangely eager voice of a man say :

"'This is the place, sir. Wait, and I will open the door for you.'

"I did as he bade me, though not without some reluctance. The voice, for all its tone of anxiety, sounded at once false and harsh, and I instinctively associated with it a harsh and false face. The house, too, did not improve in appearance upon approach. The steps shook under my tread, and I could not but notice by the faint light sifting through the bushes from the lamp on

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the other side of the way, that the balustrades had been pulled from their places, leaving only gaping holes to mark where they had once been. The door was intact, but in running my hand over it I discovered that the mouldings had been stripped from its face, and that the knocker, hanging as it did by one nail, was ready to fall at the first provocation. If Cynthia Wakeham lived here, it would be interesting to know the extent of her wealth. As there seemed to be some delay in the opening of the door, I had time to note that the grounds (all of these houses have grounds about them) were of some extent, but, as I have said, in a manifest condition of overgrowth and neglect. As I mused upon the contrast they must afford in the bright daylight to the wide and well-kept lawns of the more ambitious owners on either side, a footstep sounded on the loose boards which had evidently been flung down at one side of the house as a sort of protection to the foot from the darkness and mud of the neglected path, and a woman's form swung dimly into view, laden with a great pile of what looked to me like brushwood. As she passed she seemed to become conscious of my presence, and, looking up, she let the huge bundle slip slowly from her shoulders till it lay in the darkness at her feet.

"'Are you,' she whispered, coming close to the foot of the steps, 'going in there?'

"'Yes,' I returned, struck by the mingled surprise and incredulity in her tone.

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"She stood still a minute, then came up a step.

"'Are you a minister?' she asked.

"'No,' I laughed; 'why?'

"She seemed to reason with herself before saying: 'No one ever goes into that house; I thought perhaps you did not know. They won't have any one. Would you mind telling me,' she went on, in a hungry whisper almost thrilling to hear, coming as it did through the silence and darkness of the night, 'what you find in the house? I will be at the gate, sir, and——'

"She paused, probably awed by the force of my exclamation, and picking up her bundle of wet boughs, slunk away, but not without turning more than once before she reached the gate. Scarcely had she disappeared into the street when a window went up in a neighboring house. At the same moment, some one, I could not tell whether it was a man or a woman, came up the path as far as the first trees and there paused, while a shrill voice called out:

"'They never unlocks that door; visitors ain't wanted.'

"Evidently, if I were not admitted soon I should have the whole neighborhood about me.

"I lifted the knocker, but it came off in my hand. Angry at the mischance, and perhaps a little moved by the excitement of my position, I raised the broken piece of iron and gave a thundering knock on the rotten panels before me. Instantly the door opened, creaking ominously as it did so, and a man stood in the gap with a

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wretched old kerosene lamp in his hand. The apologetic leer on his evil countenance did not for a moment deceive me.

"'I beg your pardon,' he hurriedly exclaimed, and his voice showed he was a man of education, notwithstanding his forlorn and wretched appearance, 'but the old woman had a turn just as you came, and I could not leave her.'

"I looked at him, and instinct told me to quit the spot and not enter a house so vilely guarded. For the man was not only uncouth to the last degree in dress and aspect, but sinister in expression and servilely eager in bearing.

"'Won't you come in?' he urged. 'The old woman is past talking, but she can make signs; perhaps an hour from now she will not be able to do even that.'

"'Do you allude to the woman who wishes to make her will?' I asked.

"'Yes,' he answered, greedily, 'Cynthia Wakeham, my sister.' And he gently pushed the door in a way that forced me to enter or show myself a coward.

"I took heart and went in. What poverty I beheld before me in the light of that solitary smoking lamp! If the exterior of the house bore the marks of devastation, what shall I say of the barren halls and denuded rooms which now opened before me? Not a chair greeted my eyes, though a toppling stool here and there showed that people sat in this place. Nor did I see a table, though somewhere in some remote region beyond the staircase I

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heard the clatter of plates, as if eating were also known in this home of almost ostentatious penury. Staircase I say, but I should have said steps, for the balustrades were missing here just as they had been missing without, and not even a rail remained to speak of old-time comfort and prosperity.

"'I am very poor,' humbly remarked the man, answering my look of perplexity. 'It is my sister who has the money.' And moving towards the stairs, he motioned me to ascend.

"Even then I recoiled, not knowing what to make of this adventure; but hearing a hollow groan from above, uttered in tones unmistakably feminine, I remembered my errand and went up, followed so closely by the man, that his breath, mingled with the smell of that vile lamp, seemed to pant on my shoulder. I shall never smell kerosene again without recalling the sensations of that moment.

"Arriving at the top of the stair, up which my distorted shadow had gone before me, I saw an open door and went in. A woman was lying in one corner on a hard and uncomfortable bed, a woman whose eyes drew me to her side before a word had been spoken.

"She was old and in the last gasp of some fatal disease. But it was not this which impressed me most. It was the searching look with which she greeted me,—a piteous, hunted look, like that of some wild animal driven to bay and turning upon her conqueror for some signs of re-

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lenting or pity. It made the haggard face eloquent ; it assured me without a word that some great wrong had been done or was about to be done, and that I must show myself at once her friend if I would gain her confidence.

"Advancing to her side, I spoke to her kindly, asking if she were Cynthia Wakeham, and if she desired the services of a lawyer.

"She at once nodded painfully but unmistakably, and, lifting her hand, pointed to her lips and shook her head.

"'She means that she cannot speak,' explained the man, in a pant, over my shoulder.

"Moving a step aside in my disgust, I said to her, not to him :

"'But you can hear?'

"Her intelligent eye responded before her head could nod its painful acquiescence.

"'And you have property to leave?'

"'This house,' answered the man.

"My eyes wandered mechanically to the empty cupboards about me from which the doors had been wrenched and, as I now saw from the looks of the fireplace, burned.

"'The ground—the ground is worth something,' quoth the man.

"The avidity with which he spoke satisfied me at least upon one point—*he* was the expectant heir.

"'Your name?' I asked, turning sharply upon him.

"'Hiram Huckins.'

"It was the name attached to the telegram.

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"'And you are the brother of this woman?'

"'Yes, yes.'

"I had addressed him, but I looked at her. She answered my look with a steadfast gaze, but there was no dissent in it, and I considered that point settled.

"'She is a married woman, then?'

"'A widow; husband died long years ago.'

"'Any children?'

"'No.' And I saw in her face that he spoke the truth.

"'But you and she have brothers or sisters? You are not her only relative?'

"'I am the only one who has stuck by her,' he sullenly answered. 'We did have a sister, but she is gone; fled from home years ago; lost in the great world; dead, perhaps. *She* don't care for her; ask her.'

"I did ask her, but the haggard face said nothing. The eyes burned, but they had a waiting look.

"'To whom do you want to leave your property?' I inquired of her pointedly.

"Had she glanced at the man, had her face even changed, or so much as a tremor shook her rigid form, I might have hesitated. But the quiet way in which she lifted her hand and pointed with one finger in his direction while she looked straight at me, convinced me that whatever was wrong, her mind was made up as to the disposal of her property. So taking out my papers, I sat down on the rude bench drawn up beside the bed and began to write.

"The man stood behind me with the lamp. He was so

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eager and bent over me so closely that the smell of the lamp and his nearness were more than I could bear.

"'Set down the lamp,' I cried. 'Get a table—something—don't lean over me like that.'

"But there was nothing, actually nothing for him to put the lamp on, and I was forced to subdue my disgust and get used as best I could to his presence and to his great shadow looming on the wall behind us. But I could not get used to her eyes hurrying me, and my hand trembled as I wrote.

"'Have you any name but Cynthia?' I inquired, looking up.

"She painfully shook her head.

"'You had better tell me what her husband's name was,' I suggested to the brother.

"'John Lapham Wakeham,' was the quick reply.

"I wrote down both names. Then I said, looking intently at the dying widow:

"'As you cannot speak, you must make signs. Shake your hand when you wish to say no, and move it up and down when you wish to say yes. Do you understand?'

"She signalled somewhat impatiently that she did, and then, lifting her hand with a tremulous movement, pointed anxiously towards a large Dutch clock, which was the sole object of adornment in the room.

"'She urges you to hurry,' whispered the man. 'Make it short, make it short. The doctor I called in this morning said she might die any minute.'

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"As from her appearance I judged this to be only too possible, I hastily wrote a few words more, and then asked :

"'Is this property all that you have to leave?'

"I had looked at her, though I knew it would be the man who would answer.

"'Yes, yes, this house,' he cried. 'Put it strong; this house and all there is in it.'

"I thought of its barren rooms and empty cupboards, and a strange fancy seized me. Going straight to the woman, I leaned over her and said :

"'Is it your desire to leave all that you possess to this brother? Real property and personal, this house, and also everything it contains?'

"She did not answer, even by a sign, but pointed again to the clock.

"'She means that you are to go right on,' he cried. 'And indeed you must,' he pursued, eagerly. 'She won't be able to sign her name if you wait much longer.'

"I felt the truth of this, and yet I hesitated.

"'Where are the witnesses?' I asked. 'She must have two witnesses to her signature.'

"'Won't I do for one?' he inquired.

"'No,' I returned; 'the one benefited by a will is disqualified from witnessing it.'

"He looked confounded for a moment. Then he stepped to the door and shouted, 'Briggs! Briggs!'

"As if in answer there came a clatter as of falling dishes,

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and as proof of the slavery which this woman had evidently been under to his avarice, she gave a start, dying as she was, and turned upon him with a frightened gaze, as if she expected from him an ebullition of wrath.

"'Briggs, is there a light in Mr. Thompson's house?'

"'Yes,' answered a gruff voice from the foot of the stairs.

"'Go then, and ask him or the first person you see there, if he will come in here for a minute. Be very polite and don't swear, or I won't pay you the money I promised you. Say that Mrs. Wakeham is dying, and that the lawyer is drawing up her will. Get James Sotherby to come too, and if he won't do it, somebody else who is respectable. Everything must be very legal, sir,' he explained, turning to me, 'very legal.'

"Not knowing what to think of this man, but seeing only one thing to do, I nodded, and asked the woman whom I should name as executor. She at once indicated her brother, and as I wrote in his name and concluded the will, she watched me with an intentness that made my nerves creep, though I am usually anything but susceptible to such influences. When the document was ready I rose and stood at her side in some doubt of the whole transaction. Was it her will I had expressed in the paper I held before me, or his? Had she been constrained by his influence to do what she was doing, or was her mind free to act and but obeying its natural instincts? I determined to make one effort at finding out. Turning towards the man, I said firmly:

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"'Before Mrs. Wakeham signs this will she must know exactly what it contains. I can read it to her, but I prefer her to read the paper for herself. Get her glasses, then, if she needs them, and bring them here at once, or I throw up this business and take the document away with me out of the house.'

"'But she has no glasses,' he protested; 'they were broken long ago.'

"'Get them,' I cried; 'or get yours,—she shall not sign that document till you do.'

"But he stood hesitating, loth, as I now believe, to leave us together, though that was exactly what I desired, which she, seeing, feverishly clutched my sleeve, and, with a force of which I should not have thought her capable, made wild gestures to the effect that I should not delay any longer, but read it to her myself.

"Seeing by this, as I thought, that her own feelings were, notwithstanding my doubts, really engaged in the same direction as his, I desisted from my efforts to separate the two, if it were only for a moment, and read the will aloud. It ran thus:

"The last will and testament of Cynthia Wakeham, widow of John Lapham Wakeham, of Flatbush, Kings County, New York.

"First: I direct all my just debts and funeral expenses to be paid.

"Second: I give, devise, and bequeath to my brother, Hiram Huckins, all the property, real and personal,

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which I own, or to which I may be entitled, at the time of my death, and I appoint him the sole executor of this my last will and testament.

"Witness my hand this fifth day of June, in the year eighteen hundred and eighty-eight.

"Signed, published, and declared by the Testatrix to be her last will and testament, in our presence who, at her request and in her presence and in the presence of each other, have subscribed our names hereto as witnesses, on this 5th day of June, 1888.

"'Is that the expression of your wishes?' I asked, when I had finished.

"She nodded, and reached out her hand for the pen.

"'You must wait,' said I, 'for the witnesses.'

"But even as I spoke their approach was heard, and Huckins was forced to go to the door with the lamp, for the hall was pitch dark and the stairs dangerous. As he turned his back upon us, I thought Mrs. Wakeham moved and opened her lips, but I may have been mistaken, for his black and ominous shadow lay over her face, and I could discern but little of its expression.

"'Is there anything you want?' I asked her, rising and going to the bedside.

"But Huckins was alert to all my movements, if he had stepped for a moment away.

"'Give her water,' he cried, wheeling sharply about.

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And pointing to a broken glass standing on the floor at her side, he watched me while I handed it to her.

"'She mus' n't give out now,' he pursued, with one eye on us and the other on the persons coming upstairs.

"'She will not,' I returned, seeing her face brighten at the sound of approaching steps.

"'It 's Miss Thompson and Mr. Dickey,' now spoke up the gruff voice of Briggs from the foot of the steps. 'No other folks was up, so I brought them along.'

"The young woman, who at this instant appeared in the doorway, blushed and cast a shy look over her shoulder at the fresh-faced man who followed her.

"'It 's all right, Minnie,' immediately interposed that genial personage, with a cheerful smile; 'every one knows we are keeping company and mean to be married as soon as the times improve.'

"'Yes, every one knows,' she sighed, and stepped briskly into the room, her intelligent face and kindly expression diffusing a cheer about her such as the dismal spot had doubtless lacked for years.

"I heard afterward that this interesting couple had been waiting for the times to improve, for the last fifteen years."

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III.

CONTINUATION OF A LAWYER'S ADVENTURE.

"THE two witnesses had scarcely entered the room before the dying woman stretched out her hand again for the pen. As I handed it to her and placed the document before her on my portfolio, I asked :

"'Do you declare this paper to be your last will and testament and do you request these persons to witness it?'

"She bowed a quick acquiescence, and put the pen at the place I pointed out to her.

"'Shall I support your hand?' I pursued, fearful she would not have the strength to complete the task.

"But she shook her head and wrote her name in hastily, with a feverish energy that astonished me. Expecting to see her drop back exhausted if not lifeless as the pen left the paper, I drew the document away and bent to support her. But she did not need my assistance. Indeed she looked stronger than before, and what was still more astonishing, seemed even more anxious and burningly eager.

"'Is she holding up till the witnesses have affixed their

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signatures?' I inwardly queried. And intent upon relieving her, I hastily explained to them the requirements of the case, and did not myself breathe easily till I saw their two names below hers. Then I felt that she could rest; but to my surprise but one sigh of relief rose in that room, and that was from the cringing, cruel-eyed inheritor, who, at the first intimation that the document was duly signed and attested, sprang from his corner with such a smile that the place seemed to grow hideous, and I drew involuntarily back.

"'Let me have it,' were his first words. 'I have lived in this hole, and for fifteen years made myself a slave to her whims, till I have almost rotted away like the place itself. And now I want my reward. Let me have the will.'

"His hand was on the paper and in my surprise I had almost yielded it up to him, when another hand seized it, and the dying, gasping woman, mumbling and mouthing, pointed for the third time to the clock and then to one corner of the paper, trying to make me understand something I entirely failed to comprehend.

"'What is it?' I asked. 'What do you want? Is not the will to your liking?'

"'Yes, yes,' her frenzied nods seemed to say, and yet she continued pointing to the clock and then to the paper while the angry man before her stared and muttered in a mixture of perplexity and alarm which added no little to the excitement of the harrowing scene.

"'Let me see if I can tell what she wants,' suddenly

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observed the young woman who had signed the paper as a witness. And bringing her sweet womanly face around where the rolling eye of the woman could see her, she asked with friendly interest in her tone, 'Do you wish the time of day written on the will?'

"Oh, the relief that swept over that poor woman's tortured countenance! She nodded and looked up at me so confidingly that in despite of the oddity of the request I rapidly penned after the date, the words 'at half-past ten o'clock P.M.,' and caused the witnesses to note the addition.

"This seemed to satisfy her, and she sank back with a sign that I was to yield to her brother's demand and give him the paper he coveted, and when I hesitated, started up again with such a frenzied appeal in her face that in the terror of seeing her die before our eyes, I yielded it to his outstretched hand, expecting at the most to see him put it in his pocket.

"But no, the moment he felt it in his grasp, he set down the lamp, and, without a look in her direction or a word of thanks to me or the two neighbors who had come to his assistance, started rapidly from the room. Disturbed and doubting my own wisdom in thus yielding to an impulse of humanity which may be called weakness by such strong-minded men as yourself, I turned to follow him, but the woman's trembling hand again stopped me; and convinced at last that I was alarming myself unnecessarily and that she had had as much pleasure in making

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him her heir as he in being made so, I turned to pay her my adieux, when the expression of her face, changed now from what it had been to one of hope and trembling delight, made me pause again in wonder, and almost prepared me for the low and thrilling whisper which now broke from her lips in distinct tones.

"'Is he gone?'

"'Then you can speak,' burst from the young woman.

"The widow gave her an eloquent look.

"'I have not spoken," said she, 'for two days; I have been saving my strength. Hark!' she suddenly whispered. 'He has no light, he will pitch over the landing. No, no, he has gone by it in safety, he has reached——' she paused and listened intently, trembling as she did so—'Will he go into *that* room?—Run: follow! see if he has dared—but no, he has gone down to the kitchen,' came in quick glad relief from her lips as a distant door shut softly at the back end of the house. 'He is leaving the house and will never come back. I am released forever from his watchfulness; I am free! Now, sir, draw up another will, quick; let these two kind friends wait and see me sign it, and God will bless you for your kindness and my eyes will close in peace upon this cruel world.'

"Aghast but realizing in a moment that she had but lent herself to her brother's wishes in order to rid herself of a surveillance which had possibly had an almost mesmeric influence upon her, I opened my portfolio again, saying:

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"'You declare yourself then to have been unduly influenced by your brother in making the will you have just signed in the presence of these two witnesses?'

"To which she replied with every evidence of a clear mind——

"'I do; I do. I could not move, I could not breathe, I could not think except as he willed it. When he was near, and he was always near, I had to do just as he wished—perhaps because I was afraid of him, perhaps because he had the stronger will of the two, I do not know; I cannot explain it, but he ruled me and has done so all my life till this hour. Now he has left me, left me to die, as he thinks, unfriended and alone, but I am strong yet, stronger than he knows, and before I turn my face to the wall, I will tear my property from his unholy grasp and give it where I have always wanted it to go—to my poor, lost, unfortunate sister.'

"'Ah,' thought I, 'I see, I see'; and satisfied at last that I was no longer being made the minister of an unscrupulous avarice, I hastily drew up a second will, only pausing to ask the name of her sister and the place of her residence.'

"'Her name is Harriet Smith,' was the quick reply, and she lived when last I heard of her in Marston, a little village in Connecticut. She may be dead now, it is so long since I received any news of her,—Hiram would never let me write to her,—but she may have had children, and if so, they are just as welcome as she is to the little I have to give.'

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"'Her children's names?' I asked.

"'I don't know, I don't know anything about her. But you will find out everything necessary when I am gone; and if she is living, or has children, you will see that they are reinstated in the home of their ancestors. For,' she now added eagerly, 'they must come here to live, and build up this old house again and make it respectable once more or they cannot have my money. I want you to put that in my will; for when I have seen these old walls toppling, the doors wrenched off, and its lintels demolished for firewood, for *firewood*, sir, I have kept my patience alive and my hope up by saying, 'Never mind; some day Harriet's children will make this all right again. The old house which their kind grandfather was good enough to give me for my own, shall not fall to the ground without one effort on my part to save it. And this is how I will accomplish it. This house is for Harriet or Harriet's children if they will come here and live in it one year, but if they will not do this, let it go to my brother, for I shall have no more interest in it. You heed me, lawyer?'

"I nodded and wrote on busily, thinking, perhaps, that if Harriet or Harriet's children did not have some money of their own to fix up this old place, they would scarcely care to accept their forlorn inheritance. Meantime the two witnesses who had lingered at the woman's whispered entreaty exchanged glances, and now and then a word expressive of the interest they were taking in this unusual affair.

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"'Who is to be the executor of *this* will?' I inquired.

"'You,' she cried. Then, as I started in surprise, she added: 'I know nobody but you. Put yourself in as executor, and oh, sir, when it is all in your hands, find my lost relatives, I beseech you, and bring them here, and take them into my mother's room at the end of the hall, and tell them it is all theirs, and that they must make it their room and fix it up and lay a new floor—you remember, a new floor—and——' Her words rambled off incoherently, but her eyes remained fixed and eager.

"I wrote in my name as executor.

"When the document was finished, I placed it before her and asked the young lady who had been acting as my lamp-bearer to read it aloud. This she did; the second will reading thus:

"The last will and testament of Cynthia Wakeham, widow of John Lapham Wakeham, of Flatbush, Kings County, New York.

"First: I direct all my just debts and funeral expenses to be paid.

"Second: I give, devise, and bequeath all my property to my sister, Harriet Smith, if living at my death, and, if not living, then to her children living at my death, in equal shares, upon condition, nevertheless, that the legatee or legatees who take under this will shall forthwith take up their residence in the house I now occupy in Flatbush, and continue to reside therein for at least

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one year thence next ensuing. If neither my said sister nor any of her descendants be living at my death, or if so living, the legatee who takes hereunder shall fail to comply with the above conditions, then all of said property shall go to my brother, Hiram Huckins.

"Third: I appoint Frank Etheridge, of New York City, sole executor of this my last will and testament, thereby revoking all other wills by me made, especially that which was executed on this date at half-past ten o'clock.

"Witness my hand this fifth day of June, in the year eighteen hundred and eighty-eight.

"Signed, published, and declared by the testatrix to be her last will and testament, in our presence, who, at her request and in her presence and in the presence of each other, have subscribed our names hereto as witnesses, on this 5th day of June, 1888, at five minutes to eleven P.M.

"This was satisfactory to the dying widow, and her strength kept up till she signed it and saw it duly attested; but when that was done, and the document safely stowed away in my pocket, she suddenly collapsed and sank back in a dying state upon her pillow.

"'What are we going to do?' now cried Miss Thompson, with looks of great compassion at the poor woman thus bereft, at the hour of death, of the natural care of relatives and friends. 'We cannot leave her here alone. Has she no doctor—no nurse?'

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"'Doctors cost money,' murmured the almost speechless sufferer. And whether the smile which tortured her poor lips as she said these words was one of bitterness at the neglect she had suffered, or of satisfaction at the thought she had succeeded in saving this expense, I have never been able to decide.

"As I stooped to raise her now fallen head a quick, loud sound came to our ears from the back of the house, as of boards being ripped up from the floor by a reckless and determined hand. Instantly the woman's face assumed a ghastly look, and, tossing up her arms, she cried:

"'He has found the box!—the box! Stop him! Do not let him carry it away! It is——" She fell back, and I thought all was over; but in another instant she had raised herself almost to a sitting position, and was pointing straight at the clock. 'There! there! look! the clock!' And without a sigh or another movement she sank back on the pillow, dead."

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IV.

FLINT AND STEEL.

"GREATLY startled, I drew back from the bed which but a moment before had been the scene of such mingled emotions.

"'All is over here,' said I, and turned to follow the man whom with her latest breath she had bidden me to stop from leaving the house.'

"As I could not take the lamp and leave my companions in darkness, I stepped out into a dark hall; but before I had taken a half dozen steps I heard a cautious foot descending the back stairs, and realizing that it would be both foolish and unsafe for me to endeavor to follow him through the unlighted rooms and possibly intricate passages of this upper hall, I bounded down the front stairs, and feeling my way from door to door, at last emerged into a room where there was a lamp burning.

"I had found the kitchen, and in it were Huckins and the man Briggs. Huckins had his hand on the latch of the outside door, and from his look and the bundle he carried, I judged that if I had been a minute later he would have been in full flight from the house.

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"'Put out the light!' he shouted to Briggs.

"But I stepped forward, and the man did not dare obey him, and Huckins himself looked cowed and dropped his hand from the door-knob.

"'Where are you going?' I asked, moving rapidly to his side.

"'Is n't she dead?' was his only answer, given with a mixture of mockery and triumph difficult to describe.

"'Yes,' I assented, 'she is dead; but that does not justify you in flying the house.'

"'And who says I am flying?' he protested. 'Cannot I go out on an errand without being told I am running away?'

"'An errand,' I repeated, 'two minutes after your sister has breathed her last! Don't talk to me of errands. Your appearance is that of flight, and that bundle in your arms looks like the cause of it.'

"His eye, burning with a passion very natural under the circumstances, flashed over me with a look of disdain.

"'And what do you know of my appearance, and what is it to you if I carry or do not carry a bundle out of this house? Am I not master of everything here?'

"'No,' I cried boldly; then, thinking it might perhaps be wiser not to undeceive him as to his position till I had fully sounded his purposes, I added somewhat nonchalantly: 'that is, you are not master enough to take anything away that belonged to your sister. If you can prove to me that there is nothing in that bundle save

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what is yours and was yours before your sister died, well and good, you may go away with it and leave your poor dead sister to be cared for in her own house by strangers. But while I have the least suspicion that property of any nature belonging to this estate is hidden away under that roll of old clothes, you stop here if I have to appeal first to the strength of my arms and then to that of the law.'

"'But,' he quavered, 'it is mine—*mine*. I am but carrying away my own. Did you not draw up the will yourself? Don't you know she gave everything to me?'

"'What I know has nothing to do with it,' I retorted. 'Did you think because you saw a will drawn up in your favor that therefore you had immediate right to what she left, and could run away with her effects before her body was cold? A will has to be proven, my good man, before an heir has any right to touch what it leaves. If you do not know this, why did you try to slink away like a thief, instead of walking out of the front door like a proprietor? Your manner convicts you, man; so down with the bundle, or I shall have to give you in charge of the constable as a thief.'

"'You——!' he began, but stopped. Either his fears were touched or his cunning awakened, for after surveying me for a moment with mingled doubt and hatred, he suddenly altered his manner, till it became almost cringing, and muttering consolingly to himself, 'After all it is only a delay; everything will soon be mine,' he laid the bundle on the one board of the broken table beside

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us, adding with hypocritical meekness: 'It was only some little keepsakes of my sister, not enough to make such a fuss about.'

"'I will see to these *keepsakes*,' said I, and was about to raise the bundle, when he sprang upon me.

"'You——you——!' he cried. 'What right have you to touch them or to look at them? Because you drew up the will, does that make you an authority here? I don't believe it, and I won't see you put on the airs of it. I will go for the constable myself. I am not afraid of the law. I will see who is master in this house where I have lived in wretched slavery for years, and of which I shall be soon the owner.'

"'Very well,' said I, 'let us go find the constable.'

"The calmness with which I uttered this seemed at once to abash and infuriate him.

"He alternately cringed and ruffled himself, shuffling from one foot to the other till I could scarcely conceal the disgust with which he inspired me. At last he blurted forth with forced bravado:

"'Have I any rights, or have n't I any rights! You think because I don't know the law, that you can make a fool of me, but you can't. I may have lived like a dog, and I may not have a good coat to my back, but I am the man to whom this property has been given, as no one knows better than yourself; and if I chose to lift my foot and kick you out of that door for calling me a thief, who would blame me?—answer me that.'

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"'No one,' said I, with a serenity equal to his fury, 'if this property is indeed to be yours, and if I know it as you say.'

"Struck by the suggestion implied in these words, as by a blow in the face for which he was wholly unprepared, he recoiled for a moment, looking at me with mingled doubt and amazement.

"'And do you mean to deny to my face, within an hour of the fact, and with the very witnesses to it still in the house, what you yourself wrote in this paper I now flaunt in your face? If so, *you* are the fool, and I the cunning one, as you will yet see, Mr. Lawyer.

"I met his look with great calmness.

"'The hour you speak of contained many minutes, Mr. Huckins; and it takes only a few for a woman to change her mind, and to record that change.'

"'Her mind?' The stare of terror and dismay in his eyes was contradicted by the laugh on his lips. 'What mind had she after I left her? She could n't even speak. You cannot frighten me.'

"'Mr. Huckins,' I now said, beckoning to the two witnesses whom our loud talking had guided to the spot where we were, 'I have thought best to tell you what some men might have thought it more expedient perhaps to conceal. Mrs. Wakeham, who evidently felt herself unduly influenced by you in the making of that will you hold in your hand, immediately upon your withdrawal testified her desire to make another, and as I had no in-

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terest in the case save the desire to fulfil her real wishes, I at once complied with her request, and formally drew up a second will more in consonance with her evident desires.'

"'It is a lie, a lie ; you are deceiving me !' shrieked the unhappy man, taken wholly by surprise. 'She could n't utter a word ; her tongue was paralyzed ; how could you know her wishes ?'

"'Mrs. Wakeham had some of the cunning of her brother,' I observed. 'She knew when to play dumb and when to speak. She talked very well when released from the influence of your presence.'

"Overwhelmed, he cast one glance at the two witnesses, who by this time had stepped to my side, and reading confirmation in the severity of their looks, he fell slowly back against the table where he stood leaning heavily, with his head fallen on his breast.

"'Who has she given the house to ?' he asked at last faintly, almost humbly.

"'That I have no right to tell you,' I answered. 'When the will is offered for probate you will know ; that is all the comfort I can give you.'

"'She has left nothing to me, that much I see,' he bitterly exclaimed ; and his head, lifted with momentary passion, fell again. 'Ten years gone to the dogs,' he murmured ; 'ten years, and not a cent in reward ! It is enough to make a man mad.' Suddenly he started forward in irrepressible passion. 'You talk about influ-

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ence,' he cried, 'my influence; what influence did *you* have upon her? Some, or she would never have dared to contradict her dying words in that way. But I 'll have it out with you in the courts. I 'll never submit to being robbed in this way.'

"'You do not know that you are robbed,' said I, 'wait till you hear the will.'

"'The will? This is her will!' he shrieked, waving before him the paper that he held; 'I will not believe in any other; I will not acknowledge any other.'

"'You may have to,' now spoke up Mr. Dickey in strong and hearty tones; 'and if I might advise you as a neighbor, I would say that the stiller you keep now the better it probably will be for you in the future. You have not earned a good enough reputation among us for disinterestedness to bluster in this way about your rights.'

"'I don't want any talk from you,' was Huckins' quick reply, but these words from one who had the ears of the community in which he lived had nevertheless produced their effect; for his manner changed and it was with quite a softened air that he finally put up the paper in his pocket and said: 'I beg pardon if I have talked too loud and passionately. But the property was given to me and it shall not be taken away if any fight on my part can keep it. So let me see you all go, for I presume you do not intend to take up your abode in this house just yet.'

"'No,' I retorted with some significance, 'though it might be worth our while. It may contain more keep-

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sakes; I presume there are one or two boards yet that have not been ripped up from the floors. Then ashamed of what was perhaps an unnecessary taunt, I hastened to add: 'My reason for telling you of the existence of a second will is that you might no longer make the one you hold an excuse for rifling these premises and abstracting their contents. Nothing here is yours—yet; and till you inherit, if ever you do inherit, any attempt to hide or carry away one article which is not manifestly your own, will be regarded by the law as a theft and will be punished as such. But,' I went on, seeking to still further mitigate language calculated to arouse any man's rage, whether he was a villain or not, 'you have too much sense, and doubtless too much honesty to carry out such intentions now you know that you have lost whatever rights you considered yourself to possess, so I will say no more about it but at once make my proposition, which is that we give this box into the charge of Mr. Dickey, who will stand surety for it till your sister can be found. If you agree to this——'

"'But I won't agree,' broke in Huckins, furiously. 'Do you think I am a fool? The box is mine, I say, and——'

"'Or perhaps,' I calmly interrupted, 'you would prefer the constable to come and take both it and the house in charge. This would better please me. Shall I send for the constable?'

"'No, no, —— you! Do you want to make a prison-bird of me at once?'

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"'I do not want to,' said I, 'but the circumstances force me to it. A house which has given up one treasure may give up another, and for this other I am accountable. Now as I cannot stay here myself to watch over the place, it necessarily follows that I must provide some one who can. And as an honest man you ought to desire this also. If you felt as I would under the circumstances, you would ask for the company of some disinterested person till our rival claims as executors had been duly settled and the right heir determined upon.'

"'But the constable? I don't want any constable.'

"'And you don't want Mr. Dickey?'

"'He 's better than the constable.'

"'Very well; Mr. Dickey, will you stay?'

"'Yes, I 'll stay; that 's right, is n't it, Susan?'

"Miss Thompson who had been looking somewhat uneasy, brightened up as he spoke and answered cheerfully:

"'Yes, that 's right. But who will see me home?'

"'Can you ask?' I inquired.

"She smiled and the matter was settled.

"In the hall I had the chance to whisper to Mr. Dickey:

"'Keep a sharp lookout on the fellow. I do not trust him, and he may be up to tricks. I will notify the constable of the situation and if you want help throw up a window and whistle. The man may make another attempt to rob the premises.'

"'That is so,' was the whispered reply. 'But he will have to play sharp to get ahead of me.'"

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V.

DIFFICULTIES.

"DURING the short walk that ensued we talked much of the dead widow and her sinister brother.

"'They belong to an old family,' observed Miss Thompson, 'and I have heard my mother tell how she has danced in their house at many a ball in the olden times. But ever since my day the place has borne evidences of decay, though it is only in the last five years it has looked as if it would fall to pieces. Which of them do you think was the real miser, he or she? Neither of them have had anything to do with their neighbors for ten years at least.'

"'Do not you know?' I asked.

"'No,' said she, 'and yet I have always lived in full view of their house. You see there were years in which no one lived there. Mr. Wakeham, who married this woman about the time father married mother, was a great invalid, and it was not till his death that the widow came back here to live. The father, who was a stern old man, I have heard mother tell, gave his property to her because she was the only one of his children who had not dis-

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pleased him, but when she was a widow this brother came back to live with her, or on her, we have never been able to determine which. I think from what I have seen to-night it must have been on her, but she was very close too, or why did she live like a hermit when she could have had the friendship of the best?'

"'Perhaps because her brother overruled her; he has evidently had an eye on this property for a long time.'

"'Yes, but they have not even had the comforts. For three years at least no one has seen a butcher's cart stop at their door. How they have lived none of us know; yet there was no lack of money or their neighbors would have felt it their duty to look after them. Mrs. Wakeham has owned very valuable stocks, and as for her dividends, we know by what the postmaster says that they came regularly.'

"'This is very interesting,' said I. 'I thought that fellow's eyes showed a great deal of greed for the little he was likely to inherit. Is there no one who is fully acquainted with their affairs, or have they lived so long out of the pale of society that they possess no friends?'

"'I do not know of any one who has ever been honored with their confidence,' quoth the young lady. 'They have shown so plainly that they did not desire attention that gradually we have all ceased to go to their doors.'

"'And did not sickness make any difference? Did no one go near them when it was learned how ill this poor woman was?'

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"'We did not know she was ill till this morning. We had missed her face at the window, but no doctor had been called, and no medicine bought, so we never thought her to be in any danger. When we did find it out we were afraid to invade premises which had been so long shut against us; at least I was; others did go, but they were received so coldly they did not remain; it is hard to stand up against the sullen displeasure of a man like Mr. Huckins.'

"'And do you mean to say that this man and his sister have lived there alone and unvisited for years?'

"'They wished it, Mr. Etheridge. They courted loneliness and rejected friendship. Only one person, Mr. H——, the minister, has persisted in keeping up his old habit of calling once a year, but I have heard him say that he always dreaded the visit, first, because they made him see so plainly that they resented the intrusion, and, secondly, because each year showed him barer floors and greater evidences of poverty or determined avarice. What he will say now, when he hears about the two wills and the brother trying to run away with his sister's savings, before her body was cold, I do not know. There will be some indignation felt in town you may be sure, and considerable excitement. I hope you will come back to-morrow to help me answer questions.'

"'I shall come back as soon as I have been to Marston.'

"'So you are going to hunt up the heirs? I pray you may be successful.'

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"'Do you know them? Have you ever heard anything about them?' I asked.

"Oh, no. It must be forty years since Harriet Huckins ran away from home. To many it will be a revelation that such a person lives.'

"'And we do not even know that she does,' said I.

"'True, true, she may be dead, and then that hateful brother will have the whole. I hope he won't. I hope she is alive and will come here and make amends for the disgrace which that unsightly building has put upon the street.'

"'I hope so too,' said I, feeling my old disgust of Huckins renewed at this mention of him.

"We were now at her gate, so bidding her good-by, I turned away through the midnight streets, determined to find the constable. As I went hurrying along in the direction of his home, Miss Thompson's question repeated itself in my own mind. Had Mrs. Wakeham been the sufferer and victim which her appearance, yes and her words to me, had betokened? Or was her brother sincere in his passion and true in his complaints that he had been subject to her whims and had led the life of a dog in order to please her. With the remembrance of their two faces before me, I felt inclined to believe her words rather than his, and yet her last cry had contained something in its tone beside anxiety for the rights of an almost unknown heir; there had been anger in it,—the anger of one whose secret has been surprised and who feels himself personally robbed of something dearer than life.

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"However, at this time I could not stop to weigh these possibilities or decide this question. Whatever was true as regarded the balance of right between these two, there was no doubt as to the fact that this man was not to be trusted under temptation. I therefore made what haste I could, and being fortunate enough to find the constable still up, succeeded in interesting him in the matter and obtaiñing his promise to have the house put under proper surveillance. This done, I took the car for Fulton Ferry, and was so fortunate as to reach home at or near two o'clock in the morning. This was last night, and to-day you see me here. You disappoint me by saying that you know no one by the name of Harriet Smith."

"Yet," exclaimed Edgar, rousing himself from his attitude of listening, "I know all the old inhabitants. Harriet Smith," he continued in a musing tone, "Harriet—What is there in the name that stirs up some faint recollection? Did I once know a person by that name after all?"

"Nothing more likely."

"But there the thing stops. I cannot get any farther," mused Edgar. "The name is not entirely new to me. I have some vague memory in connection with it, but what memory I cannot tell. Let me see if Jerry can help us." And going to the door, he called "Jerry! Jerry!"

The response came slowly; heavy bodies do not soon overcome their inertia But after the lapse of a few minutes a shuffling footstep was heard. Then the sound

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of heavy breathing, something between a snore and a snort, and the huge form of the good-natured driver came slowly into view, till it paused and stood in the door opening, which it very nearly filled.

"Did you call, sirs?" asked he, with a rude attempt at a bow.

"Yes," responded Edgar, "I wanted to know if you remembered a woman by the name of Harriet Smith once living about here."

"Har-ri-et Smith," was the long-drawn-out reply; "Har-ri-et Smith! I knows lots of Harriets, and as for Smiths, they be as plenty as squirrels in nut time; but Har-ri-et Smith—I would n't like to say I did n't, and I would n't like to say I did."

"She is an old woman now, if she is still living," suggested Frank. "Or she may have moved away."

"Yes, sir, yes, of course"; and they perceived another slow Harriet begin to form itself upon his lips.

Seeing that he knew nothing of the person mentioned, Edgar motioned him away, but Frank, with a lawyer's belief in using all means at his command, stopped him as he was heavily turning his back and said:

"I have good news for a woman by that name. If you can find her, and she turns out to be a sister of Cynthia Wakeham, of Flatbush, New York, there will be something good for you too. Do you want to try for it?"

"Do I?" and the grin which appeared on Jerry's face seemed to light up the room. "I 'm not quick," he hastily

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acknowledged, as if in fear that Frank would observe this fault and make use of it against him; "that is, I 'm not spry on my feet, but that leaves me all the more time for gossip, and gossip is what 'll do *this* business, is n't it, Dr. Sellick?" Edgar nodding, Jerry laughed, and Frank, seeing he had got an interested assistant at last, gave him such instructions as he thought he needed, and dismissed him to his work.

When he was gone, the friends looked for an instant at each other, and then Frank rose.

"I am going out," said he. "If you have friends to see or business to look after, don't think you must come with me. I always take a walk before retiring."

"Very well," replied Edgar, with unusual cheeriness. "Then if you will excuse me I 'll not accompany you. Going to walk for pleasure? You 'd better take the road north; the walk in that direction is the best in town."

"All right," returned Frank; "I 'll not be gone more than an hour. See you again in the morning if not to-night." And with a careless nod he disappeared, leaving Edgar sitting alone in the room.

On the walk in front of the house he paused.

"To the north," he repeated, looking up and down the street, with a curious shake of the head; "good advice, no doubt, and one that I will follow some time, but not to-night. The attractions in an opposite direction are too great." And with an odd smile, which was at once

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full of manly confidence and dreamy anticipation, he turned his face southward and strode away through the warm and perfumed darkness of the summer night.

He took the road by which he had come from the depot, and passing rapidly by the few shops that clustered about the hotel, entered at once upon the street whose picturesque appearance had attracted his attention earlier in the evening.

What is he seeking? Exercise—the exhilaration of motion—the refreshment of change? If so, why does he look behind and before him with an almost guilty air as he advances towards a dimly lighted house, guarded by the dense branches of a double row of poplars? Is it here the attraction lies which has drawn him from the hotel and the companionship of his friend? Yes, for he stops as he reaches it and gazes first along the dim shadowy vista made by those clustered trunks and upright boughs, and then up the side and across the front of the silent house itself, while an expression of strange wistfulness softens the eager brightness of his face, and his smile becomes one of mingled pride and tenderness, for which the peaceful scene, with all its picturesque features, can scarcely account.

Can it be that his imagination has been roused and his affections stirred by the instantaneous vision of an almost unknown woman? that this swelling of the heart and this sudden turning of his whole nature towards what is sweetest, holiest, and most endearing in life means that

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his hitherto free spirit has met its mate, and that here in the lonely darkness, before a strange portal and in the midst of new and untried scenes, he has found the fate that comes once to every man, making him a changed being for ever after?

The month is June and the air is full of the scent of roses. He can see their fairy forms shining from amid the vines clambering over the walls and porches before him. They suggest all that is richest and spiciest and most exquisite in nature, as does her face as he remembered it. What if a thorn has rent a petal here and there, in the luxurious flowers before him, are they not roses still? So to him her face is all the lovelier for the blemish which might speak to others of imperfection, but which to him is only a call for profounder tenderness and more ardent devotion. And if in her nature there lies a fault also, is not a man's first love potent enough to overlook even that? He begins to think so, and allows his glances to roam from window to window of the nearly darkened house, as if half expecting her sweet and melancholy head to look forth in quest of the stars—or him.

The living rooms are mainly on the side that overlooks the garden, and scarcely understanding by what impulse he is swayed, he passes around the wall to a second gate, which he perceives opening at right angles to the poplar walk. Here he pauses a moment, looking up at the window which for some reason he has determined to be hers, and while he stands there, the moonlight shows the

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figure of another man coming from the highway and making towards the self-same spot. But before this second person reaches Frank he pauses, falters, and finally withdraws. Who is it? The shadow is on his face and we cannot see, but one thing is apparent, Frank Etheridge is not the only man who worships at this especial shrine to-night.

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VI.

YOUNG MEN'S FANCIES.

THE next morning at about nine o'clock Frank burst impetuously into Edgar's presence. They had not met for a good-night the evening before and they had taken breakfast separately.

"Edgar, what is this I hear about Hermione Cavanagh? Is it true she lives alone in that house with her sister, and that they neither of them ever go out, not even for a half-hour's stroll in the streets?"

Edgar, flushed at the other's excitement, turned and busied himself a moment with his books and papers before replying.

"Frank, you have been among the gossips."

"And what if I have! You would tell me nothing, and I knew there was a tragedy in her face; I saw it at the first glance."

"Is it a tragedy, this not going out?"

"It is the result of a tragedy; must be. They say nothing and nobody could draw from her beyond the boundary of that brick wall we rode by so carelessly. And she so young, so beautiful!"

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"Frank, you exaggerate," was all the answer he received.

Frank bit his lip; the phrase he had used had been a trifle strong for the occasion. But in another moment he was ready to continue the conversation.

"Perhaps I do speak of an experiment that has never been tried; but you know what I mean. She has received some shock which has terrified her and made her afraid of the streets, and no one can subdue this fear or induce her to step through her own gate. Is not that sad and interesting enough to move a man who recognizes her beauty?"

"It is certainly very sad," quoth the other, "if it is quite true, which I doubt."

"Go talk to your neighbors then; they have not been absent like yourself for a good long year."

"I am not interested enough," the other began.

"But you ought to be," interpolated Frank. "As a physician you ought to recognize the peculiarities of such a prejudice. Why, if I had such a case——"

"But the case is not mine. I am not and never have been Miss Cavanagh's physician."

"Well, well, her friend then."

"Who told you I was her friend?"

"I don't remember; I understood from some one that you used to visit her."

"My neighbors, as you call them, have good memories."

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"*Did* you use to visit her?"

"Frank, Frank, subdue your curiosity. If I did, I do not now. The old gentleman is dead, and it was he upon whom I was accustomed to call when I went to their house."

"The old gentleman?"

"Miss Cavanagh's father."

"And you called upon him?"

"Sometimes."

"Edgar, how short you are."

"Frank, how impatient you are."

"But I have reason."

"How 's that?"

"I want to hear about her, and you mock me with the most evasive replies."

Edgar turned towards his friend; the flush had departed from his features, but his manner certainly was not natural. Yet he did not look unkindly at the ardent young lawyer. On the contrary, there was a gleam of compassion in his eye, as he remarked, with more emphasis than he had before used:

"I am sorry if I seem to be evading any question you choose to put. But the truth is you seem to know more about the young lady than I do myself. I did not know that she was the victim of any such caprice."

"Yet it has lasted a year."

"A year?"

"Just the time you have been away."

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"Just——" Edgar paused in the repetition. Evidently his attention had been caught at last. But he soon recovered himself. "A strange coincidence," he laughed. "Happily it is nothing more."

Frank surveyed his friend very seriously.

"I shall believe you," said he.

"You may," was the candid rejoinder. And the young physician did not flinch, though Etheridge continued to look at him steadily and with undoubted intention. "And now what luck with Jerry?" he suddenly inquired, with a cheerful change of tone.

"None; I shall leave town at ten."

"Is there no Harriet Smith here?"

"Not if I can believe him."

"And has been none in the last twenty years?"

"Not that he can find out."

"Then your quest here is at an end?"

"No, it has taken another turn, that is all."

"You mean——"

"That I shall come back here to-morrow. I must be sure that what Jerry says is true. Besides—— But why mince the matter? I—I have become interested in that girl, Edgar, and want to know her—hear her speak. Cannot you help me to make her acquaintance? If you used to go to the house—— Why do you frown? Do you not like Miss Cavanagh?"

Edgar hastily smoothed his forehead.

"Frank, I have never thought very much about her.

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She was young when I visited her father, and then that scar——"

"Never mind," cried Frank. He felt as if a wound in his own breast had been touched.

Edgar was astonished. He was not accustomed to display his own feelings, and did not know what to make of a man who did. But he did not finish his sentence.

"If she does not go out," he observed instead, "she may be equally unwilling to receive visitors."

"Oh, no," the other eagerly broke in; "people visit there just the same. Only they say she never likes to hear anything about her peculiarity. She wishes it accepted without words."

It was now Edgar's turn to ask a question.

"You say she lives there alone? You mean with servants, doubtless?"

"Oh, yes, she has a servant. But I did not say she lived there alone; I said she and her sister."

Edgar was silent.

"Her sister does not go out, either, they say."

"No? What does it all mean?"

"That is what *I* want to know."

"Not go out? Emma!"

"Do you remember *Emma?*"

"Yes, she is younger than Hermione."

"And what kind of a girl is *she?*"

"Don't ask me, Frank. I have no talent for describing beautiful women."

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"She is beautiful, then?"

"If her sister is, yes."

"You mean *she* has no scar." It was softly said, almost reverently.

"No, she has no scar."

Frank shook his head.

"The scar appeals to me, Edgar."

Edgar smiled, but it was not naturally. The constraint in his manner had increased rather than diminished, and he seemed anxious to start upon the round of calls he had purposed to make.

"You must excuse me," said he, "I shall have to be off. You are coming back to-morrow?"

"If business does not detain me."

"You will find me in my new office by that time. I have rented the small brown house you must have noticed on the main street. Come there, and if you do not mind bachelor housekeeping, stay with me while you remain in town. I shall have a good cook, you may be sure, and as for a room, the north chamber has already been set apart for you."

Frank's face softened and he grasped the doctor's hand.

"That 's good of you; it looks as if you expected me to need it."

"Have you not a Harriet Smith to find?"

Frank shrugged his shoulders. "I see that you understand lawyers."

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Frank rode down to the depot with Jerry. As he passed Miss Cavanagh's house he was startled to perceive a youthful figure bending over the flower-beds on the inner side of the wall. "She is not so pretty by daylight," was his first thought. But at that moment she raised her head, and with a warm thrill he recognized the fact that it was not Hermione, but the sister he was looking at.

It gave him something to think of, for this sister was not without her attractions, though they were less brilliant and also less marred than those of the sad and stately Hermione.

When he arrived at his office his first inquiry was if anything had been heard from Flatbush, and upon being told to the contrary he immediately started for that place. He found the house a scene of some tumult. Notwithstanding the fact that the poor woman still lay unburied, the parlors and lower hall were filled with people, who stared at the walls and rapped with wary but eager knuckles on the various lintels and casements. Whispers of a treasure having been found beneath the boards of the flooring had reached the ear of the public, and the greatest curiosity had been raised in the breasts of those who up to this day had looked upon the house as a worm-eaten structure fit only for the shelter of dogs.

Mr. Dickey was in a room above, and to him Frank immediately hastened.

"Well," said he, "what news?"

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"Ah," cried the jovial witness, coming forward, "glad to see you. Have you found the heirs?"

"Not yet," rejoined Frank. "Have you had any trouble? I thought I saw a police-officer below."

"Yes, we had to have some one with authority here. Even Huckins agreed to that; he is afraid the house will be run away with, I think. Did you see what a crowd has assembled in the parlors? We let them in so that Huckins won't seem to be the sole object of suspicion; but he really is, you know. He gave me plenty to do that night."

"He did, did he?"

"Yes; you had scarcely gone before he began his tactics. First he led me very politely to a room where there was a bed; then he brought me a bottle of the vilest rum you ever drank; and then he sat down to be affable. While he talked I was at ease, but when he finally got up and said he would try to get a snatch of sleep I grew suspicious, and stopped drinking the rum and set myself to listening. He went directly to a room not far from me and shut himself in. He had no light, but in a few minutes I heard him strike a match, and then another and another. 'He is searching under the boards for more treasure,' thought I, and creeping into the next room I was fortunate enough to come upon a closet so old and with such big cracks in its partition that I was enabled to look through them into the place where he was. The sight that met my eye was startling. He

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was, as I conjectured, peering under the boards, which he had ripped up early in the evening; and as he had only the light of a match to aid him, I would catch quick glimpses of his eager, peering face and then lose the sight of it in sudden darkness till the gleam of another match came to show it up again. He crouched upon the floor and crept along the whole length of the board, thrusting in his arm to right and left, while the sweat oozed on his forehead and fell in large drops into the long, narrow hollow beneath him. At last he seemed to grow wild with repeated disappointments, and, starting up, stood looking about him at the four surrounding walls, as if demanding them to give up their secrets. Then the match went out, and I heard him stamp his foot with rage before proceeding to put back the boards and shift them into place. Then there came silence, during which I crept on tiptoe to the place I had left, judging that he would soon leave his room and return to see if I had been watching him.

"The box was on the bed, and throwing myself beside it, I grasped it with one arm and hid my face with the other, and as I lay there I soon became conscious of his presence, and I knew he was looking from me to the box, and weighing the question as to whether I was sleeping sound enough for him to risk a blow. But I did not stir, though I almost expected a sudden crash on my head, and in another moment he crept away, awed possibly by my superior strength, for I am a much bigger man than

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he, as you must see. When I thought him gone I dropped my arm and looked up. The room was in total darkness. Bounding to my feet I followed him through the halls and came upon him in the room of death. He had the lamp in his hand, and he was standing over his sister with an awful look on his face.

"'Where have you hidden it?' he hissed to the senseless form before him. 'That box is not all you had. Where are the bonds and the stocks, and the money I helped you to save?'

"He was so absorbed he did not see me. He stooped by the bed and ran his hand along under the mattresses; then he lifted the pillows and looked under the bed. Then he rose and trod gingerly over the floor, as if to see if any of the boards were loose, and peered into the empty closet, and felt with wary hand up and down the mantel sides. At last his eyes fell on the clock, and he was about to lift his hand to it when I said:

"'The clock is all right; you need n't set it; see, it just agrees with my watch!'

"What a face he turned to me! I tell you it is no fun to meet such eyes in an empty house at one o'clock at night; and if you had n't told me the police would be within call I should have been sick enough of my job, I can tell you. As it was, I drew back a foot or two and hugged the box a little more tightly, while he, with a coward's bravado, stepped after me and whispered below his breath:

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"'You are making yourself too much at home here. If I want to stop the clock, now that my sister is dead, what is that to you? You have no respect for a house in mourning, and I am free to tell you so.'

"To this tirade I naturally made no answer, and he turned again to the clock. But just as I was asking myself whether I should stop him or let him go on with his peerings and pokings, the bell rang loudly below. It was a welcome interruption to me, but it made him very angry. However, he went down and welcomed, as decently as he knew how, a woman who had been sent to his assistance by Miss Thompson, evidently thinking that it was time he made some effort to regain my good opinion by avoiding all further cause for suspicion.

"At all events, he gave me no more trouble that night, nor since, though the way he haunts the door of that room and the looks he casts inside at the clock are enough to make one's blood run cold. Do you think there are any papers hidden there?"

"I have no doubt of it," returned Frank. "Do you remember that the old woman's last words were, 'The clock! the clock!' As soon as I can appeal to the Surrogate I shall have that piece of furniture examined."

"I shall be mortally interested in knowing what you find there," commented Mr. Dickey. "If the property comes to much, won't Miss Thompson and I get something out of it for our trouble?"

"No doubt," said Frank.

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"Then we will get married," said he, and looked so beaming, that Frank shook him cordially by the hand.

"But where is Huckins?" the lawyer now inquired. "I did n't see him down below."

"He is chewing his nails in the kitchen. He is like a dog with a bone; you cannot get him to leave the house for a moment."

"I must see him," said Frank, and went down the back stairs to the place where he had held his previous interview with this angry and disappointed man.

At first sight of the young lawyer Huckins flushed deeply, but he soon grew pale and obsequious, as if he had held bitter communing with himself through the last thirty-six hours, and had resolved to restrain his temper for the future in the presence of the man who understood him. But he could not help a covert sneer from creeping into his voice.

"Have you found the heirs?" he asked, bowing with ill-mannered grace, and pushing forward the only chair there was in the room.

"I shall find them when I need them," rejoined Frank. "Fortunes, however small, do not usually go begging."

"Then you have not found them?" the other declared, a hard glitter of triumph shining in his sinister eye.

"I have not brought them with me," acknowledged the lawyer, warily.

"Perhaps, then, you won't," suggested Huckins, while he seemed to grow instantly at least two inches in stature.

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"If they are not in Marston where are they? Dead! And that leaves me the undisputed heir to all my sister's savings."

"I do not believe them dead," protested Frank.

"Why?" Huckins half smiled, half snarled.

"Some token of the fact would have come to you. You are not in a strange land or in unknown parts; you are living in the old homestead where this lost sister of yours was reared. You would have heard if she had died, at least so it strikes an unprejudiced mind."

"Then let it strike yours to the contrary," snapped out his angry companion. "When she went away it was in anger and with the curse of her father ringing in her ears. Do you see that porch?" And Huckins pointed through the cracked windows to a decayed pair of steps leading from the side of the house. "It was there she ran down on her way out. I see her now, though forty years have passed, and I, a little fellow of six, neither understood nor appreciated what was happening. My father stood in the window above, and he cried out: 'Don't come back! You have chosen your way, now go in it. Let me never see you nor hear from you again.' And we never did, never! And now you tell me we would have heard if she had died. You don't know the heart of folks if you say that. Harriet cut herself adrift that day, and she knew it."

"Yet you were acquainted with the fact that she went to Marston."

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The indignant light in the brother's eye settled into a look of cunning.

"Oh," he acknowledged carelessly, "we heard so at the time, when everything was fresh. But we heard nothing more, nothing."

"Nothing?" Frank repeated. "Not that she had married and had had children?"

"No," was the dogged reply. "My sister up there," and Huckins jerked his hand towards the room where poor Mrs. Wakeham lay, "surmised things, but she did n't know anything for certain. If she had she might have sent for these folks long ago. She had time enough in the last ten years we have been living in this hole together."

"But," Etheridge now ventured, determined not to be outmatched in cunning, "you say she was penurious, too penurious to live comfortably or to let you do so."

Huckins shrugged his shoulders and for a moment looked balked; then he cried: "The closest women have their whims. If she had known any such folks to have been living as you have named, she would have sent for them."

"If you had let her," suggested Frank.

Huckins turned upon him and his eye flashed. But he very soon cringed again and attempted a sickly smile, which completed the disgust the young lawyer felt for him.

"If I had let her," he repeated; "I, who pined for companionship or anything which would have put a good

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meal into my mouth! You do not know me, sir; you are prejudiced against me because I want my earnings, and a little comfort in my old age."

"If I am prejudiced against you, it is yourself who has made me so," returned the other. "Your conduct has not been of a nature to win my regard, since I have had the honor of your acquaintance."

"And what has yours been, worming, as you have, into my sister's confidence——"

But here Frank hushed him. "We will drop this," said he. "You know me, and I think I know you. I came to give you one last chance to play the man by helping me to find your relatives. I see you have no intention of doing so, so I will now proceed to find them without you."

"If they exist," he put in.

"Certainly, if they exist. If they do not——"

"What then?"

"I must have proofs to that effect. I must know that your sister left no heirs but yourself."

"That will take time," he grumbled. "I shall be kept weeks out of my rights."

"The Surrogate will see that you do not suffer."

He shuddered and looked like a fox driven into his hole.

"It is shameful, shameful!" he cried. "It is nothing but a conspiracy to rob me of my own. I suppose I shall not be allowed to live in my own house." And his eyes wandered greedily over the rafters above him.

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"Are you sure that it is yours?"

"Yes, yes, damn you!" But the word had been hasty, and he immediately caught Frank's sleeve and cringed in contrition. "I beg your pardon," he cried, "perhaps we had better not talk any longer, for I have been too tried for patience. They will not even leave me alone in my grief," he whined, pointing towards the rooms full, as I have said, of jostling neighbors and gossips.

"It will be quiet enough after the funeral," Frank assured him.

"Oh! oh! the funeral!" he groaned.

"Is it going to be too extravagant?" Frank insinuated artfully.

Huckins gave the lawyer a look, dropped his eyes and mournfully shook his head.

"The poor woman would not have liked it," he muttered; "but one must be decent towards one's own blood."

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VII.

THE WAY OPENS.

FRANK succeeded in having Mr. Dickey appointed as Custodian of the property, then he went back to Marston.

"Good-evening, Doctor; what a nest of roses you have here for a bachelor," was his jovial cry, as he entered the quaint little house, in which Sellick had now established himself. "I declare, when you told me I should always find a room here, I did not realize what a temptation you were offering me. And in sight——" He paused, changing color as he drew back from the window to which he had stepped,——"of the hills," he somewhat awkwardly added.

Edgar, who had watched the movements of his friend from under half lowered lids, smiled dryly.

"*Of the hills*," he repeated. Then with a short laugh, added, "I knew that you liked that especial view."

Frank's eye, which was still on a certain distant chimney, lighted up wonderfully as he turned genially towards his friend.

"I did not know you were such a good fellow," he laughed. "I hope you have found yourself made welcome here."

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"Oh, yes, welcome enough."

"Any patients yet?"

"All of Dudgeon's, I fear. I have been doing little else but warning one man after another: 'Now, no words against any former practitioner. If you want help from me, tell me your symptoms, but don't talk about any other doctor's mistakes, for I have not time to hear it.'"

"Poor old Dudgeon!" cried Frank. Then, shortly: "I 'm a poor one to hide my impatience. Have you seen either of *them* yet?"

"Either—of—them?"

"The girls, the two sweet whimsical girls. You know whom I mean, Edgar."

"You only spoke of one when you were here before, Frank."

"And I only think of one. But I saw the other on my way to the depot, and that made me speak of the two. Have you seen them?"

"No," answered the other, with unnecessary dryness; "I think you told me they did not go out."

"But you have feet, man, and you can go to them, and I trusted that you would, if only to prepare the way for me; for I mean to visit them, as you have every reason to believe, and I should have liked an introducer."

"Frank," asked the other, quietly, but with a certain marked earnestness, "has it gone as deep as that? Are you really serious in your intention of making the acquaintance of Miss Cavanagh?"

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"Serious? Have you for a minute thought me otherwise?"

"You are not serious in most things."

"In business I am, and in——"

"Love?" the other smiled.

"Yes, if you can call it love, yet."

"We will not call it anything," said the other. "You want to see her, that is all. I wonder at your decision, but can say nothing against it. Happily, you have seen her defect."

"It is not a defect to me."

"Not if it is in her nature as well?"

"Her nature?"

"A woman who for any reason cuts herself off from her species, as she is said to do, cannot be without her faults. Such idiosyncrasies do not grow out of the charity we are bid to have for our fellow-creatures."

"But she may have suffered. I can readily believe she has suffered from that same want of charity in others. There is nothing like a personal defect to make one sensitive. Think of the averted looks she must have met from many thoughtless persons; and she almost a beauty!"

"Yes, that *almost* is tragic."

"It can excuse much."

Edgar shook his head. "Think what you are doing, Frank, that 's all. *I* should hesitate in making the acquaintance of one who for *any* reason has shut herself away from the world."

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"Is not her whim shared by her sister?"

"They say so."

"Then there are two whose acquaintance you would hesitate to make?"

"Certainly, if I had any ulterior purpose beyond that of mere acquaintanceship."

"Her sister has no scar?"

Edgar, weary, perhaps, of the conversation, did not answer.

"Why should she shut herself up?" mused Frank, too interested in the subject to note the other's silence.

"Women are mysteries," quoth Edgar, shortly.

"But this is more than a mystery," cried Frank. "Whim will not account for it. There must be something in the history of these two girls which the world does not know."

"That is not the fault of the world," retorted Edgar, in his usual vein of sarcasm.

But Frank was reckless. "The world is right to be interested," he avowed. "It would take a very cold heart not to be moved with curiosity by such a fact as two girls secluding themselves in their own house, without any manifest reason. Are *you* not moved by it, Edgar? Are you, indeed, as indifferent as you seem?"

"I should like to know why they do this, of course, but I shall not busy myself to find out. I have much else to do."

"Well, I have not. It is the one thing in life for me;

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so look out for some great piece of audacity on my part, for speak to her I will, and that, too, before I leave the town."

"I do not see how you will manage that, Frank."

"You forget I am a lawyer."

Yet for all the assurance manifested by this speech, it was some time before Frank could see his way clearly to what he desired. A dozen plans were made and dismissed as futile before he finally determined to seek the assistance of a fellow-lawyer whose name he had seen in the window of the one brick building in the principal street. "Through him," thought he, "I may light upon some business which will enable me to request with propriety an interview with Miss Cavanagh." Yet his heart failed him as he went up the steps of Mr. Hamilton's office, and if that gentleman, upon presenting himself, had been a young man, Frank would certainly have made some excuse for his intrusion, and retired. But he was old and white-haired and benignant, and so Frank was lured into introducing himself as a young lawyer from New York, engaged in finding the whereabouts of one Harriet Smith, a former resident of Marston.

Mr. Hamilton, who could not fail to be impressed by Etheridge's sterling appearance, met him with cordiality.

"I have heard of you," said he, "but I fear your errand here is bound to be fruitless. No Harriet Smith, so far as I know, ever came to reside in this town. And I was born and bred in this street. Have you actual

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knowledge that one by that name ever lived here, and can you give me the date?"

The answers Frank made were profuse but hurried; he had not expected to gain news of Harriet Smith; he had only used the topic as a means of introducing conversation. But when he came to the point in which he was more nearly interested, he found his courage fail him. He could not speak the name of Miss Cavanagh, even in the most casual fashion, and so the interview ended without any further result than the making on his part of a pleasant acquaintance. Subdued by his failure, Frank quitted the office, and walked slowly down the street. If he had not boasted of his intentions to Edgar, he would have left the town without further effort; but now his pride was involved, and he made that an excuse to his love. Should he proceed boldly to her house, use the knocker, and ask to see Miss Cavanagh? Yes, he might do that, but afterwards? With what words should he greet her, or win that confidence which the situation so peculiarly demanded? He was not an acknowledged friend, or the friend of an acknowledged friend, unless Edgar—— But no, Edgar was not their friend; it would be folly to speak his name to them. What then? Must he give up his hopes till time had paved the way to their realization? He feared it must be so, yet he recoiled from the delay. In this mood he re-entered Edgar's office.

A woman in hat and cloak met him.

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"Are you the stranger lawyer that has come to town?" she asked.

He bowed, wondering if he was about to hear news of Harriet Smith.

"Then this note is for you," she declared, handing him a little three-cornered billet.

His heart gave a great leap, and he turned towards the window as he opened the note. Who could be writing letters to him of such dainty appearance as this? Not she, of course, and yet—— He tore open the sheet, and read these words:

"If not asking too great a favor, may I request that you will call at my house, in your capacity of lawyer.

"As I do not leave my own home, you will pardon this informal method of requesting your services. The lawyer here cannot do my work.

"Yours respectfully,

"HERMIONE CAVANAGH."

He was too much struck with amazement and delight to answer the messenger at once. When he did so, his voice was very business-like.

"Will Miss Cavanagh be at liberty this morning?" he asked. "I shall be obliged to return to the city after dinner."

"She told me to say that any time would be convenient to her," was the answer.

"Then say to her that I will be at her door in half an hour."

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The woman nodded, and turned.

"She lives on the road to the depot, where the two rows of poplars are," she suddenly declared, as she paused at the door.

"I know," he began, and blushed, for the woman had given him a quick glance of surprise. "I noticed the poplars," he explained.

She smiled as she passed out, and that made him crimson still more.

"Do I wear my heart on my sleeve?" he murmured to himself, in secret vexation. "If so, I must wrap it about with a decent cloak of reserve before I go into the presence of one who has such power to move it." And he was glad Edgar was not at home to mark his excitement.

The half hour wore away, and he stood on the rose-embowered porch. Would she come to the door herself, or would it be the sad-eyed sister he should see first? It mattered little. It was Hermione who had sent for him, and it was with Hermione he should talk. Was it his heart that was beating so loudly? He had scarcely answered the question, when the door opened, and the woman who had served as a messenger from Miss Cavanagh stood before him.

"Ah!" said she, "come in." And in another moment he was in the enchanted house.

A door stood open at his left, and into the room thus disclosed he was ceremoniously ushered.

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"Miss Cavanagh will be down in a moment," said the woman, as she slowly walked away, with more than one lingering backward look.

He did not note this look, for his eyes were on the quaint old furniture and shadowy recesses of the staid best room, in which he stood an uneasy guest. For somehow he had imagined he would see the woman of his dreams in a place of cheer and sunshine; at a window, perhaps, where the roses looked in, or at least in a spot enlivened by some evidences of womanly handiwork and taste. But here all was stiff as at a funeral. The high black mantel-shelf was without clock or vase, and the only attempt at ornament to be seen within the four grim walls was an uncouth wreath, made of shells, on a background of dismal black, which hung between the windows. It was enough to rob any moment of its romance. And yet, if she should look fair here, what might he not expect of her beauty in more harmonious surroundings.

As he was adjusting his ideas to this thought, there came the sound of a step on the stair, and the next moment Hermione Cavanagh entered his presence.

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VIII.

A SEARCH AND ITS RESULTS.

HERMIONE CAVANAGH, without the scar, would have been one of the handsomest of women. She was of the grand type, with height and a nobility of presence to which the extreme loveliness of her perfect features lent a harmonizing grace. Of a dazzling complexion, the hair which lay above her straight fine brows shone ebon-like in its lustre, while her eyes, strangely and softly blue, filled the gazer at first with surprise and then with delight as the varying emotions of her quick mind deepened them into a more perfect consonance with her hair, or softened them into something like the dewy freshness of heaven-born flowers. Her mouth was mobile, but the passions it expressed were not of the gentlest, whatever might be the language of her eyes, and so it was that her face was in a way a contradiction of itself, which made it a fascinating study to one who cared to watch it, or possessed sufficient understanding to read its subtle language. She was oddly dressed in a black, straight garment, eminently in keeping with the room; but there was taste displayed in the arrangement of her hair, and nothing

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could make her face anything but a revelation of beauty, unless it was the scar, and that Frank Etheridge did not see.

"Are you—" she began and paused, looking at him with such surprise that he felt his cheeks flush—"the lawyer who was in town a few days ago on some pressing inquiry?"

"I am," returned Frank, making her the low bow her embarrassment seemed to demand.

"Then you must excuse me," said she; "I thought you were an elderly man, like our own Mr. Hamilton. I should not have sent for you if——"

"If you had known I had no more experience," he suggested, with a smile, seeing her pause in some embarrassment.

She bowed; yet he knew that was not the way she would have ended the sentence if she had spoken her thought.

"Then I am to understand," said he, with a gentleness born of his great wish to be of service to her, "that you would prefer that I should send you an older adviser. I can do it, Miss Cavanagh."

"Thank you," she said, and stood hesitating, the slight flush on her cheek showing that she was engaged in some secret struggle. "I will tell you my difficulty," she pursued at last, raising her eyes with a frank look to his face. "Will you be seated?"

Charmed with the graciousness of her manner when

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once relieved from embarrassment, he waited for her to sit and then took a chair himself.

"It is a wearisome affair," she declared, "but one which a New York lawyer can solve without much trouble." And with the clearness of a highly cultivated mind, she gave him the facts of a case in which she and her sister had become involved through the negligence of her man of business.

"Can you help me?" she asked.

"Very easily," he replied. "You have but to go to New York and swear to these facts before a magistrate, and the matter will be settled without difficulty."

"But I cannot go to New York."

"No? Not on a matter of this importance?"

"On no matter. I do not travel, Mr. Etheridge."

The pride and finality with which this was uttered, gave him his first glimpse of the hard streak which there was undoubtedly in her character. Though he longed to press the question he judged that he had better not, so suggested carelessly:

"Your sister, then?"

But she met this suggestion, as he had expected her to, with equal calmness and pride.

"My sister does not travel either."

He looked the astonishment he did not feel and remarked gravely:

"I fear, then, that the matter cannot be so easily adjusted." And he began to point out the difficulties in

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