

Harte Bret

Gabriel Conroy



Bret Harte
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Содержание

BOOK I.	5
CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	16
CHAPTER IV.	19
CHAPTER V.	21
CHAPTER VI.	24
CHAPTER VII.	26
CHAPTER VIII.	28
CHAPTER IX.	31
BOOK II.	34
CHAPTER I.	34
CHAPTER II.	40
CHAPTER III.	45
CHAPTER IV.	51
CHAPTER V.	55
BOOK III.	61
CHAPTER I.	61
CHAPTER II.	66
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	69

Harte Bret Gabriel Conroy

BOOK I. *ON THE THRESHOLD*

CHAPTER I. WITHOUT

Snow. Everywhere. As far as the eye could reach – fifty miles, looking southward from the highest white peak, – filling ravines and gulches, and dropping from the walls of cañons in white shroud-like drifts, fashioning the dividing ridge into the likeness of a monstrous grave, hiding the bases of giant pines, and completely covering young trees and larches, rimming with porcelain the bowl-like edges of still, cold lakes, and undulating in motionless white billows to the edge of the distant horizon. Snow lying everywhere over the California Sierras on the 15th day of March 1848, and still falling.

It had been snowing for ten days: snowing in finely granulated powder, in damp, spongy flakes, in thin, feathery plumes, snowing from a leaden sky steadily, snowing fiercely, shaken out of purple-black clouds in white flocculent masses, or dropping in long level lines, like white lances from the tumbled and broken heavens. But always silently! The woods were so choked with it – the branches were so laden with it – it had so permeated, filled and possessed earth and sky; it had so cushioned and muffled the ringing rocks and echoing hills, that all sound was deadened. The strongest gust, the fiercest blast, awoke no sigh or complaint from the snow-packed, rigid files of forest. There was no cracking of bough nor crackle of underbrush; the overladen branches of pine and fir yielded and gave way without a sound. The silence was vast, measureless, complete! Nor could it be said that any outward sign of life or motion changed the fixed outlines of this stricken landscape. Above, there was no play of light and shadow, only the occasional deepening of storm or night. Below, no bird winged its flight across the white expanse, no beast haunted the confines of the black woods; whatever of brute nature might have once inhabited these solitudes had long since flown to the lowlands.

There was no track or imprint; whatever foot might have left its mark upon this waste, each succeeding snow-fall obliterated all trace or record. Every morning the solitude was virgin and unbroken; a million tiny feet had stepped into the track and filled it up. And yet, in the centre of this desolation, in the very stronghold of this grim fortress, there was the mark of human toil. A few trees had been felled at the entrance of the cañon, and the freshly-cut chips were but lightly covered with snow. They served, perhaps, to indicate another tree "blazed" with an axe, and bearing a rudely-shaped wooden effigy of a human hand, pointing to the cañon. Below the hand was a square strip of canvas, securely nailed against the bark, and bearing the following inscription —

"NOTICE

Captain Conroy's party of emigrants are lost in the snow, and camped up in this cañon. Out of provisions and starving!

Left St. Jo, October 8th, 1847.

Left Salt Lake, January 1st, 1848.
Arrived here, March 1st, 1848.
Lost half our stock on the Platte.
Abandoned our waggon, February 20th.

HELP!

Our names are:

Joel McCormick, Jane Brackett,

Peter Dumphy, Gabriel Conroy,
Paul Devarges, John Walker,
Grace Conroy, Henry March,
Olympia Conroy, Philip Ashley,
Mary Dumphy.

(Then in smaller letters, in pencil:)

Mamie died, November 8th, Sweetwater.
Minnie died, December 1st, Echo Cañon.
Jane died, January 2nd, Salt Lake.
James Brackett lost, February 3rd.

HELP!"

The language of suffering is not apt to be artistic or studied, but I think that rhetoric could not improve this actual record. So I let it stand, even as it stood this 15th day of March 1848, half-hidden by a thin film of damp snow, the snow-whitened hand stiffened and pointing rigidly to the fateful cañon like the finger of Death.

At noon there was a lull in the storm, and a slight brightening of the sky toward the east. The grim outlines of the distant hills returned, and the starved white flank of the mountain began to glisten. Across its gaunt hollow some black object was moving – moving slowly and laboriously; moving with such an uncertain mode of progression, that at first it was difficult to detect whether it was brute or human – sometimes on all fours, sometimes erect, again hurrying forward like a drunken man, but always with a certain definiteness of purpose, towards the cañon. As it approached nearer you saw that it was a man – a haggard man, ragged and enveloped in a tattered buffalo robe, but still a man, and a determined one. A young man despite his bent figure and wasted limbs – a young man despite the premature furrows that care and anxiety had set upon his brow and in the corners of his rigid mouth – a young man notwithstanding the expression of savage misanthropy with which suffering and famine had overlaid the frank impulsiveness of youth. When he reached the tree at the entrance of the cañon, he brushed the film of snow from the canvas placard, and then leaned for a few moments exhaustedly against its trunk. There was something in the abandonment of his attitude that indicated even more pathetically than his face and figure his utter prostration – a prostration quite inconsistent with any visible cause. When he had rested himself, he again started forward with a nervous intensity, shambling, shuffling, falling, stooping

to replace the rudely extemporised snow-shoes of fir bark that frequently slipped from his feet, but always starting on again with the feverishness of one who doubted even the sustaining power of his will.

A mile beyond the tree the cañon narrowed and turned gradually to the south, and at this point a thin curling cloud of smoke was visible that seemed to rise from some crevice in the snow. As he came nearer, the impression of recent footprints began to show; there was some displacement of the snow around a low mound from which the smoke now plainly issued. Here he stopped, or rather lay down, before an opening or cavern in the snow, and uttered a feeble shout. It was responded to still more feebly. Presently a face appeared above the opening, and a ragged figure like his own, then another, and then another, until eight human creatures, men and women, surrounded him in the snow, squatting like animals, and like animals lost to all sense of decency and shame.

They were so haggard, so faded, so forlorn, so wan, – so piteous in their human aspect, or rather all that was left of a human aspect, – that they might have been wept over as they sat there; they were so brutal, so imbecile, unreasoning and grotesque in these newer animal attributes, that they might have provoked a smile. They were originally country people, mainly of that social class whose self-respect is apt to be dependent rather on their circumstances, position and surroundings, than upon any individual moral power or intellectual force. They had lost the sense of shame in the sense of equality of suffering; there was nothing within them to take the place of the material enjoyments they were losing. They were childish without the ambition or emulation of childhood; they were men and women without the dignity or simplicity of man and womanhood. All that had raised them above the level of the brute was lost in the snow. Even the characteristics of sex were gone; an old woman of sixty quarrelled, fought, and swore with the harsh utterance and ungainly gestures of a man; a young man of scorbutic temperament wept, sighed, and fainted with the hysteria of a woman. So profound was their degradation that the stranger who had thus evoked them from the earth, even in his very rags and sadness, seemed of another race.

They were all intellectually weak and helpless, but one, a woman, appeared to have completely lost her mind. She carried a small blanket wrapped up to represent a child – the tangible memory of one that had starved to death in her arms a few days before – and rocked it from side to side as she sat, with a faith that was piteous. But even more piteous was the fact that none of her companions took the least notice, either by sympathy or complaint, of her aberration. When, a few moments later, she called upon them to be quiet, for that "baby" was asleep, they glared at her indifferently and went on. A red-haired man, who was chewing a piece of buffalo hide, cast a single murderous glance at her, but the next moment seemed to have forgotten her presence in his more absorbing occupation.

The stranger paused a moment rather to regain his breath than to wait for their more orderly and undivided attention. Then he uttered the single word:

"Nothing!"

"Nothing!" They all echoed the word simultaneously, but with different inflection and significance – one fiercely, another gloomily, another stupidly, another mechanically. The woman with the blanket baby explained to it, "he says 'nothing,'" and laughed.

"No – nothing," repeated the speaker. "Yesterday's snow blocked up the old trail again. The beacon on the summit's burnt out. I left a notice at the Divide. Do that again, Dumphy, and I'll knock the top of your ugly head off."

Dumphy, the red-haired man, had rudely shoved and stricken the woman with the baby – she was his wife, and this conjugal act may have been partly habit – as she was crawling nearer the speaker. She did not seem to notice the blow or its giver – the apathy with which these people received blows or slights was more terrible than wrangling – but said assuringly, when she had reached the side of the young man —

"To-morrow, then?"

The face of the young man softened as he made the same reply he had made for the last eight days to the same question —

"To-morrow, surely!"

She crawled away, still holding the effigy of her dead baby very carefully, and retreated down the opening.

"Pears to me you don't do much anyway, out scouting! 'Pears to me you ain't worth shucks!" said the harsh-voiced woman, glancing at the speaker. "Why don't some on ye take his place? Why do you trust your lives and the lives of women to that thar Ashley?" she continued, with her voice raised to a strident bark.

The hysterical young man, Henry March, who sat next to her, turned a wild scared face upon her, and then, as if fearful of being dragged into the conversation, disappeared hastily after Mrs. Dumphy.

Ashley shrugged his shoulders, and, replying to the group, rather than any individual speaker, said curtly —

"There's but one chance — equal for all — open to all. You know what it is. To stay here is death; to go cannot be worse than that."

He rose and walked slowly away up the cañon a few rods to where another mound was visible, and disappeared from their view. When he had gone, a querulous chatter went around the squatting circle.

"Gone to see the old Doctor and the gal. We're no account."

"Thar's two too many in this yer party."

"Yes — the crazy Doctor and Ashley."

"They're both interlopers, any way."

"Jonahs."

"Said no good could come of it, ever since we picked him up."

"But the Cap'n invited the ol' Doctor, and took all his stock at Sweetwater, and Ashley put in his provisions with the rest."

The speaker was McCormick. Somewhere in the feeble depths of his consciousness there was still a lingering sense of justice. He was hungry, but not unreasonable. Besides, he remembered with a tender regret the excellent quality of provision that Ashley had furnished.

"What's that got to do with it?" screamed Mrs. Brackett. "He brought the bad luck with him. Ain't my husband dead, and isn't that skunk — an entire stranger — still livin'?"

The voice was masculine, but the logic was feminine. In cases of great prostration with mental debility, in the hopeless vacuity that precedes death by inanition or starvation, it is sometimes very effective. They all assented to it, and, by a singular intellectual harmony, the expression of each was the same. It was simply an awful curse.

"What are you goin' to do?"

"If I was a man, I'd know!"

"Knife him!"

"Kill him, and" —

The remainder of this sentence was lost to the others in a confidential whisper between Mrs. Brackett and Dumphy. After this confidence they sat and wagged their heads together, like two unmatched but hideous Chinese idols.

"Look at his strength! and he not a workin' man like us," said Dumphy. "Don't tell me he don't get suthin' reg'lar."

"Suthin' what?"

"Suthin' TO EAT!"

But it is impossible to convey, even by capitals, the intense emphasis put upon this verb. It was followed by a horrible pause.

"Let's go and see."

"And kill him?" suggested the gentle Mrs. Brackett.

They all rose with a common interest almost like enthusiasm. But after they had tottered a few steps, they fell. Yet even then there was not enough self-respect left among them to feel any sense of shame or mortification in their baffled design. They stopped – all except Dumphy.

"Wot's that dream you was talkin' 'bout jess now?" said Mr. McCormick, sitting down and abandoning the enterprise with the most shameless indifference.

"'Bout the dinner at St. Jo?" asked the person addressed – a gentleman whose faculty of alimentary imagination had been at once the bliss and torment of his present social circle.

"Yes."

They all gathered eagerly around Mr. McCormick; even Mr. Dumphy, who was still moving away, stopped.

"Well," said Mr. March, "it began with beefsteak and injins – beefsteak, you know, juicy and cut very thick, and jess squashy with gravy and injins." There was a very perceptible watering of the mouth in the party, and Mr. March, with the genius of a true narrator, under the plausible disguise of having forgotten his story, repeated the last sentence – "jess squashy with gravy and injins. And taters – baked."

"You said fried before! – and dripping with fat!" interposed Mrs. Brackett, hastily.

"For them as likes fried – but baked goes funder – skins and all – and sassage and coffee and flapjacks!"

At this magical word they laughed, not mirthfully perhaps, but eagerly and expectantly, and said, "Go on!"

"And flapjacks!"

"You said that afore," said Mrs. Brackett, with a burst of passion. "Go on!" with an oath.

The giver of this Barmecide feast saw his dangerous position, and looked around for Dumphy, but he had disappeared.

CHAPTER II. WITHIN

The hut into which Ashley descended was like a Greenlander's "iglook," below the surface of the snow. Accident rather than design had given it this Arctic resemblance. As snow upon snow had blocked up its entrance, and reared its white ladders against its walls, and as the strength of its exhausted inmates slowly declined, communication with the outward world was kept up only by a single narrow passage. Excluded from the air, it was close and stifling, but it had a warmth that perhaps the thin blood of its occupants craved more than light or ventilation.

A smouldering fire in a wooden chimney threw a faint flicker on the walls. By its light, lying on the floor, were discernible four figures – a young woman and a child of three or four years wrapped in a single blanket, near the fire; nearer the door two men, separately enwrapped, lay apart. They might have been dead, so deep and motionless were their slumbers.

Perhaps some fear of this filled the mind of Ashley as he entered, for after a moment's hesitation, without saying a word, he passed quickly to the side of the young woman, and, kneeling beside her, placed his hand upon her face. Slight as was the touch, it awakened her. I know not what subtle magnetism was in that contact, but she caught the hand in her own, sat up, and before the eyes were scarcely opened, uttered the single word —

"Philip!"

"Grace – hush!"

He took her hand, kissed it, and pointed warningly toward the other sleepers.

"Speak low. I have much to say to you."

The young girl seemed to be content to devour the speaker with her eyes.

"You have come back," she whispered, with a faint smile, and a look that showed too plainly the predominance of that fact above all others in her mind. "I dreamt of you, Philip."

"Dear Grace" – he kissed her hand again. "Listen to me, darling! I have come back, but only with the old story – no signs of succour, no indications of help from without! My belief is, Grace," he added, in a voice so low as to be audible only to the quick ear to which it was addressed, "that we have blundered far south of the usual travelled trail. Nothing but a miracle or a misfortune like our own would bring another train this way. We are alone and helpless – in an unknown region that even the savage and brute have abandoned. The only aid we can calculate upon is from within – from ourselves. What that aid amounts to," he continued, turning a cynical eye towards the sleepers, "you know as well as I."

She pressed his hand, apologetically, as if accepting the reproach herself, but did not speak.

"As a party we have no strength – no discipline," he went on. "Since your father died we have had no leader. I know what you would say, Grace dear," he continued, answering the mute protest of the girl's hand, "but even if it were true – if I were capable of leading them, they would not take my counsels. Perhaps it is as well. If we kept together, the greatest peril of our situation would be ever present – the peril from *ourselves*!"

He looked intently at her as he spoke, but she evidently did not take his meaning. "Grace," he said, desperately, "when starving men are thrown together, they are capable of any sacrifice – of any crime, to keep the miserable life that they hold so dear just in proportion as it becomes valueless. You have read in books – Grace! good God, what is the matter?"

If she had not read his meaning in books, she might have read it at that moment in the face that was peering in at the door – a face with so much of animal suggestion in its horrible wistfulness that she needed no further revelation; a face full of inhuman ferocity and watchful eagerness, and yet a face familiar in its outlines – the face of Dumphy! Even with her danger came the swifter instinct of feminine tact and concealment, and without betraying the real cause of her momentary horror,

she dropped her head upon Philip's shoulder and whispered, "I understand." When she raised her head again the face was gone.

"Enough, I did not mean to frighten you, Grace, but only to show you what we must avoid – what we have still strength left to avoid. There is but one chance of escape; you know what it is – a desperate one, but no more desperate than this passive waiting for a certain end. I ask you again – will you share it with me? When I first spoke I was less sanguine than now. Since then I have explored the ground carefully, and studied the trend of these mountains. It is *possible*. I say no more."

"But my sister and brother?"

"The child would be a hopeless impediment, even if she could survive the fatigue and exposure. Your brother must stay with her; she will need all his remaining strength and all the hopefulness that keeps him up. No, Grace, we must go alone. Remember, our safety means theirs. Their strength will last until we can send relief; while they would sink in the attempt to reach it with us. I would go alone, but I cannot bear, dear Grace, to leave you here."

"I should die if you left me," she said, simply.

"I believe you would, Grace," he said as simply.

"But can we not wait? Help may come at any moment – to-morrow."

"To-morrow will find us weaker. I should not trust your strength nor my own a day longer."

"But the old man – the Doctor?"

"He will soon be beyond the reach of help," said the young man, sadly. "Hush, he is moving."

One of the blanketed figures had rolled over. Philip walked to the fire, threw on a fresh stick, and stirred the embers. The upspringing flash showed the face of an old man whose eyes were fixed with feverish intensity upon him.

"What are you doing with the fire?" he asked querulously, with a slight foreign accent.

"Stirring it!"

"Leave it alone!"

Philip listlessly turned away.

"Come here," said the old man.

Philip approached.

"You need say nothing," said the old man after a pause, in which he examined Philip's face keenly. "I read your news in your face – the old story – I know it by heart."

"Well?" said Philip.

"Well!" said the old man, stolidly.

Philip again turned away.

"You buried the case and papers?" asked the old man.

"Yes."

"Through the snow – in the earth?"

"Yes."

"Securely?"

"Securely."

"How do you indicate it?"

"By a cairn of stones."

"And the notices – in German and French?"

"I nailed them up wherever I could, near the old trail."

"Good."

The cynical look on Philip's face deepened as he once more turned away. But before he reached the door he paused, and drawing from his breast a faded flower, with a few limp leaves, handed it to the old man.

"I found the duplicate of the plant you were looking for."

The old man half rose on his elbow, breathless with excitement as he clutched and eagerly examined the plant.

"It is the same," he said, with a sigh of relief, "and yet you said there was no news!"

"May I ask what it means?" said Philip, with a slight smile.

"It means that I am right, and Linnæus, Darwin, and Eschscholtz are wrong. It means a discovery. It means that this which you call an Alpine flower is not one, but a new species."

"An important fact to starving men," said Philip, bitterly.

"It means more," continued the old man, without heeding Philip's tone. "It means that this flower is not developed in perpetual snow. It means that it is first germinated in a warm soil and under a kindly sun. It means that if you had not plucked it, it would have fulfilled its destiny under those conditions. It means that in two months grass will be springing where you found it – even where we now lie. We are below the limit of perpetual snow."

"In two months!" said the young girl, eagerly, clasping her hands.

"In two months," said the young man, bitterly. "In two months we shall be far from here, or dead."

"Probably!" said the old man, coolly; "but if you have fulfilled my injunctions in regard to my papers and the collection, they will in good time be discovered and saved."

Ashley turned away with an impatient gesture, and the old man's head again sank exhaustedly upon his arm. Under the pretext of caressing the child, Ashley crossed over to Grace, uttered a few hurried and almost inaudible words, and disappeared through the door. When he had gone, the old man raised his head again and called feebly —

"Grace!"

"Dr. Devarges!"

"Come here!"

She rose and crossed over to his side.

"Why did he stir the fire, Grace?" said Devarges, with a suspicious glance.

"I don't know."

"You tell him everything – did you tell him that?"

"I did not, sir."

Devarges looked as if he would read the inmost thoughts of the girl, and then, as if reassured, said —

"Take it from the fire, and let it cool in the snow."

The young girl raked away the embers of the dying fire, and disclosed what seemed to be a stone of the size of a hen's egg incandescent and glowing. With the aid of two half-burnt sticks she managed to extract it, and deposited it in a convenient snow-drift near the door, and then returned to the side of the old man.

"Grace!"

"Sir!"

"You are going away!"

Grace did not speak.

"Don't deny it. I overheard you. Perhaps it is the best that you can do. But whether it is or not you will do it – of course. Grace, what do you know of that man?"

Neither the contact of daily familiarity, the quality of suffering, nor the presence of approaching death, could subdue the woman's nature in Grace. She instantly raised her shield. From behind it she began to fence feebly with the dying man.

"Why, what we all know of him, sir – a true friend; a man to whose courage, intellect, and endurance we owe so much. And so unselfish, sir!"

"Humph! – what else?"

"Nothing – except that he has always been your devoted friend – and I thought you were his. You brought him to us," she said a little viciously.

"Yes – I picked him up at Sweetwater. But what do you know of his history? What has he told you?"

"He ran away from a wicked stepfather and relations whom he hated. He came out West to live alone – among the Indians – or to seek his fortune in Oregon. He is very proud – you know, sir. He is as unlike us as you are, sir, – he is a gentleman. He is educated."

"Yes, I believe that's what they call it here, and he doesn't know the petals of a flower from the stamens," muttered Devarges. "Well! After you run away with him does he propose to marry you?"

For an instant a faint flush deepened the wan cheek of the girl, and she lost her guard. But the next moment she recovered it.

"Oh, sir," said this arch hypocrite, sweetly, "how can you jest so cruelly at such a moment? The life of my dear brother and sister, the lives of the poor women in yonder hut, depend upon our going. He and I are the only ones left who have strength enough to make the trial. I can assist him, for, although strong, I require less to support my strength than he. Something tells me we shall be successful; we shall return soon with help. Oh, sir, – it is no time for trifling now; our lives – even your own is at stake!"

"My own life," said the old man, impassively, "is already spent. Before you return, if you return at all, I shall be beyond your help."

A spasm of pain appeared to pass over his face. He lay still for a moment as if to concentrate his strength for a further effort. But when he again spoke his voice was much lower, and he seemed to articulate with difficulty.

"Grace," he said at last, "come nearer, girl, – I have something to tell you."

Grace hesitated. Within the last few moments a shy, nervous dread of the man which she could not account for had taken possession of her. She looked toward her sleeping brother.

"He will not waken," said Devarges, following the direction of her eyes. "The anodyne still holds its effect. Bring me what you took from the fire."

Grace brought the stone – a dull bluish-grey slag. The old man took it, examined it, and then said to Grace —

"Rub it briskly on your blanket."

Grace did so. After a few moments it began to exhibit a faint white lustre on its polished surface.

"It looks like silver," said Grace, doubtfully.

"It *is* silver!" replied Devarges.

Grace put it down quickly and moved slightly away.

"Take it," said the old man, – "it is yours. A year ago I found it in a ledge of the mountain range far west of this. I know where it lies in bulk – a fortune, Grace, do you hear? – hidden in the bluish stone you put in the fire for me last night. I can tell you where and how to find it. I can give you the title to it – the right of discovery. Take it – it is yours."

"No, no," said the girl, hurriedly, "keep it yourself. You will live to enjoy it."

"Never, Grace! even were I to live I should not make use of it. I have in my life had more than my share of it, and it brought me no happiness. It has no value to me – the rankest weed that grows above it is worth more in my eyes. Take it. To the world it means everything – wealth and position. Take it. It will make you as proud and independent as your lover – it will make you always gracious in his eyes; – it will be a setting to your beauty, – it will be a pedestal to your virtue. Take it – it is yours."

"But you have relatives – friends," said the girl, drawing away from the shining stone with a half superstitious awe. "There are others whose claims" —

"None greater than yours," interrupted the old man, with the nervous haste of failing breath. "Call it a reward if you choose. Look upon it as a bribe to keep your lover to the fulfilment of his promise to preserve my manuscripts and collection. Think, if you like, that it is an act of retribution – that once in my life I might have known a young girl whose future would have been blessed by such a gift. Think – think what you like – but take it!"

His voice had sunk to a whisper. A greyish pallor had overspread his face, and his breath came with difficulty. Grace would have called her brother, but with a motion of his hand Devarges restrained her. With a desperate effort he raised himself upon his elbow, and drawing an envelope from his pocket, put it in her hand.

"It contains – map – description of mine and locality – yours – say you will take it – Grace, quick, say" —

His head had again sunk to the floor. She stooped to raise it. As she did so a slight shadow darkened the opening by the door. She raised her eyes quickly and saw the face of Dumphy!

She did not shrink this time; but, with a sudden instinct, she turned to Devarges, and said — "I will!"

She raised her eyes again defiantly, but the face had disappeared.

"Thank you," said the old man. His lips moved again, but without a sound. A strange film had begun to gather in his eyes.

"Dr. Devarges," whispered Grace.

He did not speak. "He is dying," thought the young girl as a new and sudden fear overcame her. She rose quickly and crossed hurriedly to her brother and shook him. A prolonged inspiration, like a moan, was the only response. For a moment she glanced wildly around the room and then ran to the door.

"Philip!"

There was no response. She climbed up through the tunnel-like opening. It was already quite dark, and a few feet beyond the hut nothing was distinguishable. She cast a rapid backward glance, and then, with a sudden desperation, darted forward into the darkness. At the same moment two figures raised themselves from behind the shadow of the mound and slipped down the tunnel into the hut – Mrs. Brackett and Mr. Dumphy. They might have been the meanest predatory animals – so stealthy, so eager, so timorous, so crouching, and yet so agile were their motions. They ran sometimes upright, and sometimes on all fours, hither and thither. They fell over each other in their eagerness, and struck and spat savagely at each other in the half darkness. They peered into corners, they rooted in the dying embers and among the ashes, they groped among the skins and blankets, they smelt and sniffed at every article. They paused at last apparently unsuccessful, and glared at each other.

"They must have eaten it," said Mrs. Brackett, in a hoarse whisper.

"It didn't look like suthin' to eat," said Dumphy.

"You saw 'em take it from the fire?"

"Yes!"

"And rub it?"

"Yes!"

"Fool. Don't you see" —

"What?"

"It was a baked potato."

Dumphy sat dumfounded.

"Why should they rub it? It takes off the cracklin' skins," he said.

"They've got such fine stomachs!" answered Mrs. Brackett, with an oath.

Dumphy was still aghast with the importance of his discovery.

"He said he knew where there was more!" he whispered eagerly.

"Where?"

"I didn't get to hear."

"Fool! Why didn't ye rush in and grip his throat until he told yer?" hissed Mrs. Brackett, in a tempest of baffled rage and disappointment. "Ye ain't got the spunk of a flea. Let me get hold of that gal – Hush! what's that?"

"He's moving!" said Dumphy.

In an instant they had both changed again into slinking, crouching, baffled animals, eager only for escape. Yet they dared not move.

The old man had turned over, and his lips were moving in the mutterings of delirium. Presently he called "Grace!"

With a sign of caution to her companion, the woman leaned over him.

"Yes, deary, I'm here."

"Tell him not to forget. Make him keep his promise. Ask him where it is buried!"

"Yes, deary!"

"He'll tell you. He knows!"

"Yes, deary!"

"At the head of Monument Cañon. A hundred feet north of the lone pine. Dig two feet down below the surface of the cairn."

"Yes!"

"Where the wolves can't get it."

"Yes!"

"The stones keep it from ravenous beasts."

"Yes, in course."

"That might tear it up."

"Yes!"

"Starving beasts!"

"Yes, deary!"

The fire of his wandering eyes went out suddenly, like a candle; his jaw dropped; he was dead. And over him the man and woman crouched in fearful joy, looking at each other with the first smile that had been upon their lips since they had entered the fateful cañon.

CHAPTER III. GABRIEL

It was found the next morning that the party was diminished by five. Philip Ashley and Grace Conroy, Peter Dumphy and Mrs. Brackett, were missing; Dr. Paul Devarges was dead. The death of the old man caused but little excitement and no sorrow; the absconding of the others was attributed to some information which they had selfishly withheld from the remaining ones, and produced a spasm of impotent rage. In five minutes their fury knew no bounds. The lives and property of the fugitives were instantly declared forfeit. Steps were taken – about twenty, I think – in the direction of their flight, but finally abandoned.

Only one person knew that Philip and Grace had gone together – Gabriel Conroy. On awakening early that morning he had found pinned to his blanket a paper with these words in pencil

—
"God bless dear brother and sister, and keep them until Philip and I come back with help."

With it were a few scraps of provisions, evidently saved by Grace from her scant rations, and left as a parting gift. These Gabriel instantly turned into the common stock. Then he began to comfort the child. Added to his natural hopefulness, he had a sympathetic instinct with the pains and penalties of childhood, not so much a quality of his intellect as of his nature. He had all the physical adaptabilities of a nurse – a large, tender touch, a low persuasive voice, pliant yet unhesitating limbs, and broad, well-cushioned surfaces. During the weary journey women had instinctively entrusted babies to his charge; most of the dead had died in his arms; all forms and conditions of helplessness had availed themselves of his easy capacity. No one thought of thanking him. I do not think he ever expected it; he always appeared morally irresponsible and quite unconscious of his own importance, and, as is frequent in such cases, there was a tendency to accept his services at his own valuation. Nay more, there was a slight consciousness of superiority in those who thus gave him an opportunity of exhibiting his special faculty.

"Olly," he said, after an airy preliminary toss, "would ye like to have a nice dolly?"

Olly opened her wide hungry eyes in hopeful anticipation and nodded assent.

"A nice dolly, with real mamma," he continued, "who plays with it like a true baby. Would ye like to help her play with it?"

The idea of a joint partnership of this kind evidently pleased Olly by its novelty.

"Well then, brother Gabe will get you one. But Gracie will have to go away, so that the doll's mamma kin come."

Olly at first resented this, but eventually succumbed to novelty, after the fashion of her sex, starving or otherwise. Yet she prudently asked —

"Is it ever hungry?"

"It is never hungry," replied Gabriel, confidently.

"Oh!" said Olly, with an air of relief.

Then Gabriel, the cunning, sought Mrs. Dumphy, the mentally alienated.

"You are jest killin' of yourself with the tendin' o' that child," he said, after bestowing a caress on the blanket and slightly pinching an imaginary cheek of the effigy. "It would be likelier and stronger fur a playmate. Good gracious! how thin it is gettin'. A change will do it good; fetch it to Olly, and let her help you to tend it until – until – to-morrow." To-morrow was the extreme limit of Mrs. Dumphy's future.

So Mrs. Dumphy and her effigy were installed in Gracie's place, and Olly was made happy. A finer nature or a more active imagination than Gabriel's would have revolted at this monstrous combination; but Gabriel only saw that they appeared contented, and the first pressing difficulty of Gracie's absence was overcome. So alternately they took care of the effigy, the child simulating

the cares of the future and losing the present in them, the mother living in the memories of the past. Perhaps it might have been pathetic to have seen Olly and Mrs. Dumphy both saving the infinitesimal remnants of their provisions for the doll, but the only spectator was one of the actors, Gabriel, who lent himself to the deception; and pathos, to be effective, must be viewed from the outside.

At noon that day the hysterical young man, Gabriel's cousin, died. Gabriel went over to the other hut and endeavoured to cheer the survivors. He succeeded in infecting them so far with his hopefulness as to loosen the tongue and imagination of the story-teller, but at four o'clock the body had not yet been buried. It was evening, and the three were sitting over the embers, when a singular change came over Mrs. Dumphy. The effigy suddenly slipped from her hands, and looking up, Gabriel perceived that her arms had dropped to her side, and that her eyes were fixed on vacancy. He spoke to her, but she made no sign nor response of any kind. He touched her and found her limbs rigid and motionless. Olly began to cry.

The sound seemed to agitate Mrs. Dumphy. Without moving a limb, she said, in a changed, unnatural voice, "Hark!"

Olly choked her sobs at a sign from Gabriel.

"They're coming!" said Mrs. Dumphy.

"Which?" said Gabriel.

"The relief party."

"Where?"

"Far, far away. They're jest setting out. I see 'em – a dozen men with pack horses and provisions. The leader is an American – the others are strangers. They're coming – but far, oh, so far away!"

Gabriel fixed his eyes upon her, but did not speak. After a death-like pause, she went on —

"The sun is shining, the birds are singing, the grass is springing where they ride – but, oh, so far – too far away!"

"Do you know them?" asked Gabriel.

"No."

"Do they know us?"

"No."

"Why do they come, and how do they know where we are?" asked Gabriel.

"Their leader has seen us."

"Where?"

"In a dream."¹

Gabriel whistled and looked at the rag baby. He was willing to recognise something abnormal, and perhaps even prophetic, in this insane woman; but a coincident exaltation in a stranger who was not suffering from the illusions produced by starvation was beyond his credulity. Nevertheless, the instincts of good humour and hopefulness were stronger, and he presently asked —

"How will they come?"

"Up through a beautiful valley and a broad shining river. Then they will cross a mountain until they come to another beautiful valley with steep sides, and a rushing river that runs so near us that I can almost hear it now. Don't you see it? It is just beyond the snow peak there; a green valley, with the rain falling upon it. Look! it is there."

She pointed directly north, toward the region of inhospitable snow.

¹ I fear I must task the incredulous reader's further patience by calling attention to what may perhaps prove the most literal and thoroughly-attested fact of this otherwise fanciful chronicle. The condition and situation of the ill-famed "Donner Party" – then an unknown, unheralded cavalcade of emigrants – starving in an unfrequented pass of the Sierras, was first made known to Captain Yount of Napa, *in a dream*. The Spanish records of California show that the relief party which succoured the survivors was projected upon this *spiritual* information.

"Could you get to it?" asked the practical Gabriel.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I must wait here for my baby. She is coming for us. She will find me here."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

It was the last time that she uttered that well-worn sentence; for it was only a little past midnight that her baby came to her – came to her with a sudden light, that might have been invisible to Gabriel, but that it was reflected in her own lack-lustre eyes – came to this poor half-witted creature with such distinctness that she half rose, stretched out her thin yearning arms, and received it – a corpse! Gabriel placed the effigy in her arms and folded them over it. Then he ran swiftly to the other hut. For some unexplained reason he did not get further than the door. What he saw there he has never told; but when he groped his fainting way back to his own hut again, his face was white and bloodless, and his eyes wild and staring. Only one impulse remained – to fly for ever from the cursed spot. He stopped only long enough to snatch up the sobbing and frightened Olly, and then, with a loud cry to God to help him – to help *them*– he dashed out, and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER IV. NATURE SHOWS THEM THE WAY

It was a spur of the long grave-like ridge that lay to the north of the cañon. Up its gaunt white flank two figures had been slowly crawling since noon, until at sunset they at last stood upon its outer verge outlined against the sky – Philip and Grace.

For all the fatigues of the journey, the want of nourishing food and the haunting shadow of the suffering she had left, the face of Grace, flushed with the dying sun, was very pretty. The boy's dress she had borrowed was ill-fitting, and made her exquisite little figure still more diminutive, but it could not entirely hide its graceful curves. Here in this rosy light the swooning fringes of her dark eyes were no longer hidden; the perfect oval of her face, even the few freckles on her short upper lip, were visible to Philip. Partly as a physical support, partly to reassure her, he put his arm tenderly around her waist. Then he kissed her. It is possible that this last act was purely gratuitous.

Howbeit Grace first asked, with the characteristic prudence of her sex, the question she had already asked many days before that day, "Do you love me, Philip?" And Philip, with the ready frankness of our sex on such occasions, had invariably replied, "I do."

Nevertheless the young man was pre-occupied, anxious, and hungry. It was the fourth day since they had left the hut. On the second day they had found some pine cones with the nuts still intact and fresh beneath the snow, and later a squirrel's hoard. On the third day Philip had killed the proprietor and eaten him. The same evening Philip had espied a duck winging his way up the cañon. Philip, strong in the belief that some inland lake was the immediate object of its flight, had first marked its course, and then brought it down with a long shot. Then having altered their course in accordance with its suggestion, they ate their guide next morning for breakfast.

Philip was also disappointed. The summit of the spur so laboriously attained only showed him the same endless succession of white snow billows stretching rigidly to the horizon's edge. There was no break – no glimpse of watercourse or lake. There was nothing to indicate whence the bird had come or the probable point it was endeavouring to reach. He was beginning to consider the feasibility of again changing their course, when an unlooked-for accident took that volition from his hands.

Grace had ventured out to the extreme limit of the rocky cliff, and with straining eyes was trying to peer beyond the snow fields, when the treacherous ledge on which she was standing began to give way. In an instant Philip was at her side and had caught her hand, but at the same moment a large rock of the ledge dropped from beneath her feet, and left her with no support but his grasp. The sudden shock loosened also the insecure granite on which Philip stood. Before he could gain secure foothold it also trembled, tottered, slipped, and then fell, carrying Philip and Grace with it. Luckily this immense mass of stone and ice got fairly away before them, and ploughed down the steep bank of the cliff, breaking off the projecting rocks and protuberances, and cutting a clean, though almost perpendicular, path down the mountain side. Even in falling Philip had presence of mind enough to forbear clutching at the crumbling ledge, and so precipitating the rock that might crush them. Before he lost his senses he remembered tightening his grip of Grace's arm, and drawing her face and head forward to his breast, and even in his unconsciousness it seemed that he instinctively guided her into the smooth passage or "shoot" made by the plunging rock below them; and even then he was half conscious of dashing into sudden material darkness and out again into light, and of the crashing and crackling of branches around him, and even the brushing of the stiff pine needles against his face and limbs. Then he felt himself stopped, and then, and then only, everything whirled confusedly by him, and his brain seemed to partake of the motion, and then – the relief of utter blankness and oblivion. When he regained his senses, it was with a burning heat in his throat, and the sensation of strangling. When he opened his eyes he saw Grace bending over

him, pale and anxious, and chafing his hands and temples with snow. There was a spot of blood upon her round cheek.

"You are hurt, Grace!" were the first words that Philip gasped.

"No! – dear, brave Philip – but only so thankful and happy for your escape." Yet, at the same moment the colour faded from her cheek, and even the sun-kissed line of her upper lip grew bloodless, as she leaned back against a tree.

But Philip did not see her. His eyes were rapidly taking in his strange surroundings. He was lying among the broken fragments of pine branches and the débris of the cliff above. In his ears was the sound of hurrying water, and before him, scarce a hundred feet, a rushing river! He looked up; the red glow of sunset was streaming through the broken limbs and shattered branches of the snow-thatched roof that he had broken through in his descent. Here and there along the river the same light was penetrating the interstices and openings of this strange vault that arched above this sunless stream.

He knew now whence the duck had flown! He knew now why he had not seen the watercourse before! He knew now where the birds and beasts had betaken themselves – why the woods and cañons were trackless! Here was at last the open road! He staggered to his feet with a cry of delight.

"Grace, we are saved."

Grace looked at him with eyes that perhaps spoke more eloquently of joy at his recovery than of comprehension of his delight.

"Look, Grace! this is Nature's own road – only a lane, perhaps – but a clue to our way out of this wilderness. As we descend the stream it will open into a broader valley."

"I know it," she said, simply.

Philip looked at her inquiringly.

"When I dragged you out of the way of the falling rocks and snow above, I had a glimpse of the valley you speak of. I saw it from there."

She pointed to a ledge of rock above the opening where the great stone that had fallen had lodged.

"When you dragged me, my child?"

Grace smiled faintly.

"You don't know how strong I am," she said, and then proved it by fainting dead away.

Philip started to his feet and ran to her side. Then he felt for the precious flask that he had preserved so sacredly through all their hardships, but it was gone. He glanced around him; it was lying on the snow, empty! For the first time in their weary pilgrimage Philip uttered a groan. At the sound Grace opened her sweet eyes. She saw her lover with the empty flask in his hand, and smiled faintly.

"I poured it all down your throat, dear," she said. "You looked so faint – I thought you were dying – forgive me!"

"But I was only stunned; and you, Grace, you" —

"Am better now," she said, as she strove to rise. But she uttered a weak little cry and fell back again.

Philip did not hear her. He was already climbing the ledge she had spoken of. When he returned his face was joyous.

"I see it, Grace; it is only a few miles away. It is still light, and we shall camp there to-night."

"I am afraid – not – dear Philip," said Grace, doubtfully.

"Why not?" asked Philip, a little impatiently.

"Because – I – think – my leg is broken!"

"Grace!"

But she had fainted.

CHAPTER V. OUT OF THE WOODS – INTO THE SHADOW

Happily Grace was wrong. Her ankle was severely sprained, and she could not stand. Philip tore up his shirt, and, with bandages dipped in snow water, wrapped up the swollen limb. Then he knocked over a quail in the bushes and another duck, and clearing away the brush for a camping spot, built a fire, and tempted the young girl with a hot supper. The peril of starvation passed, their greatest danger was over – a few days longer of enforced rest and inactivity was the worst to be feared.

The air had grown singularly milder with the last few hours. At midnight a damp breeze stirred the pine needles above their heads, and an ominous muffled beating was heard upon the snow-packed vault. It was rain.

"It is the reveille of spring!" whispered Philip.

But Grace was in no mood for poetry – even a lover's. She let her head drop upon his shoulder, and then said —

"You must go on, dear, and leave me here."

"Grace!"

"Yes, Philip! I can live till you come back. I fear no danger now. I am so much better off than *they* are!"

A few tears dropped on his hand. Philip winced. Perhaps it was his conscience; perhaps there was something in the girl's tone, perhaps because she had once before spoken in the same way, but it jarred upon a certain quality in his nature which he was pleased to call his "common sense." Philip really believed himself a high-souled, thoughtless, ardent, impetuous temperament, saved only from destruction by the occasional dominance of this quality.

For a moment he did not speak. He thought how, at the risk of his own safety, he had snatched this girl from terrible death; he thought how he had guarded her through their perilous journey, taking all the burdens upon himself; he thought how happy he had made her – how she had even admitted her happiness to him; he thought of her present helplessness, and how willing he was to delay the journey on her account; he dwelt even upon a certain mysterious, ill-defined but blissful future with him to which he was taking her; and yet here, at the moment of their possible deliverance, she was fretting about two dying people, who, without miraculous interference, would be dead before she could reach them. It was part of Philip's equitable self-examination – a fact of which he was very proud – that he always put himself in the position of the person with whom he differed, and imagined how *he* would act under the like circumstances. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that Philip always found that his conduct under those conditions would be totally different. In the present instance, putting himself in Grace's position, he felt that he would have abandoned all and everything for a love and future like hers. That she did not was evidence of a moral deficiency or a blood taint. Logic of this kind is easy and irrefutable. It has been known to obtain even beyond the Sierras, and with people who were not physically exhausted. After a pause he said to Grace, in a changed voice —

"Let us talk plainly for a few moments, Grace, and understand each other before we go forward or backward. It is five days since we left the hut; were we even certain of finding our wandering way back again, we could not reach them before another five days had elapsed; by that time all will be over. They have either been saved or are beyond the reach of help. This sounds harsh, Grace, but it is no harsher than the fact. Had we stayed, we would, without helping them, have only shared their fate. I might have been in your brother's place, you in your sister's. It is our fortune, not our fault, that we are not dying with them. It has been willed that you and I should be

saved. It might have been willed that we should have perished in our attempts to succour them, and that relief which came to *them* would have never reached *us*."

Grace was no logician, and could not help thinking that if Philip had said this before, she would not have left the hut. But the masculine reader will, I trust, at once detect the irrelevance of the feminine suggestion, and observe that it did not refute Philip's argument. She looked at him with a half frightened air. Perhaps it was the tears that dimmed her eyes, but his few words seemed to have removed him to a great distance, and for the first time a strange sense of loneliness came over her. She longed to reach her yearning arms to him again, but with this feeling came a sense of shame that she had not felt before.

Philip noticed her hesitation, and half interpreted it. He let her passive head fall.

"Perhaps we had better wait until we are ourselves out of danger before we talk of helping others," he said with something of his old bitterness. "This accident may keep us here some days, and we know not as yet where we are. Go to sleep now," he said more kindly, "and in the morning we will see what can be done."

Grace sobbed herself to sleep! Poor, poor Grace! She had been looking for this opportunity of speaking about herself – about their future. This was to have been the beginning of her confidence about Dr. Devarges's secret; she would have told him frankly all the doctor had said, even his suspicions of Philip himself. And then Philip would have been sure to have told her his plans, and they would have gone back with help, and Philip would have been a hero whom Gabriel would have instantly recognised as the proper husband for Grace, and they would have all been very happy. And now they were all dead, and had died, perhaps, cursing her, and – Philip – Philip had not kissed her good-night, and was sitting gloomily under a tree!

The dim light of a leaden morning broke through the snow vault above their heads. It was raining heavily, the river had risen, and was still rising. It was filled with drift and branches, and snow and ice, the waste and ware of many a mile. Occasionally a large uprooted tree with a gaunt forked root like a mast sailed by. Suddenly Philip, who had been sitting with his chin upon his hands, rose with a shout. Grace looked up languidly. He pointed to a tree that, floating by, had struck the bank where they sat, and then drifted broadside against it, where for a moment it lay motionless.

"Grace," he said, with his old spirits, "Nature has taken us in hand herself. If we are to be saved, it is by her methods. She brought us here to the water's edge, and now she sends a boat to take us off again. Come!"

Before Grace could reply, Philip had lifted her gaily in his arms, and deposited her between two upright roots of the tree. Then he placed beside her his rifle and provisions, and leaping himself on the bow of this strange craft, shoved it off with a broken branch that he had found. For a moment it still clung to the bank, and then suddenly catching the impulse of the current, darted away like a living creature.

The river was very narrow and rapid where they had embarked, and for a few moments it took all of Philip's energy and undivided attention to keep the tree in the centre of the current. Grace sat silent, admiring her lover, alert, forceful, and glowing with excitement. Presently Philip called to her —

"Do you see that log? We are near a settlement."

A freshly-hewn log of pine was floating in the current beside them. A ray of hope shot through Grace's sad fancies; if they were so near help, might not it have already reached the sufferers? But she forbore to speak to Philip again upon that subject, and in his new occupation he seemed to have forgotten her. It was with a little thrill of joy that at last she saw him turn, and balancing himself with his bough upon their crank craft, walk down slowly toward her. When he reached her side he sat down, and, taking her hand in his, for the first time since the previous night, he said gently —

"Grace, my child, I have something to tell you."

Grace's little heart throbbed quickly; for a moment she did not dare to lift her long lashes toward his. Without noticing her embarrassment he went on —

"In a few hours we shall be no longer in the wilderness, but in the world again — in a settlement perhaps, among men and — perhaps women. Strangers certainly — not the relatives you have known, and who know you — not the people with whom we have been familiar for so many weeks and days — but people who know nothing of us, or our sufferings."

Grace looked at him, but did not speak.

"You understand, Grace, that, not knowing this, they might put their own construction upon our flight.

"To speak plainly, my child, you are a young woman, and I am a young man. Your beauty, dear Grace, offers an explanation of our companionship that the world will accept more readily than any other, and the truth to many would seem scarcely as natural. For this reason it must not be told. I will go back alone with relief, and leave you here in some safe hands until I return. But I leave you here not as Grace Conroy — you shall take my own name!"

A hot flush mounted to Grace's throat and cheek, and for an instant, with parted lips, she hung breathless upon his next word. He continued quietly —

"You shall be my sister — Grace Ashley."

The blood fell from her cheek, her eyelids dropped, and she buried her face in her hands. Philip waited patiently for her reply. When she lifted her face again, it was quiet and calm — there was even a slight flush of proud colour in her cheek as she met his gaze, and with the faintest curl of her upper lip said —

"You are right!"

At the same moment there was a sudden breaking of light and warmth and sunshine over their heads; the tree swiftly swung round a sharp curve in the river, and then drifted slowly into a broad, overflowed valley, sparkling with the emerald of gently sloping hillsides, and dazzling with the glow of the noonday sun. And beyond, from a cluster of willows scarcely a mile away, the smoke of a cabin chimney curled in the still air.

CHAPTER VI. FOOTPRINTS

For two weeks an unclouded sun rose and set on the rigid outlines of Monument Point. For two weeks there had been no apparent change in the ghastly whiteness of the snow-flanked rocks; in the white billows that rose rank on rank beyond, in the deathlike stillness that reigned above and below. It was the first day of April; there was the mildness of early spring in the air that blew over this gaunt waste, and yet awoke no sound or motion. And yet a nearer approach showed that a slow insidious change had been taking place. The white flanks of the mountain were more hollow; the snow had shrunk visibly away in places, leaving the grey rocks naked and protuberant; the rigid outlines were there, but less full and rounded; the skeleton was beginning to show through the wasting flesh; there were great patches of snow that had sloughed away, leaving the gleaming granite bare below. It was the last change of the Hippocratic face that Nature turned toward the spectator. And yet this change had been noiseless – the solitude unbroken.

And then one day there suddenly drifted across the deathlike valley the chime of jingling spurs and the sound of human voices. Down the long defile a cavalcade of mounted men and pack mules made their way, plunging through drifts and clattering over rocks. The unwonted sound awoke the long slumbering echoes of the mountain, brought down small avalanches from cliff and tree, and at last brought from some cavern of the rocks to the surface of the snow a figure so wild, haggard, dishevelled, and monstrous, that it was scarcely human. It crawled upon the snow, dodging behind rocks with the timidity of a frightened animal, and at last, squatting behind a tree, awaited in ambush the approach of the party.

Two men rode ahead; one grave, preoccupied, and reticent. The other alert, active, and voluble. At last the reticent man spoke, but slowly, and as if recalling a memory rather than recording a present impression.

"They cannot be far away from us now. It was in some such spot that I first saw them. The place is familiar."

"Heaven send that it may be!" said the other hastily, "for to tell you the truth, I doubt if we will be able to keep the men together a day longer in this crazy quest, unless we discover something."

"It was here," continued the other dreamily, not heeding his companion, "that I saw the figures of a man and woman. If there is not a cairn of stone somewhere about this spot, I shall believe my dream false, and confess myself an old fool."

"Well – as I said before," rejoined the other, laughing, "anything – a scrap of paper, an old blanket, or a broken waggon-tongue will do. Columbus helped his course and kept up his crew on a fragment of seaweed. But what are the men looking at? Great God! There *is* something moving by yonder rock!"

By one common superstitious instinct the whole party had crowded together – those who, a few moments before, had been loudest in their scepticism, held their breath with awe, and trembled with excitement – as the shambling figure that had watched them enter the cañon rose from its lair, and taking upon itself a human semblance, with uncouth gestures and a strange hoarse cry made towards them. It was Dumphy!

The leader was the first to recover himself. He advanced from the rest and met Dumphy half-way.

"Who are you?"

"A man."

"What's the matter?"

"Starving."

"Where are the others?"

Dumphy cast a suspicious glance at him and said —

"Who?"

"The others. You are not alone?"

"Yes, I am!"

"How did you get here?"

"What's that to you? I'm here and starving. Gimme suthin' to eat and drink."

He sank exhaustedly on all fours again.

There was a murmur of sympathy from the men.

"Give him suthin'. Don't you see he can't stand — much less talk? Where's the doctor?"

And then the younger of the leaders thus adjured — "Leave him to me — he wants my help just now more than yours."

He poured some brandy down his throat. Dumphy gasped, and then staggered to his feet.

"What did you say your name was?" asked the young surgeon kindly.

"Jackson," said Dumphy, with a defiantly blank look.

"Where from?"

"Missouri."

"How did you get here?"

"Strayed from my party."

"And they are — "

"Gone on. Gimme suthin' to eat!"

"Take him back to camp and hand him over to Sanchez. He'll know what to do," said the surgeon to one of the men. "Well, Blunt," he continued, addressing the leader, "you're saved — but your nine men in buckram have dwindled down to one, and not a very creditable specimen at that," he said, as his eyes followed the retreating Dumphy.

"I wish it were all, doctor," said Blunt simply; "I would be willing to go back now, but something tells me we have only begun. This one makes everything else possible. What have you there?"

One of the men was approaching, holding a slip of paper with ragged edges, as if torn from some position where it had been nailed.

"A notiss — from a tree. Me no sabe," said the ex-vaquero.

"Nor I," said Blunt, looking at it; "it seems to be in German. Call Glohr."

A tall Swiss came forward. Blunt handed him the paper. The man examined it.

"It is a direction to find property — important and valuable property — buried."

"Where?"

"Under a cairn of stones."

The surgeon and Blunt exchanged glances.

"Lead us there!" said Blunt.

It was a muffled monotonous tramp of about an hour. At the end of that time they reached a spur of the mountain around which the cañon turned abruptly. Blunt uttered a cry. Before them was a ruin — a rude heap of stones originally symmetrical and elevated, but now thrown down and dismantled. The snow and earth were torn up around and beneath it. On the snow lay some scattered papers, a portfolio of drawings of birds and flowers: a glass case of insects broken and demolished, and the scattered feathers of a few stuffed birds. At a little distance lay what seemed to be a heap of ragged clothing. At the sight of it the nearest horseman uttered a shout and leaped to the ground. It was Mrs. Brackett, dead.

CHAPTER VII. IN WHICH THE FOOTPRINTS BEGIN TO FADE

She had been dead about a week. The features and clothing were scarcely recognizable; the limbs were drawn up convulsively. The young surgeon bent over her attentively.

"Starved to death?" said Blunt interrogatively.

The surgeon did not reply, but rose and examined the scattered specimens. One of them he picked up and placed first to his nose and then to his lips. After a pause he replied quietly —

"No. Poisoned."

The men fell back from the body.

"Accidentally, I think," continued the surgeon coolly; "the poor creature has been driven by starvation to attack the specimens. They have been covered with a strong solution of arsenic to preserve them from the ravages of insects, and this starving woman has been the first to fall a victim to the collector's caution."

There was a general movement of horror and indignation among the men. "Shoost to keep dem birds," said the irate Swiss. "Killing women to save his cussed game," said another. The surgeon smiled. It was an inauspicious moment for Dr. Devarges to have introduced himself in person.

"If this enthusiastic naturalist is still living, I hope he'll keep away from the men for some hours," said the surgeon to Blunt, privately.

"Who is he?" asked the other.

"A foreigner — a *savant* of some note, I should say, in his own country. I think I have heard the name before — 'Devarges,'" replied the surgeon, looking over some papers that he had picked up. "He speaks of some surprising discoveries he has made, and evidently valued his collection very highly."

"Are they worth re-collecting and preserving?" asked Blunt.

"Not now!" said the surgeon. "Every moment is precious. Humanity first, science afterward," he added lightly, and they rode on.

And so the papers and collections preserved with such care, the evidence of many months of patient study, privation, and hardship, the records of triumph and discovery were left lying upon the snow. The wind came down the flanks of the mountain and tossed them hither and thither as if in scorn, and the sun, already fervid, heating the metallic surfaces of the box and portfolio, sank them deeper in the snow, as if to bury them from the sight for ever.

By skirting the edge of the valley where the snow had fallen away from the mountain-side, they reached in a few hours the blazed tree at the entrance of the fateful cañon. The placard was still there, but the wooden hand that once pointed in the direction of the buried huts had, through some mischance of wind or weather, dropped slightly, and was ominously pointing to the snow below. This was still so deep in drifts that the party were obliged to leave their horses and enter the cañon a-foot. Almost unconsciously, this was done in perfect silence, walking in single file, occasionally climbing up the sides of the cañon where the rocks offered a better foothold than the damp snow, until they reached a wooden chimney and part of a roof that now reared itself above the snow. Here they paused and looked at each other. The leader approached the chimney, and leaning over it called within.

There was no response. Presently, however, the cañon took up the shout and repeated it, and then there was a silence broken only by the falling of an icicle from a rock, or a snow slide from the hill above. Then all was quiet again, until Blunt, after a moment's hesitation, walked around to the opening and descended into the hut. He had scarcely disappeared, as it seemed, before he returned, looking very white and grave, and beckoned to the surgeon. He instantly followed. After

a little, the rest of the party, one after another, went down. They stayed some time, and then came slowly to the surface bearing three dead bodies. They returned again quickly, and then brought up the *dissevered* members of a fourth. This done they looked at each other in silence.

"There should be another cabin here," said Blunt after a pause.

"Here it is!" said one of the men, pointing to the chimney of the second hut.

There was no preliminary "hallo!" or hesitation now. The worst was known. They all passed rapidly to the opening, and disappeared within. When they returned to the surface they huddled together – a whispering but excited group. They were so much preoccupied that they did not see that their party was suddenly increased by the presence of a stranger.

CHAPTER VIII. THE FOOTPRINTS GROW FAINTER

It was Philip Ashley! Philip Ashley – faded, travel-worn, hollow-eyed, but nervously energetic and eager. Philip, who four days before had left Grace the guest of a hospitable trapper's half-breed family in the California Valley. Philip – gloomy, discontented, hateful of the quest he had undertaken, but still fulfilling his promise to Grace and the savage dictates of his own conscience. It was Philip Ashley, who now standing beside the hut, turned half-cynically, half-indifferently toward the party.

The surgeon was first to discover him. He darted forward with a cry of recognition, "Poinsett! Arthur! – what are you doing here?"

Ashley's face flushed crimson at the sight of the stranger. "Hush!" he said almost involuntarily. He glanced rapidly around the group, and then in some embarrassment replied with awkward literalness, "I left my horse with the others at the entrance of the cañon."

"I see," said the surgeon briskly, "you have come with relief like ourselves; but you are too late! too late!"

"Too late!" echoed Ashley.

"Yes, they are all dead or gone!"

A singular expression crossed Ashley's face. It was unnoticed by the surgeon, who was whispering to Blunt. Presently he came forward.

"Captain Blunt, this is Lieutenant Poinsett of the Fifth Infantry, an old messmate mine, whom I have not met before for two years. He is here, like ourselves, on an errand of mercy. It is like him!"

The unmistakable air of high breeding and intelligence which distinguished Philip always, and the cordial endorsement of the young surgeon, prepossessed the party instantly in his favour. With that recognition, something of his singular embarrassment dropped away.

"Who are those people?" he ventured at last to say.

"Their names are on this paper, which we found nailed to a tree. Of course, with no survivor present, we are unable to identify them all. The hut occupied by Dr. Devarges, whose body, buried in the snow, we have identified by his clothing, and the young girl Grace Conroy and her child-sister, are the only ones we are positive about."

Philip looked at the doctor.

"How have you identified the young girl?"

"By her clothing, which was marked."

Philip remembered that Grace had changed her clothes for the suit of a younger brother who was dead.

"Only by that?" he asked.

"No. Dr. Devarges in his papers gives the names of the occupants of the hut. We have accounted for all but her brother, and a fellow by the name of Ashley."

"How do you account for them?" asked Philip with a dark face.

"Ran away! What can you expect from that class of people?" said the surgeon with a contemptuous shrug.

"What class?" asked Philip almost savagely.

"My dear boy," said the surgeon, "you know them as well as I. Didn't they always pass the Fort where we were stationed? Didn't they beg what they could, and steal what they otherwise couldn't get, and then report to Washington the incompetency of the military? Weren't they always getting up rows with the Indians and then sneaking away to let us settle the bill? Don't you remember them – the men gaunt, sickly, vulgar, low-toned; the women dirty, snuffy, prematurely old and prematurely prolific?"

Philip tried to combat this picture with his recollection of Grace's youthful features, but somehow failed. Within the last half-hour his instinctive fastidiousness had increased a hundredfold. He looked at the doctor, and said "Yes."

"Of course," said the surgeon. "It was the old lot. What could you expect? People who could be strong only in proportion to their physical strength, and losing everything with the loss of that? There have been selfishness, cruelty – God knows – perhaps murder done here!"

"Yes, yes," said Philip, hastily; "but you were speaking of this girl, Grace Conroy; what do you know of her?"

"Nothing, except that she was found lying there dead with her name on her clothes and her sister's blanket in her arms, as if the wretches had stolen the dying child from the dead girl's arms. But you, Arthur, how chanced you to be here in this vicinity? Are you stationed here?"

"No, I have resigned from the army."

"Good! and you are here" —

"Alone!"

"Come, we will talk this over as we return. You will help me make out my report. This you know, is an official inquiry, based upon the alleged clairvoyant quality of our friend Blunt. I must say we have established that fact, if we have been able to do nothing more."

The surgeon then lightly sketched an account of the expedition, from its inception in a dream of Blunt (who was distinctly impressed with the fact that a number of emigrants were perishing from hunger in the Sierras) to his meeting with Philip, with such deftness of cynical humour and playful satire – qualities that had lightened the weariness of the mess-table of Fort Bobadil – that the young men were both presently laughing. Two or three of the party who had been engaged in laying out the unburied bodies, and talking in whispers, hearing these fine gentlemen make light of the calamity in well-chosen epithets, were somewhat ashamed of their own awe, and less elegantly, and I fear less grammatically, began to be jocose too. Whereat the fastidious Philip frowned, the surgeon laughed, and the two friends returned to the entrance of the cañon, and thence rode out of the valley together.

Philip's reticence regarding his own immediate past was too characteristic to excite any suspicion or surprise in the mind of his friend. In truth, the doctor was too well pleased with his presence, and the undoubted support which he should have in Philip's sympathetic tastes and congenial habits, to think of much else. He was proud of his friend – proud of the impression he had made among the rude unlettered men with whom he was forced by the conditions of frontier democracy to associate on terms of equality. And Philip, though young, was accustomed to have his friends proud of him. Indeed, he always felt some complacency with himself that he seldom took advantage of this fact. Satisfied that he might have confided to the doctor the truth of his connection with the ill-fated party and his flight with Grace, and that the doctor would probably have regarded him as a hero, he felt less compunction at his suppression of the fact.

Their way lay by Monument Point and the dismantled cairn. Philip had already passed it on his way to the cañon, and had felt a thankfulness for the unexpected tragedy that had, as he believed, conscientiously relieved him of a duty to the departed naturalist, yet he could not forego a question.

"Is there anything among these papers and collections worth our preserving?" he asked the surgeon.

The doctor, who had not for many months had an opportunity to air his general scepticism, was nothing if not derogatory.

"No," he answered, shortly. "If there were any way that we might restore them to the living Dr. Devarges, they might minister to his vanity, and please the poor fellow. I see nothing in them that should make them worthy to survive him."

The tone was so like Dr. Devarges' own manner, as Philip remembered it, that he smiled grimly and felt relieved. When they reached the spot Nature seemed to have already taken the same

cynical view; the metallic case was already deeply sunken in the snow, the wind had scattered the papers far and wide, and even the cairn itself had tumbled into a shapeless, meaningless ruin.

CHAPTER IX. IN WHICH THE FOOTPRINTS ARE LOST FOR EVER

A fervid May sun had been baking the adobe walls of the Presidio of San Ramon, firing the red tiles, scorching the black courtyard, and driving the mules and vaqueros of a train that had just arrived into the shade of the long galleries of the quadrangle, when the *Comandante*, who was taking his noonday *siesta* in a low, studded chamber beside the guard-room, was gently awakened by his secretary. For thirty years the noonday slumbers of the Commander had never been broken; his first thought was the heathen! – his first impulse to reach for his trusty Toledo. But, as it so happened, the cook had borrowed it that morning to rake *tortillas* from the Presidio oven, and Don Juan Salvatierra contented himself with sternly demanding the reason for this unwonted intrusion.

"A señorita – an American – desires an immediate audience."

Don Juan removed the black silk handkerchief which he had tied round his grizzled brows, and sat up. Before he could assume a more formal attitude, the door was timidly opened, and a young girl entered. For all the disfigurement of scant, coarse, ill-fitting clothing, or the hollowness of her sweet eyes, and even the tears that dimmed their long lashes; for all the sorrow that had pinched her young cheek and straightened the corners of her childlike mouth, she was still so fair, so frank, so youthful, so innocent and helpless, that the *Comandante* stood erect, and then bent forward in a salutation that almost swept the floor. Apparently the prepossession was mutual. The young girl took a quick survey of the gaunt but gentlemanlike figure before her, cast a rapid glance at the serious but kindly eyes that shone above the Commander's iron-grey mustachios, dropped her hesitating, timid manner, and, with an impulsive gesture and a little cry, ran forward and fell upon her knees at his feet. The Commander would have raised her gently, but she restrained his hand.

"No, no, listen! I am only a poor, poor girl, without friends or home. A month ago, I left my family starving in the mountains, and came away to get them help. My brother came with me. God was good to us, Señor, and after a weary tramp of many days we found a trapper's hut, and food and shelter. Philip, my brother, went back alone to succour them. He has not returned. Oh, sir, he may be dead; they all may be dead – God only knows! It is three weeks ago since he left me; three weeks! It is a long time to be alone, Señor, a stranger in a strange land. The trapper was kind, and sent me here to you for assistance. You will help me? I know you will. You will find them, my friends, my little sister, my brother!"

The Commander waited until she had finished, and then gently lifted her to a seat by his side. Then he turned to his secretary, who, with a few hurried words in Spanish, answered the mute inquiry of the Commander's eyes. The young girl felt a thrill of disappointment as she saw that her personal appeal had been lost and unintelligible; it was with a slight touch of defiance that was new to her nature that she turned to the secretary who advanced as interpreter.

"You are an American?"

"Yes," said the girl, curtly, who had taken one of the strange, swift, instinctive dislikes of her sex to the man.

"How many years?"

"Fifteen."

The Commander, almost unconsciously, laid his brown hand on her clustering curls.

"Name?"

She hesitated and looked at the Commander.

"Grace," she said.

Then she hesitated; and, with a defiant glance at the secretary, added —

"Grace Ashley!"

"Give to me the names of some of your company, Mees Graziashly."

Grace hesitated.

"Philip Ashley, Gabriel Conroy, Peter Dumphy, Mrs. Jane Dumphy," she said at last.

The secretary opened a desk, took out a printed document, unfolded it, and glanced over its contents. Presently he handed it to the Commander with the comment "*Bueno*." The Commander said "*Bueno*" also, and glanced kindly and reassuringly at Grace.

"An expedition from the upper Presidio has found traces of a party of Americans in the Sierra," said the secretary monotonously. "There are names like these."

"It is the same – it is our party!" said Grace, joyously.

"You say so?" said the secretary, cautiously.

"Yes," said Grace, defiantly.

The secretary glanced at the paper again, and then said, looking at Grace intently —

"There is no name of Mees Graziashly."

The hot blood suddenly dyed the cheek of Grace and her eyelids dropped. She raised her eyes imploringly to the Commander. If she could have reached him directly, she would have thrown herself at his feet and confessed her innocent deceit, but she shrank from a confidence that first filtered through the consciousness of the secretary. So she began to fence feebly with the issue.

"It is a mistake," she said. "But the name of Philip, my brother, is there?"

"The name of Philip Ashley is here," said the secretary, grimly.

"And he is alive and safe!" cried Grace, forgetting in her relief and joy her previous shame and mortification.

"He is not found," said the secretary.

"Not found?" said Grace, with widely opened eyes.

"He is not there."

"No, of course," said Grace, with a nervous hysterical laugh; "he was with me; but he came back – he returned."

"On the 30th of April there is no record of the finding of Philip Ashley."

Grace groaned and clasped her hands. In her greater anxiety now, all lesser fears were forgotten. She turned and threw herself before the Commander.

"Oh, forgive me, Señor, but I swear to you I meant no harm! Philip is not my brother, but a friend, so kind, so good. He asked me to take his name, poor boy, God knows if he will ever claim it again, and I did. My name is not Ashley. I know not what is in that paper, but it must tell of my brother, Gabriel, my sister, of all! O, Señor, are they living or dead? Answer me you must – for – I am – I am Grace Conroy!"

The secretary had refolded the paper. He opened it again, glanced over it, fixed his eyes upon Grace, and, pointing to a paragraph, handed it to the Commander. The two men exchanged glances, the Commander coughed, rose, and averted his face from the beseeching eyes of Grace. A sudden death-like chill ran through her limbs as, at a word from the Commander, the secretary rose and placed the paper in her hands.

Grace took it with trembling fingers. It seemed to be a proclamation in Spanish.

"I cannot read it," she said, stamping her little foot with passionate vehemence. "Tell me what it says."

At a sign from the Commander, the secretary opened the paper and arose. The Commander, with his face averted, looked through the open window. The light streaming through its deep, tunnel-like embrasure, fell upon the central figure of Grace, with her shapely head slightly bent forward, her lips apart, and her eager, passionate eyes fixed upon the Commander. The secretary cleared his throat in a perfunctory manner; and, with the conscious pride of an irreproachable linguist, began —

"NOTICE.

"TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMANDANTE OF THE PRESIDIO OF SAN FELIPE.

"I have the honour to report that the expedition sent out to relieve certain distressed emigrants in the fastnesses of the Sierra Nevadas, said expedition being sent on the information of Don José Bluent of San Geronimo, found in a cañon east of the Canada del Diablo the evidences of the recent existence of such emigrants buried in the snow, and the melancholy and deeply-to-be-deplored record of their sufferings, abandonment, and death. A written record preserved by these miserable and most infelicitous ones gives the names and history of their organisation, known as 'Captain Conroy's Party,' a copy of which is annexed below.

"The remains of five of these unfortunates were recovered from the snow, but it was impossible to identify but two, who were buried with sacred and reverential rites.

"Our soldiers behaved with that gallantry, coolness, patriotism, inflexible hardihood, and high-principled devotion which ever animate the swelling heart of the Mexican warrior. Nor can too much praise be given to the voluntary efforts of one Don Arthur Poinsett, late Lieutenant of the Army of the United States of America, who, though himself a voyager and a stranger, assisted our commander in the efforts of humanity.

"The wretched dead appeared to have expired from hunger, although one was evidently a victim" —

The tongue of the translator hesitated a moment, and then with an air of proud superiority to the difficulties of the English language, he resumed —

"A victim to fly poison. It is to be regretted that among the victims was the famous Doctor Paul Devarges, a Natural, and collector of the stuffed Bird and Beast, a name most illustrious in science."

The secretary paused, his voice dropped its pretentious pitch, he lifted his eyes from the paper, and fixing them on Grace, repeated, deliberately —

"The bodies who were identified were those of Paul Devarges and Grace Conroy."

"Oh, no! no!" said Grace, clasping her hands, wildly; "it is a mistake! You are trying to frighten me, a poor, helpless, friendless girl! You are punishing me, gentlemen, because you know I have done wrong, because you think I have lied! Oh, have pity, gentlemen. My God — save me — Philip!"

And with a loud, despairing cry, she rose to her feet, caught at the clustering tendrils of her hair, raised her little hands, palms upward, high in the air, and then sank perpendicularly, as if crushed and beaten flat, a pale and senseless heap upon the floor.

The Commander stooped over the prostrate girl. "Send Manuela here," he said quickly, waving aside the proffered aid of the secretary, with an impatient gesture quite unlike his usual gravity, as he lifted the unconscious Grace in his arms.

An Indian waiting-woman hurriedly appeared, and assisted the Commander to lay the fainting girl upon a couch.

"Poor child!" said the Commander, as Manuela, bending over Grace, unloosed her garments with sympathetic feminine hands. "Poor little one, and without a father!"

"Poor woman!" said Manuela to herself, half aloud; "and without a husband."

BOOK II.

AFTER FIVE YEARS

CHAPTER I.

ONE HORSE GULCH

It was a season of unexampled prosperity in One Horse Gulch. Even the despondent original locator, who, in a fit of depressed alcoholism, had given it that infelicitous title, would have admitted its injustice, but that he fell a victim to the "craftily qualified" cups of San Francisco long before the Gulch had become prosperous. "Hed Jim stuck to straight whisky he might hev got his pile outter the very ledge whar his cabin stood," said a local critic. But Jim did not; after taking a thousand dollars from his claim, he had flown to San Franciscos, where, gorgeously arrayed, he had flitted from champagne to cognac, and from gin to lager beer, until he brought his gilded and ephemeral existence to a close in the country hospital.

Howbeit, One Horse Gulch survived not only its godfather, but the baleful promise of its unhallowed christening. It had its Hotel and its Temperance House, its Express office, its saloons, its two squares of low wooden buildings in the main street, its clustering nests of cabins on the hill-sides, its freshly-hewn stumps, and its lately-cleared lots. Young in years, it still had its memories, experiences and antiquities. The first tent pitched by Jim White was still standing, the bullet holes were yet to be seen in the shutters of the Cachucha saloon, where the great fight took place between Boston Joe, Harry Worth, and Thompson of Angel's; from the upper loft of Watson's "Emporium" a beam still projected from which a year ago a noted citizen had been suspended, after an informal inquiry into the ownership of some mules that he was found possessed of. Near it was a small unpretentious square shed, where the famous caucus had met that had selected the delegates who chose the celebrated and Honourable Blank to represent California in the councils of the nation.

It was raining. Not in the usual direct, honest, perpendicular fashion of that mountain region, but only suggestively, and in a vague, uncertain sort of way, as if it might at any time prove to be fog or mist, and any money wagered upon it would be hazardous. It was raining as much from below as above, and the lower limbs of the loungers who gathered around the square box stove that stood in Briggs's warehouse, exhaled a cloud of steam. The loungers in Briggs's were those who from deficiency of taste or the requisite capital avoided the gambling and drinking saloons, and quietly appropriated biscuits from the convenient barrel of the generous Briggs, or filled their pipes from his open tobacco canisters, with the general suggestion in their manner that their company fully compensated for any waste of his material.

They had been smoking silently – a silence only broken by the occasional hiss of expectoration against the hot stove, when the door of a back room opened softly, and Gabriel Conroy entered.

"How is he gettin' on, Gabe?" asked one of the loungers.

"So, so," said Gabriel. "You'll want to shift those bandages again," he said, turning to Briggs, "afore the doctor comes. I'd come back in an hour, but I've got to drop in and see how Steve's gettin' on, and it's a matter of two miles from home."

"But he says he won't let anybody tech him but you," said Mr. Briggs.

"I know he *says* so," said Gabriel, soothingly; "but he'll get over that. That's what Stimson sed when he was took worse, but he got over that, and I never got to see him except in time to lay him out."

The justice of this was admitted even by Briggs, although evidently disappointed. Gabriel was walking to the door, when another voice from the stove stopped him.

"Oh, Gabe! you mind that emigrant family with the sick baby camped down the gulch! Well, the baby up and died last night."

"I want to know," said Gabriel, with thoughtful gravity.

"Yes, and that woman's in a heap of trouble. Couldn't you kinder drop in in passing and look after things?"

"I will," said Gabriel thoughtfully.

"I thought you'd like to know it, and I thought she'd like me to tell you," said the speaker, settling himself back again over the stove with the air of a man who had just fulfilled, at great personal sacrifice and labour, a work of supererogation.

"You're always thoughtful of other folks, Johnson," said Briggs, admiringly.

"Well, yes," said Johnson, with a modest serenity; "I allers allow that men in Californy ought to think of others besides themselves. A little keer and a little *sabe* on my part, and there's that family in the gulch made comfortable with Gabe around 'em."

Meanwhile this homely inciter of the unselfish virtues of One Horse Gulch had passed out into the rain and darkness. So conscientiously did he fulfil his various obligations, that it was nearly one o'clock before he reached his rude hut on the hill-side, a rough cabin of pine logs, so unpretentious and wild in exterior as to be but a slight improvement on nature. The vines clambered unrestrainedly over the bark-thatched roof; the birds occupied the crevices of the walls, the squirrel ate his acorns on the ridge pole without fear and without reproach.

Softly drawing the wooden peg that served as a bolt, Gabriel entered with that noiselessness and caution that were habitual to him. Lighting a candle by the embers of a dying fire, he carefully looked around him. The cabin was divided into two compartments by the aid of a canvas stretched between the walls, with a flap for the doorway. On a pine table lay several garments apparently belonging to a girl of seven or eight – a frock grievously rent and torn, a frayed petticoat of white flannel already patched with material taken from a red shirt, and a pair of stockings so excessively and sincerely darned, as to have lost nearly all of their original fabric in repeated bits of relief that covered almost the entire structure. Gabriel looked at these articles ruefully, and, slowly picking them up, examined each with the greatest gravity and concern. Then he took off his coat and boots, and having in this way settled himself into an easy dishabille, he took a box from the shelf, and proceeded to lay out thread and needles, when he was interrupted by a child's voice from behind the canvas screen.

"Is that you, Gabe?" – "Yes."

"Oh, Gabe, I got tired and went to bed."

"I see you did," said Gabriel drily, picking up a needle and thread that had apparently been abandoned after a slight excursion into the neighbourhood of a rent and left hopelessly sticking in the petticoat.

"Yes, Gabe; they're so awfully old!"

"Old!" repeated Gabe, reproachfully. "Old! Lettin' on a little wear and tear, they're as good as they ever were. That petticoat is stronger," said Gabriel, holding up the garment and eyeing the patches with a slight glow of artistic pride – "stronger, Olly, than the first day you put it on."

"But that's five years ago, Gabe."

"Well," said Gabriel, turning round and addressing himself impatiently to the screen, "wot if it is?"

"And I've growed."

"Growed!" said Gabriel, scornfully. "And haven't I let out the tucks, and didn't I put three fingers of the best sacking around the waist? You'll just ruin me in clothes."

Olly laughed from behind the screen. Finding, however, no response from the grim worker, presently there appeared a curly head at the flap, and then a slim little girl, in the scantiest of nightgowns, ran, and began to nestle at his side, and to endeavour to enwrap herself in his waistcoat.

"Oh, go 'way!" said Gabriel, with a severe voice and the most shameless signs of relenting in his face. "Go away! What do you care? Here I might slave myself to death to dress you in silks and satins, and you'd dip into the first ditch or waltz through the first underbrush that you kem across. You haven't got no *sabe* in dress, Olly. It ain't ten days ago as I iron-bound and copper-fastened that dress, so to speak, and look at it now! Olly, look at it now!" And he held it up indignantly before the maiden.

Olly placed the top of her head against the breast of her brother as a *point d'appui*, and began to revolve around him as if she wished to bore a way into his inmost feelings.

"Oh, you ain't mad, Gabe!" she said, leaping first over one knee and then over the other without lifting her head. "You ain't mad!"

Gabriel did not deign to reply, but continued mending the frayed petticoat in dignified silence.

"Who did you see down town?" said Olly, not at all rebuffed.

"No one," said Gabriel, shortly.

"You did! You smell of linnyments and peppermint," said Olly, with a positive shake of the head. "You've been to Briggs's and the new family up the gulch."

"Yes," said Gabriel, "that Mexican's legs is better, but the baby's dead. Jest remind me, to-morrow, to look through mother's things for suthin' for that poor woman."

"Gabe, do you know what Mrs. Markle says of you?" said Olly, suddenly raising her head.

"No," replied Gabriel, with an affectation of indifference that, like all his affectations, was a perfect failure.

"She says," said Olly, "that you want to be looked after yourself more'n all these people. She says you're just throwing yourself away on other folks. She says I ought to have a woman to look after me."

Gabriel stopped his work, laid down the petticoat, and taking the curly head of Olly between his knees, with one hand beneath her chin and the other on the top of her head, turned her mischievous face towards his. "Olly," he said, seriously, "when I got you outer the snow at Starvation Camp; when I toted you on my back for miles till we got into the valley; when we lay by thar for two weeks, and me a felling trees and picking up provisions here and thar, in the wood or the river, wherever thar was bird or fish, I reckon you got along as well – I won't say better – ez if you had a woman to look arter you. When at last we kem here to this camp, and I built this yer house, I don't think any woman could hev done better. If they could, I'm wrong, and Mrs. Markle's right."

Olly began to be uncomfortable. Then the quick instincts of her sex came to her relief, and she archly assumed the aggressive.

"I think Mrs. Markle likes you, Gabe."

Gabriel looked down at the little figure in alarm. There are some subjects whereof the youngest of womankind has an instinctive knowledge that makes the wisest of us tremble.

"Go to bed, Olly," said the cowardly Gabriel.

But Olly wanted to sit up, so she changed the subject.

"The Mexican you're tendin' isn't a Mexican, he's a Chileno; Mrs. Markle says so."

"Maybe; it's all the same. *I* call him a Mexican. He talks too straight, anyway," said Gabriel, indifferently.

"Did he ask you any more questions about – about old times?" continued the girl.

"Yes; he wanted to know everything that happened in Starvation Camp. He was rek'larly took with poor Gracie; asked a heap o' questions about her – how she acted, and seemed to feel as bad as we did about never hearing anything from her. I never met a man, Olly, afore, as seemed to take

such an interest in other folks' sorrows as he did. You'd have tho't he'd been one of the party. And he made me tell him all about Dr. Devarges."

"And Philip?" queried Olly.

"No," said Gabriel, somewhat curtly.

"Gabriel," said Olly, sullenly, "I wish you didn't talk so to people about those days."

"Why?" asked Gabriel, wonderingly.

"Because it ain't good to talk about. Gabriel dear," she continued, with a slight quivering of the upper lip, "sometimes I think the people round yer look upon us sorter queer. That little boy that came here with the emigrant family wouldn't play with me, and Mrs. Markle's little girl said that we did dreadful things up there in the snow. He said I was a cannon-ball."

"A what?" asked Gabriel.

"A cannon-ball! He said that you and I" —

"Hush," interrupted Gabriel, sternly, as an angry flush came into his sunburnt cheek, "I'll jest bust that boy if I see him round yer agin."

"But, Gabriel," persisted Olly, "nobody" —

"Will you go to bed, Olly, and not catch your death yer on this cold floor asking ornery and perfectly ridiculuous questions?" said Gabriel, briskly, lifting her to her feet. "Thet Markle girl ain't got no sense anyway — she's allers leading you round in ditches, ruinin' your best clothes, and keepin' me up half the night mendin' on 'em."

Thus admonished, Olly retreated behind the canvas screen, and Gabriel resumed his needle and thread. But the thread became entangled, and was often snappishly broken, and Gabriel sewed imaginary, vindictive stitches in the imaginary calves of an imaginary youthful emigrant, until Olly's voice again broke the silence.

"Oh, Gabe!"

"Yes," said Gabriel, putting down his work despairingly.

"Do you think — that Philip — ate Grace?"

Gabriel rose swiftly, and disappeared behind the screen. As he did so, the door softly opened, and a man stepped into the cabin. The new-comer cast a rapid glance around the dimly-lighted room, and then remained motionless in the doorway. From behind the screen came the sound of voices. The stranger hesitated, and then uttered a slight cough.

In an instant Gabriel reappeared. The look of angry concern at the intrusion turned to one of absolute stupefaction as he examined the stranger more attentively. The new-comer smiled faintly, yet politely, and then, with a slight halt in his step, moved towards a chair, into which he dropped with a deprecating gesture.

"I shall sit — and you shall pardon me. You have surprise! Yes? Five, six hour ago you leave me very sick on a bed — where you are so kind — so good. Yes? Ah? You see me here now, and you say crazy! Mad!"

He raised his right hand with the fingers upward, twirled them to signify Gabriel's supposed idea of a whirling brain, and smiled again.

"Listen. Comes to me an hour ago a message most important. Most necessary it is I go to-night — now, to Marysville. You see. Yes? I rise and dress myself. Ha! I have great strength for the effort. I am better. But I say to myself, 'Victor, you shall first pay your respects to the good Pike who have been so kind, so good. You shall press the hand of the noble grand miner who have recover you. *Bueno*, I am here!'"

He extended a thin, nervous brown hand, and for the first time since his entrance concentrated his keen black eyes, which had roved over the apartment and taken in its minutest details, upon his host. Gabriel, lost in bewilderment, could only gasp — "But you ain't well enough, you know. You can't walk yet. You'll kill yourself!"

The stranger smiled.

"Yes? – you think – you think? Look now! Waits me, outside, the horse of the livery-stable man. How many miles you think to the stage town? Fifteen." (He emphasized them with his five uplifted fingers.) "It is nothing. Two hour comes the stage and I am there. Ha!"

Even as he spoke, with a gesture, as if brushing away all difficulties, his keen eyes were resting upon a little shelf above the chimney, whereon stood an old-fashioned daguerreotype case open. He rose, and, with a slight halting step and an expression of pain, limped across the room to the shelf, and took up the daguerreotype.

"What have we?" he asked.

"It is Gracie," said Gabriel, brightening up. "Taken the day we started from St. Jo."

"How long?"

"Six years ago. She was fourteen then," said Gabriel, taking the case in his hand and brushing the glass fondly with his palm. "Thar warn't no puttier gal in all Missouri," he added, with fraternal pride, looking down upon the picture with moistened eyes. "Eh – what did you say?"

The stranger had uttered a few words hastily in a foreign tongue. But they were apparently complimentary, for when Gabriel looked up at him with an inquiring glance, he was smiling and saying, "Beautiful! Angelic! Very pretty!" with eyes still fixed upon the picture. "And it is like – ah, I see the brother's face, too," he said, gravely, comparing Gabriel's face with the picture. Gabriel looked pleased. Any nature less simple than his would have detected the polite fiction. In the square, honest face of the brother there was not the faintest suggestion of the delicate, girlish, poetical oval before him.

"It is precious," said the stranger: "and it is all, ha?"

"All?" echoed Gabriel, inquiringly.

"You have nothing more?"

"No."

"A line of her writing, a letter, her private papers would be a treasure, eh?"

"She left nothing," said Gabriel, simply, "but her clothes. You know she put on a boy's suit – Johnny's clothes – when she left. Thet's how it allus puzzles me thet they knew *who* she was, when they came across the poor child dead."

The stranger did not speak, and Gabriel went on —

"It was nigh on a month afore I got back. When I did, the snow was gone, and there warn't no track or trace of anybody. Then I heerd the story I told ye – thet a relief party had found 'em all dead – and thet among the dead was Grace. How that poor child ever got back thar alone (for thar warn't no trace or mention of the man she went away with) is what gets me. And that there's my trouble, Mr. Ramirez! To think of thet pooty darlin' climbing back to the old nest, and finding no one thar! To think of her coming back, as she allowed, to Olly and me, and findin' all her own blood gone, is suthin' thet, at times, drives me almost mad. She didn't die of starvation; she didn't die of cold. Her heart was broke, Mr. Ramirez; her little heart was broke!"

The stranger looked at him curiously, but did not speak. After a moment's pause, he lifted his bowed head from his hands, wiped his eyes with Olly's flannel petticoat, and went on —

"For more than a year I tried to get sight o' that report. Then I tried to find the Mission or the Presidio that the relief party started from, and may be see some of that party. But then kem the gold excitement, and the Americans took possession of the Missions and Presidios, and when I got to San – San – San –"

"Geronimo," interrupted Ramirez, hastily.

"Did I tell?" asked Gabriel, simply; "I don't remember that."

Ramirez showed all his teeth in quick assent, and motioned him with his finger to go on.

"When I got to San Geronimo, there was nobody, and no records left. Then I put a notiss in the San Francisco paper for Philip Ashley – that was the man as helped her away – to communicate with me. But thar weren't no answer."

Ramirez rose.

"You are not rich, friend Gabriel?"

"No," said Gabriel.

"But you expect – ah – you expect?"

"Well, I reckon some day to make a strike like the rest."

"Anywhere, my friend?"

"Anywhere," repeated Gabriel, smiling.

"*Adios*," said the stranger, going to the door.

"*Adios*," repeated Gabriel. "Must you go to-night? What's your hurry? You're sure you feel better now?"

"Better?" answered Ramirez, with a singular smile. "Better! Look, I am so strong!"

He stretched out his arms, and expanded his chest, and walked erect to the door.

"You have cured my rheumatism, friend Gabriel. Good night."

The door closed behind him. In another moment he was in the saddle, and speeding so swiftly that, in spite of mud and darkness, in two hours he had reached the mining town where the Wingdam and Sacramento stage-coach changed horses. The next morning, while Olly and Gabriel were eating breakfast, Mr. Victor Ramirez stepped briskly from the stage that drew up at Marysville Hotel, and entered the hotel office. As the clerk looked up inquiringly, Mr. Ramirez handed him a card —

"Send that, if you please, to Miss Grace Conroy."

CHAPTER II. MADAME DEVARGES

Mr. Ramirez followed the porter upstairs, and along a narrow passage, until he reached a larger hall. Here the porter indicated that he should wait until he returned, and then disappeared down the darkened vista of another passage. Mr. Ramirez had ample time to observe the freshness of the boarded partitions and scant details of the interior of the International Hotel; he even had time to attempt to grapple the foreign mystery of the notice conspicuously on the wall, "Gentlemen are requested not to sleep on the stairs," before his companion reappeared. Beckoning to Mr. Ramirez, with an air of surly suspicion, the porter led him along the darkened passage until he paused before a door at its farther extremity and knocked gently. Slight as was the knock, it had the mysterious effect of causing all the other doors along the passage to open, and a masculine head to appear at each opening. Mr. Ramirez's brow darkened quickly. He was sufficiently conversant with the conditions of that early civilization to know that, as a visitor to a lady, he was the object of every man's curious envy and aggressive suspicion. There was the sound of light footsteps within, and the door opened. The porter lingered long enough to be able to decide upon the character and propriety of the greeting, and then sullenly retired. The door closed, and Mr. Ramirez found himself face to face with the occupant of the room. She was a small, slight blonde, who, when the smile that had lit her mouth and eyes as she opened the door faded suddenly as she closed it, might have passed for a plain, indistinctive woman. But for a certain dangerous submissiveness of manner – which I here humbly submit is always to be feared in an all-powerful sex – and an address that was rather more deprecatory than occasion called for, she would hardly have awakened the admiration of our sex or the fears of her own.

As Ramirez advanced, with both hands impulsively extended, she drew back shyly, and, pointing to the ceiling and walls, said quietly, "Cloth and paper!"

Ramirez's dark face grew darker. There was a long pause. Suddenly the lady lightened the shadow that seemed to have fallen upon their interview with both her teeth and eyes, and, pointing to a chair, said —

"Sit down, Victor, and tell me why you have returned so soon."

Victor sat sullenly down. The lady looked all deprecation and submissiveness, but said nothing.

Ramirez would, in his sullenness, have imitated her, but his natural impulsiveness was too strong, and he broke out —

"Look! From the book of the hotel it is better you should erase the name of Grace Conroy, and put down your own!"

"And why, Victor?"

"She asks why," said Victor, appealing to the ceiling. "My God! Because one hundred miles from here live the brother and sister of Grace Conroy. I have seen him!"

"Well."

"Well," echoed Victor. "Is it well? Listen. You shall hear if it is well."

He drew his chair beside her, and went on in a low, earnest voice —

"I have at last located the mine. I followed the *deseno*— the description of the spot, and all its surroundings – which was in the paper that I – I – found. Good! It is true! – ah, you begin to be interested! – it is true, all true of the locality. See! Of the spot I do not know. Of the mine it has not yet been discovered!

"It is called 'One Horse Gulch,' why – who knows? It is a rich mining camp. All around are valuable claims; but the mine on the top of the little hill is unknown, unclaimed! For why?

You understand, it promises not as much as the other claims on the surface. It is the same – all as described here."

He took from his pocket an envelope, and drew out a folded paper (the papers given to Grace Conroy by Dr. Devarges), and pointed to the map.

"The description here leads me to the head waters of the American River. I followed the range of foot-hills, for I know every foot, every step, and I came one day last week to 'One Horse Gulch.' See, it is the gulch described here – all the same."

He held the paper before her, and her thin, long fingers closed like a bird's claw over its corners.

"It is necessary I should stay there four or five days to inquire. And yet how? I am a stranger, a foreigner; the miners have suspicion of all such, and to me they do not talk easily. But I hear of one Gabriel Conroy, a good man, very kind with the sick. Good! I have sickness – very sudden, very strong! My rheumatism takes me here." He pointed to his knee. "I am helpless as a child. I have to be taken care of at the house of Mr. Briggs. Comes to me here Gabriel Conroy, sits by me, talks to me, tells me everything. He brings to me his little sister. I go to his cabin on the hill. I see the picture of his sister. Good. You understand? It is all over!"

"Why?"

"Eh? She asks why, this woman," said Victor, appealing to the ceiling. "Is it more you ask? Then listen. The house of Gabriel Conroy is upon the land, the very land, you understand? of the grant made by the Governor to Dr. Devarges. He is this Gabriel, look! he is in possession!"

"How? Does he know of the mine?"

"No! It is accident – what you call Fate!"

She walked to the window, and stood for a few moments looking out upon the falling rain. The face that looked out was so old, so haggard, so hard and set in its outlines, that one of the loungers on the side-walk, glancing at the window to catch a glimpse of the pretty French stranger, did not recognise her. Possibly the incident recalled her to herself, for she presently turned with a smile of ineffable sweetness, and returning to the side of Ramirez, said, in the gentlest of voices, "Then you abandon me?"

Victor did not dare to meet her eyes. He looked straight before him, shrugged his shoulders, and said – "It is Fate!"

She clasped her thin fingers lightly before her, and, standing in front of her companion, so as to be level with his eyes, said – "You have a good memory, Victor."

He did not reply.

"Let me assist it. It is a year ago that I received a letter in Berlin, signed by a Mr. Peter Dumphy, of San Francisco, saying that he was in possession of important papers regarding property of my late husband, Dr. Paul Devarges, and asking me to communicate with him. I did not answer his letter; I came. It is not my way to deliberate or hesitate – perhaps a wise man would. I am only a poor, weak woman, so I came. I know it was all wrong. You sharp, bold, cautious men would have written first. Well, I came!"

Victor winced slightly, but did not speak.

"I saw Mr. Dumphy in San Francisco. He showed me some papers that he said he had found in a place of deposit which Dr. Devarges had evidently wished preserved. One was a record of a Spanish grant, others indicated some valuable discoveries. He referred me to the Mission and Presidio of San Ysabel that had sent out the relief party for further information. He was a trader – a mere man of business – it was a question of money with him; he agreed to assist me for a *percentage*! Is it not so?"

Victor raised his dark eyes to hers, and nodded.

"I came to the Mission. I saw *you* – the Secretary of the former Comandante – the only one left who remembered the expedition, and the custodian of the Presidio records. You showed me the

only copy of the report; *you*, too, would have been cold and business-like, until I told you my story. You seemed interested. You told me about the young girl, this mysterious Grace Conroy, whose name appeared among the dead, who you said you thought was an impostor! Did you not?"

Victor nodded.

"You told me of her agony on reading the report! Of her fainting, of the discovery of her condition by the women, of the Comandante's pity, of her mysterious disappearance, of the Comandante's reticence, of your own suspicions of the birth of a child! Did you not, Victor?"

He endeavoured to take her hand. Without altering her gentle manner, she withdrew her hand quietly, and went on —

"And then you told me of your finding that paper on the floor where they loosened her dress — the paper you now hold in your hand. You told me of your reasons for concealing and withholding it. And then, Victor, you proposed to me a plan to secure my own again — to personate this girl — to out-imposture this imposture. You did not ask me for a percentage! You did not seek to make money out of my needs; you asked only for my love! Well, well! perhaps I was a fool, a weak woman. It was a tempting bribe; possibly I listened more to the promptings of my heart than my interest. I promised you my hand and my fortune when we succeeded. You come to me now, and ask to be relieved of that obligation. No! no! you have said enough."

The now frightened man had seized her by the hand, and thrown himself on his knees before her in passionate contrition; but, with a powerful effort, she had wrested herself free.

"No, no!" she continued, in the same deprecatory voice. "Go to this brother, whom the chief end of your labours seems to have been to discover. Go to him now. Restore to him the paper you hold in your hand. Say that you stole it from his sister, whom you suspected to have been an impostor, and that you knew to be the mother of an illegitimate child! Say that in doing this, you took the last hope from the wronged and cast-off wife who came thousands of miles to claim something from the man who should have supported her. Say this, and that brother, if he is the good and kind man you represent him to be, he will rise up and bless you! You have only to tell him further, that this paper cannot be of any use to him, as this property legally belongs to his sister's child, if living. You have only to hand him the report which declares both of his sisters to be dead, and leaves his own identity in doubt, to show him what a blessing has fallen upon him."

"Forgive me," gasped Victor, with a painful blending of shame and awesome admiration of the woman before him; "forgive me, Julie! I am a coward! a slave! an ingrate! I will do anything, Julie; anything you say."

Madame Devarges was too sagacious to press her victory further; perhaps she was too cautious to exasperate the already incautiously demonstrative man before her. She said "Hush," and permitted him at the same time, as if unconsciously, to draw her beside him.

"Listen, Victor. What have you to fear from this man?" she asked, after a pause. "What would his evidence weigh against me, when he is in unlawful possession of my property, my legally declared properly, if I choose to deny his relationship? Who will identify him as Gabriel Conroy, when his only surviving relative dare not come forward to recognise him; when, if she did, you could swear that she came to you under another name? What would this brother's self-interested evidence amount to opposed to yours, that I was the Grace Conroy who came to the Mission, to the proof of my identity offered by one of the survivors, Peter Dumphy?"

"Dumphy!" echoed Ramirez, in amazement.

"Yes, Dumphy!" repeated Madame Devarges. "When he found that, as the divorced wife of Dr. Devarges, I could make no legal claim, and I told him of your plan, he offered himself as witness of my identity. Ah, Victor! I have not been idle while you have found only obstacles."

"Forgive me!" He caught and kissed her hands passionately. "I fly now. Good-bye."

"Where are you going?" she asked, rising.

"To 'One Horse Gulch,'" he answered.

"No! Sit down. Listen. You must go to San Francisco, and inform Dumphy of your discovery. It will be necessary, perhaps, to have a lawyer; but we must first see how strong we stand. You must find out the whereabouts of this girl Grace, at once. Go to San Francisco, see Dumphy, and return to me here!"

"But you are alone here, and unprotected. These men!"

The quick suspicions of a jealous nature flashed in his eyes.

"Believe me, they are less dangerous to our plans than women! Do you not trust me, Victor?" she said, with a dazzling smile.

He would have thrown himself at her feet, but she restrained him with an arch look at the wall, and a precautionary uplifted finger.

"Good; go now. Stay. This Gabriel – is he married?"

"No."

"Good-bye."

The door closed upon his dark, eager face, and he was gone. A moment later there was a sharp ringing of the bell of No. 92, the next room to that occupied by Mme. Devarges.

The truculent porter knocked at the door, and entered this room respectfully. There was no suspicion attached to the character of *its* occupant. *He* was well known as Mr. Jack Hamlin, a gambler.

"Why the devil did you keep me waiting?" said Jack, reaching from the bed, and wrathfully clutching his boot-jack.

The man murmured some apology.

"Bring me some hot water."

The porter was about to hurriedly withdraw, when Jack stopped him with an oath.

"You've been long enough coming without shooting off like that. Who was that man that just left the next room?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Find out, and let me know."

He flung a gold piece at the man, beat up his pillow, and turned his face to the wall. The porter still lingered, and Jack faced sharply round.

"Not gone yet? What the devil" —

"Beg your pardon, sir; do you know anything about her?"

"No," said Jack, raising himself on his elbow; "but if I catch you hanging round that door, as you were five minutes ago, I'll" —

Here Mr. Hamlin dropped his voice, and intimated that he would forcibly dislodge certain vital and necessary organs from the porter's body.

"Go."

After the door closed again, Mr. Hamlin lay silent for an hour. At the end of that time he got up and began to dress himself slowly, singing softly to himself the while, as was his invariable custom, in that sweet tenor for which he was famous. When he had thus warbled through his toilet, replacing a small ivory-handled pistol in his waistcoat-pocket to one of his most heart-breaking notes, he put his hat on his handsome head, perhaps a trifle more on one side than usual, and stepped into the hall. As he sharply shut his door and locked it, the slight concussion of the thin partitions caused the door of his fair neighbour's room to start ajar, and Mr. Hamlin, looking up mechanically, saw the lady standing by the bureau, with her handkerchief to her eyes. Mr. Hamlin instantly stopped his warbling, and walked gravely downstairs. At the foot of the steps he met the porter. The man touched his hat.

"He doesn't belong here, sir."

"Who doesn't belong here?" asked Mr. Hamlin, coldly.

"That man."

"What man?"

"The man you asked about."

Mr. Hamlin quietly took out a cigar, lit it, and after one or two puffs, looked fixedly in the man's eyes, and said —

"I haven't asked you about any man."

"I thought, sir" —

"You shouldn't begin to drink so early in the day, Michael," said Mr. Hamlin, quietly, without withdrawing his black eyes from the man's face. "You can't stand it on an empty stomach. Take my advice and wait till after dinner."

CHAPTER III. MRS. MARKLE

Olly's allusion to Mrs. Markle and her criticism had recurred to Gabriel more or less uneasily through the night, and as he rose betimes the next morning and stood by the table on which lay his handiwork, a grim doubt of his proficiency in that branch of domestic economy began to oppress him.

"Like as not I ain't doin' my duty to that child," he said softly to himself, as he picked up the garments one by one, and deposited them beside the bedside of the still sleeping Olly. "Them clothes are – leavin' out the strength and sayin' nothin' o' durability as material – a trifle old-fashioned and onbecomin'. Not as you requires anything o' the kind, bless your pooty face," he said, apostrophising the dewy curls and slumber-flushed cheek of the unconscious child; "but mebbe it does sorter provoke remarks from the other children. And the settlement's gettin' crowded. Three new families in six months is rather too – too –" considered Gabriel, hesitating for a word; "rather too populating! And Mrs. Markle" – Gabriel flushed even in the stillness and solitude of his own cabin – "to think of that little gal, not nine years old, speaking o' that widder in that way. It beats everything. And to think I've kept clar of that sort o' thing jest on Olly's account, jest that she shouldn't have any woman around to boss her."

Nevertheless, when he and Olly sat down to their frugal breakfast, he was uneasily conscious of several oddities of her dress, not before noticeable, and even some peculiarities of manner.

"Ez a ginerall thing, Olly," he pointed out with cautious generalisation, "ez a ginerall thing, in perlite society, young gals don't sit down a-straddle of their chairs, and don't reach down every five minnits to heave away at their boot-straps."

"As a general thing, Gabe, girls don't wear boots," said Olly, leaning forward to dip her bread in the frying-pan.

Artfully evading the question whether high india-rubber boots were an indispensable feature of a girl's clothing, Gabriel continued with easy indifference – "I think I'll drop in on Mrs. Markle on my way to the Gulch this morning."

He glanced under his eyelids at as much of his sister's face as was visible behind the slice of bread she was consuming.

"Take me with you, Gabe?"

"No," said Gabriel, "you must stay here and do up the house; and mind you keep out o' the woods until your work's done. Besides," he added, loftily, "I've got some business with Mrs. Markle."

"Oh, Gabe!" said Olly, shining all over her face with gravity and archness.

"I'd like to know what's the matter with you, Olly," said Gabriel, with dignified composure.

"Ain't you ashamed, Gabe?"

Gabriel did not stop to reply, but rose, gathered up his tools, and took his hat from the corner. He walked to the door, but suddenly turned and came back to Olly.

"Olly," he said, taking her face in both hands, after his old fashion, "ef anything at any time should happen to me, I want ye to think, my darling, ez I always did my best for you, Olly, for you. Wotever I did was always for the best."

Olly thought instantly of the river.

"You ain't goin' into deep water to-day, Gabe, are you?" she asked, with a slight premonitory quiver of her short upper lip.

"Pooty deep for me, Olly; but," he added, hastily, with a glance at her alarmed face, "don't you mind, I'll come out all safe. Good-bye." He kissed her tenderly. She ran her fingers through his sandy curls, deftly smoothed his beard, and reknotted his neckerchief.

"You oughter hev put on your other shirt, Gabe; that ain't clean; and you a-goin' to Mrs. Markle's! Let me get your straw hat, Gabe. Wait." She ran in behind the screen, but when she returned he was gone.

It had been raining the night before, but on the earth beneath there was a dewy freshness, and in the sky above the beauty of cloud scenery – a beauty rare to California except during the rainy season. Gabriel, although not usually affected by meteorological influences, nor peculiarly susceptible to the charms of Nature, felt that the morning was a fine one, and was for that reason, I imagine, more than usually accessible to the blandishments of the fair. From admiring a tree, a flower, or a gleam of sunshine, to the entertainment of a dangerous sentimentalism in regard to the other sex, is, I fear, but a facile step to some natures, whose only safety is in continuous practicality. Wherefore, Gabriel, as he approached the cottage of Mrs. Markle, was induced to look from Nature up to – Nature's goddess – Mrs. Markle, as her strong bright face appeared above the dishes she was washing by the kitchen window. And here occurred one of those feminine inconsistencies that are charming to the average man, but are occasionally inefficient with an exceptional character. Mrs. Markle, who had always been exceedingly genial, gentle, and natural with Gabriel during his shyness, seeing him coming with a certain fell intent of cheerfulness in his face, instantly assumed an aggressive manner, which, for the sake of its probable warning to the rest of her sex, I venture to transcribe.

"Ef you want to see me, Gabriel Conroy," said Mrs. Markle, stopping to wipe the suds from her brown but handsomely shaped arms, "you must come up to the sink, for I can't leave the dishes. Joe Markle always used to say to me, 'Sue, when you've got work to do, you don't let your mind wander round much on anything else.' Sal, bring a cheer here for Gabriel – he don't come often enough to stand up for a change. We're hard-working women, you and me, Sal, and we don't get time to be sick – and sick folks is about the only kind as Mr. Conroy cares to see."

Thoroughly astonished as Gabriel was with this sarcastic reception, there was still a certain relief that it brought to him. "Olly was wrong," he said to himself; "that woman only thinks of washing dishes and lookin' after her boarders. Ef she was allus like this – and would leave a man alone, never foolin' around him, but kinder standin' off and 'tendin' strictly to the business of the house, why, it wouldn't be such a bad thing to marry her. But like as not she'd change – you can't trust them critters. Howsomer I can set Olly's mind at rest."

Happily unconscious of the heresies that were being entertained by the silent man before her, Mrs. Markle briskly continued her washing and her monologue, occasionally sprinkling Gabriel with the overflow of each.

"When I say hard-workin' women, Sal," said Mrs. Markle, still addressing a gaunt female companion, whose sole functions were confined to chuckling at Gabriel over the dishes she was wiping, and standing with her back to her mistress – "when I say hard-workin' women, Sal, I don't forget ez there are men ez is capable of doin' all that, and more – men ez looks down on you and me." Here Mistress Markle broke a plate, and then, after a pause, sighed, faced around with a little colour in her cheek and a sharp snap in her black eyes, and declared that she was "that narvous" this morning that she couldn't go on.

There was an embarrassing silence. Luckily for Gabriel, at this moment the gaunt Sal picked up the dropped thread of conversation, and with her back to her mistress, and profoundly ignoring his presence, addressed herself to the wall.

"Narvous you well may be, Susan, and you slavin' for forty boarders, with transitory meals for travellers, and nobody to help you. If you was flat on your back with rheumatiz, ez you well might be, perhaps you might get a hand. A death in the family might be of sarvice to you in callin' round you friends az couldn't otherwise leave their business. That cough that little Manty had on to her for the last five weeks would frighten some mothers into a narvous consumption."

Gabriel at this moment had a vivid and guilty recollection of noticing Manty Markle wading in the ditch below the house as he entered, and of having observed her with the interest of possible paternal relationship. That relationship seemed so preposterous and indefensible on all moral grounds, now that he began to feel himself in the light of an impostor, and was proportionally embarrassed. His confusion was shown in a manner peculiarly characteristic of himself. Drawing a small pocket comb from his pocket, he began combing out his sandy curls, softly, with a perplexed smile on his face. The widow had often noticed this action, divined its cause, and accepted it as a tribute. She began to relent. By some occult feminine sympathy, this relenting was indicated by the other woman.

"You're out of sorts this morning, Susan, 'nd if ye'll take a fool's advice, ye'll jest quit work, and make yourself comfortable in the settin'-room, and kinder pass the time o' day with Gabriel; onless he's after waitin' to pick up some hints about housework. I never could work with a man around. I'll do up the dishes ef you'll excuse my kempany, which two is and three's none. Yer give me this apron. You don't hev time, I declare, Sue, to tidy yourself up. And your hair's comin' down."

The gaunt Sal, having recognised Gabriel's presence to this extent, attempted to reorganise Mrs. Markle's coiffure, but was playfully put aside by that lady, with the remark, that "she had too much to do to think of them things."

"And it's only a mop, anyway," she added, with severe self-depreciation; "let it alone, will you, Sal! Thar! I told you; now you've done it." And she had. The infamous Sal, by some deft trick well known to her deceitful sex, had suddenly tumbled the whole wealth of Mrs. Markle's black mane over her plump shoulders. Mrs. Markle, with a laugh, would have flown to the chaste recesses of the sitting-room; but Sal, like a true artist, restrained her, until the full effect of this poetic picture should be impressed upon the unsuspecting Gabriel's memory.

"Mop, indeed!" said Sal. "It's well that many folks is of many minds, and self-praise is open disgrace; but when a man like Lawyer Maxwell sez to me only yesterday sittin' at this very table, lookin' kinder up at you, Sue, as you was passin' soup, unconscious like, and one o' 'em braids droppin' down, and jest missin' the plate, when Lawyer Maxwell sez to me, 'Sal, thar's many a fine lady in Frisco ez would give her pile to have Susan Markle's hair'" —

But here Sal was interrupted by the bashful escape of Mrs. Markle to the sitting-room. "Ye don't know whether Lawyer Maxwell has any bisness up this way, Gabriel, do ye?" said Sal, resuming her work.

"No," said the unconscious Gabriel, happily as oblivious of the artful drift of the question as he had been of the dangerous suggestiveness of Mrs. Markle's hair.

"Because he *does* kinder pass here more frequent than he used, and hez taken ez menny ez five meals in one day. I declare, I thought that was him when you kem just now! I don't think thet Sue notices it, not keering much for that kind of build in a man," continued Sal, glancing at Gabriel's passively powerful shoulders, and the placid strength of his long limbs. "How do you think Sue's looking now — ez a friend interested in the family — how does she look to you?"

Gabriel hastened to assure Sal of the healthful appearance of Mrs. Markle, but only extracted from his gaunt companion a long sigh and a shake of the head.

"It's deceitful, Gabriel! No one knows what that poor critter goes through. Her mind's kinder onsettled o' late, and in that onsettled state, she breaks things. You see her break that plate just now? Well, perhaps I oughtn't to say it — but you being a friend and in confidence, for she'd kill me, being a proud kind o' nater, suthin' like my own, and it may not amount to nothin' arter all — but I kin always tell when you've been around by the breakages. You was here, let's see, the week afore last, and there wasn't cups enough left to go round that night for supper!"

"Maybe it's chills," said the horror-stricken Gabriel, his worst fears realised, rising from his chair; "I've got some Indian cholagogue over to the cabin, and I'll jest run over and get it, or send

it back." Intent only upon retreat, he would have shamelessly flown; but Sal intercepted him with a face of mysterious awe.

"Ef she should kem in here and find you gone, Gabriel, in that weak state of hers – narvous you may call it, but so it is – I wouldn't be answerable for that poor critter's life. Ef she should think you'd gone, arter what has happened, arter what has passed between you and her to-day, it would jest kill her."

"But what has passed?" said Gabriel, in vague alarm.

"It ain't for me," said the gaunt Sal, loftily, "to pass my opinion on other folks' conduct, or to let on what this means, or what thet means, or to give my say about people callin' on other people, and broken crockery, hair combs" – Gabriel winced – "and people ez is too nice and keerful to open their mouths afore folks! It ain't for me to get up and say that, when a woman is ever so little out of sorts, and a man is so far gone ez he allows to rush off like a madman to get her medicines, what ez or what ezn't in it. I keep my own counsel, and thet's my way. Many's the time Sue hez said to me: 'Ef thar ever was a woman ez knowed how to lock herself up and throw away the key, it's you, Sal.' And there you are, ma'am, and it's high time ez plain help like me stopped talkin' while ladies and gentlemen exchanged the time o' day."

It is hardly necessary to say that the latter part of this speech was addressed to the widow, who at that moment appeared at the door of the sitting-room, in a new calico gown that showed her plump figure to advantage, or that the gaunt Sal intended to indicate the serious character of the performance by a show of increased respect to the actors.

"I hope I ain't intrudin' on your conversation," said the widow, archly, stopping, with a show of consideration, on the threshold. "Ef you and Sal ain't done private matters yet – I'll wait."

"I don't think ez Gabriel hez anything more to say thet you shouldn't hear, Mrs. Markle," said Sal, strongly implying a recent confidential disclosure from Gabriel, which delicacy to Gabriel alone prevented her from giving. "But it ain't for me to hear confidence in matters of the feelin's."

It is difficult to say whether Mrs. Markle's archness, or Sal's woeful perspicuity, was most alarming to Gabriel. He rose; he would have flown, even with the terrible contingency of Mrs. Markle's hysterics before his eyes; he would have faced even that forcible opposition from Sal of which he fully believed her capable, but that a dreadful suspicion that he was already hopelessly involved, that something would yet transpire that would enable him to explain himself, and perhaps an awful fascination of his very danger, turned his irresolute feet into Mrs. Markle's sitting-room. Mrs. Markle offered him a chair; he sank helplessly into it, while, from the other room, Sal, violently clattering her dishes, burst into shrill song, so palpably done for the purpose of assuring the bashful couple of her inability to overhear their tender confidences, that Gabriel coloured to the roots of his hair.

That evening Gabriel returned from his work in the gulch more than usually grave. To Olly's inquiries he replied shortly and evasively. It was not, however, Gabriel's custom to remain uncommunicative on even disagreeable topics, and Olly bided her time. It came after their frugal supper was over – which, unlike the morning meal, passed without any fastidious criticism on Gabriel's part – and Olly had drawn a small box, her favourite seat, between her brother's legs, and rested the back of her head comfortably against his waistcoat. When Gabriel had lighted his pipe at the solitary candle, he gave one or two preliminary puffs, and then, taking his pipe from his mouth, said gently, "Olly, it can't be done."

"What can't be done, Gabe?" queried the artful Olly, with a swift preconception of the answer, expanding her little mouth into a thoughtful smile.

"Thet thing." – "What thing, Gabe?"

"This yer marryin' o' Mrs. Markle," said Gabriel, with an assumption of easy, business-like indifference.

"Why?" asked Olly.

"She wouldn't hev me."

"What?" said Olly, facing swiftly round.

Gabriel evaded his sister's eyes, and looking in the fire, repeated slowly, but with great firmness —

"No; not fur — fur — fur a gift!"

"She's a mean, stuck-up, horrid old thing!" said Olly, fiercely. "I'd jest like to — why, there ain't a man az kin compare with you, Gabe! Like her impudence!"

Gabriel waved his pipe in the air deprecatingly, yet with such an evident air of cheerful resignation, that Olly faced upon him again suspiciously, and asked — "What did she say?"

"She said," replied Gabe, slowly, "thet her heart was given to another. I think she struck into poetry, and said —

"My heart it is another's,

And it never can be thine.

"Thet is, I think so. I disremember her special remark, Olly; but you know women allers spout poetry at sech times. Ennyhow, that's about the way the spring panned out."

"Who was it?" said Olly, suddenly.

"She didn't let on who," said Gabriel, uneasily. "I didn't think it the square thing to inquire."

"Well," said Olly.

Gabriel looked down still more embarrassed, and shifted his position. "Well," he repeated.

"What did *you* say?" said Olly. — "Then?"

"No, afore. How did you do it, Gabe?" said Olly, comfortably fixing her chin in her hands, and looking up in her brother's face.

"Oh, the usual way!" said Gabriel, with a motion of his pipe, to indicate vague and glittering generalities of courtship.

"But how? Gabe, tell me all about it."

"Well," said Gabriel, looking up at the roof, "wimmen is bashful ez a general thing, and thar's about only one way ez a man can get at 'em, and that ez, by being kinder keerless and bold. Ye see, Olly, when I kem inter the house, I sorter jest chucked Sal under the chin — thet way, you know — and then went up and put my arm around the widder's waist, and kissed her two or three times, you know, jest to be sociable and familiar like."

"And to think, Gabe, thet after all that she wouldn't hev ye," said Olly.

"Not at any price," said Gabriel, positively.

"The disgustin' creature!" said Olly, "I'd jest like to ketch that Manty hangin' round yer after that!" she continued, savagely, with a vicious shake of her little fist. "And just to think, only to-day we give her her pick o' them pups!"

"Hush, Olly, ye mustn't do anythin' o' the sort," said Gabriel, hastily. "Ye must never let on to any one anything. It's confidence, Olly, confidence, ez these sort o' things allus is — atween you and me. Besides," he went on, reassuringly, "that's nothin'. Lord, afore a man's married he hez to go through this kind o' thing a dozen times. It's expected. There was a man as I once knowed," continued Gabriel, with shameless mendacity, "ez went through it fifty tunes, and he was a better man nor me, and could shake a thousand dollars in the face of any woman. Why, bless your eyes, Olly, some men jest likes it — it's excitement — like perspectin'."

"But what did you say, Gabe?" said Olly, returning with fresh curiosity to the central fact, and ignoring the Pleasures of Rejection as expounded by Gabriel.

"Well, I just up, and sez this: Susan Markle, sez I, the case is just this. Here's Olly and me up there on the hill, and jess you and Manty down there on the Gulch, and mountings wild and valleys deep two loving hearts do now divide, and there's no reason why it shouldn't be one family and one house, and that family and that house mine. And it's for you to say when. And then I kinder slung in a little more poetry, and sorter fooled around with that ring," said Gabriel, showing a heavy

plain gold ring on his powerful little finger, "and jest kissed her agin, and chucked Sally under the chin, and that's all."

"And she wouldn't hev ye, Gabe," said Olly, thoughtfully, "after all that? Well, who wants her to? I don't."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Olly," said Gabriel. "But ye mustn't let on a word of it to her. She talks o' coming up on the hill to build, and wants to buy that part of the old claim where I perspected last summer, so's to be near us, and look arter you. And, Olly," continued Gabriel, gravely, "ef she comes round yer foolin' around me ez she used to do, ye mustn't mind that – it's women's ways."

"I'd like to catch her at it," said Olly.

Gabriel looked at Olly with a guilty satisfaction, and drew her toward him. "And now that it's all over, Olly," said he, "it's all the better ez it is. You and me'll get along together ez comfortable as we kin. I talked with some of the boys the other day about sendin' for a schoolmarm from Marysville, and Mrs. Markle thinks it's a good idee. And you'll go to school, Olly. I'll run up to Marysville next week and get you some better clothes, and we'll be just ez happy ez ever. And then some day, Olly, afore you know it – them things come always suddent – I'll jest make a strike outer that ledge, and we'll be rich. Thar's money in that ledge, Olly, I've allus allowed that. And then we'll go – you and me – to San Francisco, and we'll hev a big house, and I'll jest invite a lot of little girls, the best they is in Frisco, to play with you, and you'll hev all the teachers you want, and women ez will be glad to look arter ye. And then maybe I might make it up with Mrs. Markle" —

"Never!" said Olly, passionately.

"Never it is!" said the artful Gabriel, with a glow of pleasure in his eyes, and a slight stirring of remorse in his breast. "But it's time that small gals like you was abed."

Thus admonished, Olly retired behind the screen, taking the solitary candle, and leaving her brother smoking his pipe by the light of the slowly dying fire. But Olly did not go to sleep, and half an hour later, peering out of the screen, she saw her brother still sitting by the fire, his pipe extinguished, and his head resting on his hand. She went up to him so softly that she startled him, shaking a drop of water on the hand that she suddenly threw round his neck.

"You ain't worrying about that woman, Gabe?"

"No," said Gabriel, with a laugh.

Olly looked down at her hand. Gabriel looked up at the roof. "There's a leak thar that's got to be stopped to-morrow. Go to bed, Olly, or you'll take your death."

CHAPTER IV. IN WHICH THE ARTFUL GABRIEL IS DISCOVERED

Notwithstanding his assumed ease and a certain relief, which was real, Gabriel was far from being satisfied with the result of his visit to Mrs. Markle. Whatever may have actually occurred, not known to the reader except through Gabriel's own disclosure to Olly, Gabriel's manner hardly bore out the boldness and conclusiveness of his statement. For a day or two afterwards he resented any allusion to the subject from Olly, but on the third day he held a conversation with one of the Eureka Bar miners, which seemed to bear some remote reference to his experience.

"Thar's a good deal said lately in the papers," began Gabriel, cautiously, "in regard to breach o' promise trials. Lookin' at it, by and large, thar don't seem to be much show for a fellow ez hez been in enny ways kind to a gal, is thar?"

The person addressed, whom rumour declared to have sought One Horse Gulch as a place of refuge from his wife, remarked with an oath that women were blank fools anyway, and that on general principles they were not to be trusted.

"But thar must be a kind o' gin'ral law on the subject," urged Gabriel. "Now what would be your opinion if you was on a jury onto a case like this? It happened to a friend o' mine in Frisco," said Gabriel, with a marked parenthesis, "a man ez you don't know. Thar was a woman – we'll say a widder – ez had been kinder hangin' round him off and on for two or three year, and he hadn't allowed anything to her about marryin'. One day he goes down thar to her house, kinder easy-like, jest to pass the time o' day, and be sociable" —

"That's bad," interrupted the cynic.

"Yes," said Gabriel, doubtingly, "p'r'aps it does look bad, but you see he didn't mean anythin'."

"Well?" said the adviser.

"Well! thet's all," said Gabriel.

"All!" exclaimed his companion, indignantly.

"Yes, all. Now this woman kinder allows she'll bring a suit agin him to make him marry her."

"My opinion is," said the adviser, bluntly, "my opinion is, that the man was a fool, and didn't tell ye the truth nuther, and I'd give damages agin him, for being such a fool."

This opinion was so crushing to Gabriel that he turned hopelessly away. Nevertheless, in his present state of mind, he could not refrain from pushing his inquiries further, and in a general conversation which took place at Briggs's store, in the afternoon, among a group of smokers, Gabriel artfully introduced the subject of courtship and marriage.

"Thar's different ways of getting at the feelin's of a woman," said the oracular Johnson, after a graphic statement of his own method of ensnaring the affections of a former sweetheart, "thar's different ways jest as thar's different men and women in the world. One man's way won't do with some wimmen. But thar's one way ez is pretty sure to fetch 'em allers. That is, to play off indifferent – to never let on ye like 'em! To kinder look arter them in a gin'ral sort o' way, pretty much as Gabe thar looks arter the sick! – but not to say anythin' particler. To make them understand that they've got to do all the courtin', ef thar's enny to be done. What's the matter, Gabe, ye ain't goin'?"

Gabriel, who had risen in great uneasiness, muttered something about "its being time to go home," and then sat down again, looking at Johnson in fearful fascination.

"That kind o' thing is pretty sure to fetch almost enny woman," continued Johnson, "and a man ez does it orter be looked arter. It orter be put down by law. It's tamperin', don't yer see, with the holiest affections. Sich a man orter be spotted wherever found."

"But mebbe the man don't mean anythin' – mebbe it's jest his way," suggested Gabriel, ruefully, looking around in the faces of the party, "mebbe he don't take to wimmen and marriage nat'ral, and it's jest his way."

"Way be blowed!" said the irate Johnson, scornfully. "Ketch him, indeed! It's jest the artfullest kind o' artfulness. It's jest begging on a full hand."

Gabriel rose slowly, and, resisting any further attempts to detain him, walked to the door, and, after a remark on the threatening nature of the weather, delivered in a manner calculated to impress his audience with his general indifference to the subject then under discussion, melted dejectedly away into the driving rain that had all day swept over One Horse Gulch, and converted its one long narrow street into a ditch of turbulent yellow water.

"Thet Gabe seems to be out o' sorts to-day," said Johnson. "I heerd Lawyer Maxwell asking arter him this morning; I reckon thar's suthin' up! Gabe ain't a bad sort of chap. Hezen't got enny too much *sabe* about him, but he's mighty good at looking arter sick folks, and thet kind o' man's a power o' use in this camp. Hope thar ain't anything ez will interfere with his sphere o' usefulness."

"May be a woman scrape," suggested Briggs. "He seemed sort o' bound up in what you was saying about women jest now. Thar is folks round yer," said Briggs, dropping his voice and looking about him, "ez believes that that yer Olly, which he lets on to be his sister, to be actooally his own child. No man would tote round a child like that, and jest bind himself up in her, and give up wimmen and whisky, and keerds, and kempeny, ef it wasn't his own. Thet ain't like brothers in my part of the country."

"It's a mighty queer story he tells, ennyways – all this yer stuff about Starvation Camp and escapin'," suggested another. "I never did, somehow, take enny stock in that."

"Well, it's his own look out," concluded Johnson. "It's nothin' to me. Ef I've been any service to him pintin' out sick people, and kinder makin' suggestions here and thar, how he should look arter them, he's welcome to it. I don't go back on my record, if he hez got into trouble."

"And I'm sure," said Briggs, "if I did allow him to come in here and look arter thet sick Mexican, it ain't for me to be expected to look after his moril character too." But here the entrance of a customer put a stop to further criticism.

Meanwhile the unfortunate subject of this discussion, by clinging close to the walls of houses, had avoided the keen blast that descended from the mountain, and had at last reached the little trail that led through the gulch to his cabin on the opposite hill-side. Here Gabriel hesitated. To follow that trail would lead him past the boarding-house of Mrs. Markle. In the light of the baleful counsel he had just received, to place himself as soon again in the way of danger seemed to him to be only a provocation of fate. That the widow and Sal might swoop down upon him as he passed, and compel him to enter; that the spectacle of his passing without a visit might superinduce instant hysterics on the part of the widow, appeared to his terror-stricken fancy as almost a certainty. The only other way home was by a circuitous road along the ridge of the hill, at least three miles farther. Gabriel did not hesitate long, but began promptly to ascend the hill. This was no easy task in the face of a strong gale and torrents of beating rain, but the overcoming of physical difficulties by the exercise of his all conquering muscles, and the fact that he was doing something, relieved his mind of its absurd terrors. When he had reached the summit he noticed for the first time the full power of those subtle agencies that had been silently at work during the last week's steady rain. A thin trickling mountain rill where he had two weeks before slaked his thirst during a ramble with Olly, was now transformed into a roaring cataract; the brook that they had leaped across was now a swollen river. There were slowly widening pools in the valleys, darkly glancing sheets of water on the distant plains, and a monotonous rush and gurgle always in the air. It was half an hour later, and two miles farther on his rough road, that he came in view of the narrow precipitous gorge through which the Wingdam stage passed on its way from Marysville. As he approached nearer he could see that the little mountain stream which ran beside the stage road had already slightly encroached upon the road-bed, and that here and there the stage road itself was lost in drifts of standing water. "It will be pretty rough drivin' up that cañon," said Gabriel to himself as he thought of the incoming Wingdam stage, now nearly due; "mighty onpleasant and risky with narvous leaders, but thar's worse things

than that in this yer world," he meditated, as his mind reverted again to Mrs. Markle, "and ef I could change places with Yuba Bill, and get on that box and Olly inside – I'd do it!"

But just then the reservoir of the Wingdam ditch came in view on the hill beside him, and with it a revelation that in a twinkling displaced Mrs. Markle, and seemed almost to change the man's entire nature! What was it? Apparently nothing to the eye of the ordinary traveller. The dam was full, and through a cut-off the overplus water was escaping with a roar. Nothing more? Yes – to an experienced eye the escaping water was not abating the quantity in the dam. Was that all? No! Halfway down the rudely constructed *adobe* bank of the dam, the water was slowly oozing and trickling through a slowly-widening crevice, over the rocks above the gorge and stage road below! The wall of the dam was giving way! To tear off coat and all impeding garments, to leap from rock to rock, and boulder to boulder, hanging on by slippery chimisal and the decayed roots of trees; to reach at the risk of life and limb the cañon below, and then to run at the highest speed to warn the incoming stage of the danger before it should enter the narrow gorge, was only the resolve and action of a brave man. But to do this without the smallest waste of strength that ought to be preserved, to do this with the greatest economy of force, to do this with the agility and skill of a mountaineer, and the reserved power of a giant; to do this with a will so simple, direct, and unhesitating, that the action appeared to have been planned and rehearsed days before, instead of being the resolution of the instant, – this belonged to Gabriel Conroy! And to have seen him settle into a long swinging trot, and to have observed his calm, grave, earnest, but unexcited face, and quiet, steadfast eye, you would have believed him some healthy giant simply exercising himself.

He had not gone half a mile before his quick ear caught a dull sound and roar of advancing water. Yet even then he only slightly increased his steady stride, as if he had been quickened and followed by his trainer rather than by approaching Death. At the same moment there was a quick rattle and clatter in the road ahead – a halt, and turning back, for Gabriel's warning shout had run before him like a bullet. But it was too late. The roaring water behind him struck him and bore him down, and the next instant swept the coach and horses a confused, struggling, black mass, against the rocky walls of the cañon. And then it was that the immense reserved strength of Gabriel came into play. Set upon by the almost irresistible volume of water, he did not waste his power in useless opposition, but allowed himself to be swept hither and thither until he touched a branch of chimisal that depended from the cañon side. Seizing it with one sudden and mighty effort, he raised himself above the sweep and suction of the boiling flood. The coach was gone; where it had stood a few black figures struggled, swirled, and circled. One of them was a woman. In an instant Gabriel plunged into the yellow water. A few strokes brought him to her side; in another moment he had encircled her waist with his powerful arm and lifted her head above the surface, when he was seized by two despairing arms from the other side. Gabriel did not shake them off. "Take hold of me lower down and I'll help ye both," he shouted, as he struck out with his only free arm for the chimisal. He reached it; drew himself up so that he could grasp it with his teeth, and then, hanging on by his jaw, raised his two clinging companions beside him. They had barely grasped it, when another ominous roar was heard below, and another wall of yellow water swept swiftly up the cañon. The chimisal began to yield to their weight. Gabriel dug his fingers into the soil about its roots, clutched the jagged edges of a rock beneath, and threw his arm about the woman, pressing her closely to the face of the wall. As the wave swept over them, there was a sudden despairing cry, a splash, and the man was gone. Only Gabriel and the woman remained. They were safe, but for the moment only. Gabriel's left hand grasping an insecure projection, was all that sustained their united weight. Gabriel, for the first time, looked down upon the woman. Then he said hesitatingly —

"Kin ye hold yourself a minnit?" – "Yes."

Even at that critical moment some occult quality of sweetness in her voice thrilled him.

"Lock your hands together hard, and sling 'em over my neck." She did so. Gabriel freed his right hand. He scarcely felt the weight thus suddenly thrown upon his shoulders, but cautiously

groped for a projection on the rock above. He found it, raised himself by a supreme effort, until he secured a foothold in the hole left by the uprooted chimisal bush. Here he paused.

"Kin ye hang on a minnit longer?"

"Go on," she said.

Gabriel went on. He found another projection, and another, and gradually at last reached a ledge a foot wide, near the top of the cliff. Here he paused. It was the woman's turn to speak.

"Can you climb to the top?" she asked.

"Yes – if you" —

"Go on," she said, simply.

Gabriel continued the ascent cautiously. In a few minutes he had reached the top. Here her hands suddenly relaxed their grasp; she would have slipped to the ground had not Gabriel caught her by the waist, lifted her in his arms, and borne her to a spot where a fallen pine-tree had carpeted and cushioned the damp ground with its withered tassels. Here he laid her down with that exquisite delicacy and tenderness of touch which was so habitual to him in his treatment of all helplessness as to be almost unconscious. But she thanked him, with such a graceful revelation of small white teeth, and such a singular look out of her dark grey eyes, that he could not help looking at her again. She was a small light-haired woman, tastefully and neatly dressed, and of a type and class unknown to him. But for her smile, he would not have thought her pretty. But even with that smile on her face, she presently paled and fainted. At the same moment Gabriel heard the sound of voices, and, looking up, saw two of the passengers, who had evidently escaped by climbing the cliff, coming towards them. And then – I know not how to tell it – but a sudden and awe-inspiring sense of his ambiguous and peculiar situation took possession of him. What would they think of it? Would they believe his statement? A sickening recollection of the late conversation at Brigg's returned to him; the indignant faces of the gaunt Sal and the plump Mrs. Markle were before him; even the questioning eyes of little Olly seemed to pierce his inmost soul, and alas! this hero, the victorious giant, turned and fled.

CHAPTER V. SIMPLICITY *versus* SAGACITY

When Gabriel reached his home it was after dark, and Olly was anxiously waiting to receive him.

"You're wet all through, you awful Gabe, and covered with mud into the bargain. Go and change your clothes, or you'll get your death, as sure as you're a born sinner!"

The tone and manner in which this was uttered was something unusual with Olly, but Gabriel was too glad to escape further questioning to criticise or rebuke it. But when he had reappeared from behind the screen with dry clothes, he was surprised to observe by the light of the newly-lit candle that Olly herself had undergone since morning a decided change in her external appearance. Not to speak alone of an unusual cleanliness of face and hands, and a certain attempt at confining her yellow curls with a vivid pink ribbon, there was an unwonted neatness in her attire, and some essay at adornment in a faded thread-lace collar which she had found among her mother's "things" in the family bag, and a purple neck-ribbon.

"It seems to me," said the delighted Gabriel, "that somebody else hez been dressin' up and makin' a toylit, sence I've been away. Hev you been in the ditches agin, Olly?"

"No," said Olly, with some dignity of manner, as she busied herself in setting the table for supper.

"But I reckon I never seen ye look so peart afore, Olly; who's been here?" he added, with a sudden alarm.

"Nobody," said Olly; "I reckon some folks kin get along and look decent without the help of other folks, leastways of Susan Markle."

At this barbed arrow Gabriel winced slightly. "See yer, Olly," said Gabriel, "ye mustn't talk thet way about thet woman. You're only a chile – and ef yer brother did let on to ye, in confidence, certing things ez a brother may say to his sister, ye oughtn't say anythin' about it."

"Say anythin'!" echoed Olly, scornfully; "do you think I'd ever let on to thet woman ennything? Ketch me!"

Gabriel looked up at his sister in awful admiration, and felt at the depths of his conscience-stricken and self-deprecatory nature that he didn't deserve so brave a little defender. For a moment he resolved to tell her the truth, but a fear of Olly's scorn and a desire to bask in the sunshine of her active sympathy withheld him. "Besides," he added to himself, in a single flash of self-satisfaction, "this yer thing may be the makin' o' thet gal yet. Look at thet collar, Gabriel! look at thet hair, Gabriel! all your truth-tellin' never fetched outer thet purty child what thet one yarn did."

Nevertheless, as Gabriel sat down to his supper he was still haunted by the ominous advice and counsel he had heard that day. When Olly had finished her meal, he noticed that she had forborne, evidently at great personal sacrifice, to sop the frying-pan with her bread. He turned to her gravely —

"Ef you wus ever asked, Olly, ef I had been sweet upon Mrs. Markle, wot would ye say?"

"Say," said Olly savagely, "I'd say that if there ever was a woman ez had run arter a man with less call to do it – it was Mrs. Markle – that same old disgustin' Susan Markle. Thet's wot I'd say, and I'd say it – to her face! Gabe, see here!"

"Well," said the delighted Gabriel.

"Ef that school-ma'am comes up here, do you jest make up to her!"

"Olly!" ejaculated the alarmed Gabriel.

"You jest go for her! You jest do for her what you did for that Susan Markle. And jest you do it, if you can, Gabe – when Mrs. Markle's around – or afore little Manty – she'll go and tell her mother – she tells her everything. I've heerd, Gabe, that some o' them school-ma'ams is nice."

In his desire to please Olly, Gabriel would have imparted to her the story of his adventure in the cañon, but a vague fear that Olly might demand from him an instant offer of his hand and heart to the woman he had saved, checked the disclosure. And the next moment there was a rap at the door of the cabin.

"I forgot to say, Gabe, that Lawyer Maxwell was here to-day to see ye," said Olly, "and I bet you thet's him. If he wants you to nuss anybody, Gabe, don't ye do it! You got enough to do to look arter me!"

Gabriel rose with a perplexed face and opened the door. A tall dark man, with a beard heavily streaked with grey, entered. There was something in his manner and dress, although both conformed to local prejudices and customs, that denoted a type of man a little above the average social condition of One Horse Gulch. Unlike Gabriel's previous evening visitor, he did not glance around him, but fixed a pair of keen, half-humorous, half-interrogating grey eyes upon his host's face, and kept them there. The habitual expression of his features was serious, except for a certain half-nervous twitching at the left corner of his mouth, which continued usually, until he stopped and passed his hand softly across it. The impression always left on the spectator was, that he had wiped away a smile, as some people do a tear.

"I don't think I ever before met you, Gabriel," he said, advancing and offering his hand. "My name is Maxwell. I think you've heard of me. I have come for a little talk on a matter of business."

The blank dismay of Gabriel's face did not escape him, nor the gesture with which he motioned to Olly to retire.

"It's quite evident," he said to himself, "that the child knows nothing of this, or is unprepared. I have taken him by surprise."

"If I mistake not, Gabriel," said Maxwell aloud, "your little – er – girl – is as much concerned in this matter as yourself. Why not let her remain?"

"No, no;" said Gabriel, now feeling perfectly convinced in the depths of his conscience-stricken soul that Maxwell was here as the legal adviser of the indignant Mrs. Markle. "No! Olly, run out and get some chips in the wood-house agin to-morrow morning's fire. Run!"

Olly ran. Maxwell cast a look after the child, wiped his mouth, and leaning his elbow on the table, fixed his eyes on Gabriel. "I have called to-night, Gabriel, to see if we can arrange a certain matter without trouble, and even – as I am employed against you – with as little talk as possible. To be frank, I am entrusted with the papers in a legal proceeding against you. Now, see here! is it necessary for me to say what these proceedings are? Is it even necessary for me to give the name of my client?"

Gabriel dropped his eyes, but even then the frank honesty of his nature spoke for him. He raised his head and said simply – "No!"

Lawyer Maxwell was for a moment staggered, but only for a moment. "Good," he said thoughtfully; "you are frank. Let me ask you now if, to avoid legal proceedings, publicity, and scandal – and allow me to add, the almost absolute certainty of losing in any suit that might be brought against you – would you be willing to abandon this house and claim at once, allowing it to go for damages in the past? If you would, I think I could accept it for such. I think I could promise that even this question of a closer relationship would not come up. Briefly, *she* might keep her name, and *you* might keep yours, and you would remain to each other as strangers. What do you say?"

Gabriel rose quickly and took the lawyer's hands with a tremulous grasp. "You're a kind man, Mr. Maxwell," he said, shaking the lawyer's hand vigorously; "a good man. It's a bad business, and you've made the best of it. Ef you'd been my own lawyer instead o' hers, you couldn't hev treated me better. I'll leave here at once. I've been thinking o' doing it ever since this yer thing troubled me; but I'll go to-morrow. Ye can hev the house, and all it contains. If I had anything else in a way of a fee to offer ye, I'd do it. She kin hev the house and all that they is of it. And then nothing will be said?"

"Not a word," said Maxwell, examining Gabriel curiously.

"No talk – nothin' in the newspapers?" continued Gabriel.

"Your conduct toward her and your attitude in this whole affair will be kept a profound secret, unless you happen to betray it yourself and that is my one reason for advising you to leave here."

"I'll do it – to-morrow," said Gabriel, rubbing his hands. "Wouldn't you like to have me sign some bit o' paper?"

"No, no," said the lawyer, wiping his mouth with his hand, and looking at Gabriel as if he belonged to some entirely new species. "Let me advise you, as a friend, to sign no paper that might be brought against you hereafter. Your simple abandonment of the claim and house is sufficient for our purposes. I will make out no papers in the case until Thursday; by that time I expect to find no one to serve them on. You understand?"

Gabriel nodded, and wrung the lawyer's hand warmly.

Maxwell walked toward the door, still keeping his glance fixed on Gabriel's clear, honest eyes. On the threshold he paused, and leaning against it, wiped his mouth with a slow gesture, and said – "From all I can hear, Gabriel, you are a simple, honest fellow, and I frankly confess to you, but for the admission you have made to me, I would have thought you incapable of attempting to wrong a woman. I should have supposed it some mistake. I am not a judge of the motives of men; I am too old a lawyer, and too familiar with things of this kind to be surprised at men's motives, or even to judge their rights or wrongs by my own. But now that we understand each other, would you mind telling me what was your motive for this peculiar and monstrous form of deception? Understand me; it will not alter my opinion of you, which is, that you are not a bad man. But I am curious to know how you could deliberately set about to wrong this woman; what was the motive?"

Gabriel's face flushed deeply. Then he lifted his eyes and pointed to the screen. The lawyer followed the direction of his finger, and saw Olly standing in the doorway.

Lawyer Maxwell smiled. "It is the sex, anyway," he said to himself; "perhaps a little younger than I supposed; of course, his own child." He nodded again, smiled at Olly, and with the consciousness of a professional triumph, blent with a certain moral satisfaction that did not always necessarily accompany his professional success, he passed out into the night.

Gabriel avoided conversation with Olly until late in the evening. When she had taken her accustomed seat at his feet before the fire, she came directly to the point. "What did he want, Gabe?"

"Nothing partickler," said Gabriel, with an affectation of supreme indifference. "I was thinking, Olly, that I'd tell you a story. It's a long time since I told one." It had been Gabriel's habit to improve these precious moments by relating the news of the camp, or the current topics of the day, artfully imparted as pure fiction; but since his pre-occupation with Mrs. Markle, he had lately omitted it.

Olly nodded her head, and Gabriel went on —

"Once upon a time they lived a man ez hed lived and would live – for thet was wot was so sing'ler about him – all alone, 'cept for a little sister ez this man hed, wot he loved very dearly. They was no one ez this man would ever let ring in, so to speak, between him and this little sister, and the heaps o' private confidence, and the private talks about this and thet, thet this yer man hed with this little sister, was wonderful to behold."

"Was it a real man – a pure man?" queried Olly.

"The man was a real man, but the little sister, I oughter say, was a kind o' fairy, you know, Olly, ez hed a heap o' power to do good to this yer man, unbeknownst to him and afore his face. They lived in a sorter paliss in the woods, this yer man and his sister. And one day this yer man hed a heap o' troubil come upon him that was sich ez would make him leave this beautiful paliss, and he didn't know how to let on to his little sister about it; and so he up, and he sez to her, sez he, 'Gloriana' – thet was her name – 'Gloriana,' sez he, 'we must quit this beautiful paliss and wander into furrin parts, and the reason why is a secret ez I can't tell ye.' And this yer little sister jest ups and sez, 'Wot's agreeable to you, brother, is agreeable to me, for we is everything to each other the

wide world over, and variety is the spice o' life, and I'll pack my traps to-morrow.' And she did. For why, Olly? Why, don't ye see, this yer little sister was a fairy, and knowed it all without bein' told. And they went away to furrin parts and strange places, war they built a more beautiful paliss than the other was, and they lived thar peaceful like and happy all the days o' their life."

"And thar wasn't any old witch of a Mrs. Markle to bother them. When are ye goin', Gabe?" asked the practical Olly.

"I thought to-morrow," said Gabriel, helplessly abandoning all allegory, and looking at his sister in respectful awe, "thet ez, I reckoned, Olly, to get to Casey's in time to take the arternoon stage up to Marysville."

"Well," said Oily, "then I'm goin' to bed now."

"Olly," said Gabriel reproachfully, as he watched the little figure disappear behind the canvas, "ye didn't kiss me fur good-night."

Olly came back. "You ole Gabe – you!" she said patronisingly, as she ran her fingers through his tangled curls, and stooped to bestow a kiss on his forehead from an apparently immeasurable moral and intellectual height – "You old big Gabe, what would you do without me, I'd like to know?"

The next morning Gabriel was somewhat surprised at observing Olly, immediately after the morning meal, proceed gravely to array herself in the few more respectable garments that belonged to her wardrobe. Over a white muslin frock, yellow and scant with age, she had tied a scarf of glaring cheap pink ribbon, and over this again she had secured, by the aid of an enormous tortoiseshell brooch, a large black and white check shawl of her mother's, that even repeated folding could not reduce in size. She then tied over her yellow curls a large straw hat trimmed with white and yellow daisies and pale-green ribbon, and completed her toilet by unfurling over her shoulder a small yellow parasol. Gabriel, who had been watching these preparations in great concern, at last ventured to address the *bizarre* but pretty little figure before him.

"War you goin', Olly?"

"Down the gulch to say good-bye to the Reed gals. 'Taint the square thing to vamose the ranch without lettin' on to folks."

"Ye ain't goin' near Mrs. Markle's, are ye?" queried Gabriel, in deprecatory alarm.

Oily turned a scornful flash of her clear blue eye upon her brother, and said curtly, "Ketch me!"

There was something so appalling in her quickness, such a sudden revelation of quaint determination in the lines of her mouth and eyebrows, that Gabriel could say no more. Without a word he watched the yellow sunshade and flapping straw hat with its streaming ribbons slowly disappear down the winding descent of the hill. And then a sudden and grotesque sense of dependence upon the child – an appreciation of some reserved quality in her nature hitherto unsuspected by him – something that separated them now, and in the years to come would slowly widen the rift between them – came upon him with such a desolating sense of loneliness that it seemed unendurable. He did not dare to re-enter or look back upon the cabin, but pushed on vaguely toward his claim on the hillside. On his way thither he had to pass a solitary red-wood tree that he had often noticed, whose enormous bulk belittled the rest of the forest; yet, also, by reason of its very isolation had acquired a certain lonely pathos that was far beyond the suggestion of its heroic size. It seemed so imbecile, so gratuitously large, so unproductive of the good that might be expected of its bulk, so unlike the smart spruces and pert young firs and larches that stood beside it, that Gabriel instantly accepted it as a symbol of himself, and could not help wondering if there were not some other locality where everything else might be on its own plane of existence. "If I war to go thar," said Gabriel to himself, "I wonder if I might not suit better than I do yer, and be of some sarvice to thet child." He pushed his way through the underbrush, and stood upon the ledge that he had first claimed on his arrival at One Horse Gulch. It was dreary – it was unpromising – a vast stony field high up in air, covered with scattered boulders of dark iron-grey rock. Gabriel

smiled bitterly. "Any other man but me couldn't hev bin sich a fool as to preëmt sich a claim fur gold. P'r'aps it's all for the best that I'm short of it now," said Gabriel, as he turned away, and descended the hill to his later claim in the gulch, which yielded him that pittance known in the mining dialect as "grub."

It was nearly three o'clock before he returned to the cabin with the few tools that he had gathered. When he did so, he found Olly awaiting him, with a slight flush of excitement on her cheek, but no visible evidences of any late employment to be seen in the cabin.

"Ye don't seem to have been doin' much packin', Olly," said Gabriel – "tho' thar ain't, so to speak, much to pack up."

"Thar ain't no use in packin', Gabe," replied Olly, looking directly into the giant's bashful eyes.

"No use?" echoed Gabriel.

"No sort o' use," said Olly decidedly. "We ain't goin', Gabe, and that's the end on't. I've been over to see Lawyer Maxwell, and I've made it all right!"

Gabriel dropped speechless into a chair, and gazed, open-mouthed, at his sister. "I've made it all right, Gabe," continued Olly coolly, "you'll see. I jest went over thar this morning, and hed a little talk with the lawyer, and giv him a piece o' my mind about Mrs. Markle – and jest settled the whole thing."

"Good Lord! Olly, what did you say?"

"Say?" echoed Olly. "I jest up and told him everythin' I knew about thet woman, and I never told you, Gabe, the half of it. I jest sed ez how she'd been runnin' round arter you ever sence she first set eyes on you, when you was nussin' her husband wot died. How you never ez much ez looked at her ontill I set you up to it! How she used to come round yer, and sit and sit and look at you, Gabe, and kinder do this et ye over her shoulder." – (Here Olly achieved an admirable imitation of certain arch glances of Mrs. Markle that would have driven that estimable lady frantic with rage, and even at this moment caused the bashful blood of Gabriel to fly into his very eyes.) "And how she used to let on all sorts of excuses to get you over thar, and how you refoosed! And wot a deceitful, old, mean, disgustin' critter she was enny way!" and here Olly paused for want of breath.

"And wot did he say?" said the equally breathless Gabriel.

"Nothin' at first! Then he laughed and laughed, and laughed till I thought he'd bust! And then – let me see," reflected the conscientious Olly, "he said thar was some 'absurd blunder and mistake' – that's jest what he called thet Mrs. Markle, Gabe – those was his very words! And then he set up another yell o' laughin', and somehow, Gabe, I got to laughin', and she got to laughin' too!" And Olly laughed at the recollection.

"Who's *she*?" asked Gabriel, with a most lugubrious face.

"O Gabe! you think everybody's Mrs. Markle," said Olly swiftly. "*She* was a lady ez was with thet Lawyer Maxwell, ez heerd it all. Why, Lord! she seemed to take ez much interest in it as the lawyer. P'r'aps," said Olly, with a slight degree of conscious pride as *raconteur*, "p'r'aps it was the way I told it. I was *thet* mad, Gabe, and sassy!"

"And what did he say?" continued Gabriel, still ruefully, for to him, as to most simple, serious natures devoid of any sense of humour, all this inconsequent hilarity looked suspicious.

"Why, he was fur puttin' right over here 'to explain,' ez he called it, but the lady stopped him, and sed somethin' low I didn't get to hear. Oh, she must be a partickler friend o' his, Gabe – for he did everythin' thet she said. And she said I was to go back and say thet we needn't hurry ourselves to git away at all. And thet's the end of it, Gabe."

"But didn't he say anythin' more, Olly?" said Gabriel anxiously.

"No. He begin to ask me some questions about old times and Starvation Camp, and I'd made up my mind to disremember all them things ez I told you, Gabe, fur I'm jest sick of being called a cannon-ball, so I jest disremembered everything ez fast ez he asked it, until he sez, sez he to this

lady, 'she evidently knows nothin' o' the whole thing.' But the lady had been tryin' to stop his askin' questions, and he'd been kinder signin' to me not to answer too. Oh, she's cute, Gabe; I could see thet ez soon ez I set down."

"What did she look like, Olly?" said Gabriel, with an affectation of carelessness, but still by no means yet entirely relieved in his mind.

"Oh, she didn't look like Mrs. Markle, Gabe, or any o' thet kind. A kinder short woman, with white teeth, and a small waist, and good clo'es. I didn't sort o' take to her much, Gabe, though she was very kind to me. I don't know ez I could say ezactly what she did look like; I reckon thar ain't anybody about yer looks like she. Saints and goodness! Gabe, that's her now; thar she is!"

Something darkened the doorway. Gabriel, looking up, beheld the woman he had saved in the cañon. It was Madame Devarges!

BOOK III. THE LEAD

CHAPTER I. AN OLD PIONEER OF '49

A thick fog, dense, impenetrable, bluish-grey and raw, marked the advent of the gentle summer of 1854 on the California coast. The brief immature spring was scarcely yet over; there were flowers still to be seen on the outlying hills around San Francisco, and the wild oats were yet green on the Contra Costa mountains. But the wild oats were hidden under a dim India-inky veil, and the wild flowers accepted the joyless embraces of the fog with a staring waxen rigidity. In short, the weather was so uncomfortable that the average Californian was more than ever inclined to impress the stranger aggressively with the fact that fogs were healthy, and that it was the "finest climate on the earth."

Perhaps no one was better calculated or more accustomed to impress the stranger with this belief than Mr. Peter Dumphy, banker and capitalist. His outspoken faith in the present and future of California was unbounded. His sincere convictions that no country or climate was ever before so signally favoured, his intoleration of any criticism or belief to the contrary, made him a representative man. So positive and unmistakable was his habitual expression on these subjects, that it was impossible to remain long in his presence without becoming impressed with the idea that any other condition of society, climate, or civilization than that which obtained in California, was a mistake. Strangers were brought early to imbibe from this fountain; timid and weak Californians, in danger of a relapse, had their faith renewed and their eyesight restored by bathing in this pool that Mr. Dumphy kept always replenished. Unconsciously, people at last got to echoing Mr. Dumphy's views as their own, and much of the large praise that appeared in newspapers, public speeches, and correspondence, was first voiced by Dumphy. It must not be supposed that Mr. Dumphy's positiveness of statement and peremptory manner were at all injurious to his social reputation. Owing to that suspicion with which most frontier communities regard polite concession and suavity of method, Mr. Dumphy's brusque frankness was always accepted as genuine. "You always know what Pete Dumphy means," was the average criticism. "He ain't goin' to lie to please any man." To a conceit that was so freely and shamelessly expressed as to make hesitating and cautious wisdom appear weak and unmanly beside it, Mr. Dumphy added the rare quality of perfect unconscientiousness unmingled with any adulterating virtue. It was with such rare combative qualities as these that Mr. Dumphy sat that morning in his private office and generally opposed the fog without, or rather its influence upon his patrons and society at large. The face he offered to it was a strong one, although superficially smooth, for since the reader had the honour of his acquaintance, he had shaved off his beard, as a probably unnecessary indication of character. It was still early, but he had already despatched much business with that prompt decision which made even an occasional blunder seem heroic. He was signing a letter that one of his clerks had brought him, when he said briskly, without looking up – "Send Mr. Ramirez in."

Mr. Ramirez, who had already called for three successive days without obtaining an audience of Dumphy, entered the private room with an excited sense of having been wronged, which, however, instantly disappeared, as far as external manifestation was concerned, on his contact with the hard-headed, aggressive, and prompt Dumphy.

"How do?" said Dumphy, without looking up from his desk. Mr. Ramirez uttered some objection to the weather, and then took a seat uneasily near Dumphy. "Go on," said Dumphy, "I can listen."

"It is I who came to listen," said Mr. Ramirez, with great suavity. "It is of the news I would hear."

"Yes," said Mr. Dumphy, signing his name rapidly to several documents, "Yes, *Yes*, Yes." He finished them, turned rapidly upon Ramirez, and said "Yes!" again, in such a positive manner as to utterly shipwreck that gentleman's self-control. "Ramirez!" said Dumphy abruptly, "how much have you got in that thing?"

Mr. Ramirez, still floating on a sea of conjecture, could only say, "Eh! Ah! It is what?"

"How *deep* are you? How much would you *lose*?"

Mr. Ramirez endeavoured to fix his eyes upon Dumphy's. "How – much – would I lose? – if how? If what?"

"What – money – have – you – got – in – it?" said Mr. Dumphy, emphasising each word sharply with the blunt end of his pen on the desk.

"No money! I have much interest in the success of Madame Devarges!"

"Then you're not 'in' much! That's lucky for you. Read that letter. – Show him in!"

The last remark was in reply to a mumbled interrogatory of the clerk, who had just entered. Perhaps it was lucky for Mr. Ramirez that Mr. Dumphy's absorption with his new visitor prevented his observation of his previous visitor's face. As he read the letter, Ramirez's face first turned to an ashen-grey hue, then to a livid purple, then he smacked his dry lips thrice, and said "*Carámba!*" then with burning eyes he turned towards Dumphy.

"You have read this?" he asked, shaking the letter towards Dumphy.

"One moment," interrupted Dumphy, finishing the conversation with his latest visitor, and following him to the door. "Yes," he continued, returning to his desk and facing Ramirez. "Yes!" Mr. Ramirez could only shake the letter and smile in a ghastly way at Dumphy. "Yes," said Dumphy, reaching forward and coolly taking the letter out of Ramirez's hand, "Yes. Seems she is going to get married," he continued, consulting the letter. "Going to marry the brother, the man in possession. That puts you all right; any way, the cat jumps; and it lets *you* out." With the air of having finished the interview, Mr. Dumphy quietly returned the letter, followed by Ramirez's glaring eyes, to a pigeon-hole in his desk, and tapped his desk with his penholder.

"And you – you?" gasped Ramirez hoarsely, "you?"

"Oh, *I* didn't go into it a dollar. Yet it was a good investment. She could have made out a strong case. You had possession of the deed or will, hadn't you? There was no evidence of the existence of the other woman," continued Mr. Dumphy, in his usually loud voice, overlooking the cautionary gestures of Mr. Ramirez with perfect indifference. "Hello! How do?" he added to another visitor. "I was sending you a note." Mr. Ramirez rose. His long finger nails were buried in the yellow flesh of his palms. His face was quite bloodless, and his lips were dry. "What's your hurry?" said Dumphy, looking up. "Come in again; there's another matter I want you to look into, Ramirez! We've got some money out on claim that ought to have one or two essential papers to make it right. I daresay they're lying round somewhere where you can find 'em. Draw on me for the expense." Mr. Dumphy did not say this slyly, nor with any dark significance, but with perfect frankness. Virtually it said – "You're a scamp, so am I; whether or not this other man who overhears us is one likewise, it matters not." He took his seat again, turned to the latest comer, and became oblivious of his previous companion.

Luckily for Mr. Ramirez, when he reached the street he had recovered the control of his features, if not his natural colour. At least the fog, which seemed to lend a bluish-grey shade to all complexions, allowed his own livid cheek to pass unnoticed. He walked quickly, and it appeared almost unconsciously towards the water, for it was not until he reached the steamboat wharf that he

knew where he was. He seemed to have taken one step from Mr. Dumphy's office to the pier. There was nothing between these two objects in his consciousness. The interval was utterly annihilated. The steamboat did not leave for Sacramento until eight that evening, and it was only ten o'clock now. He had been conscious of this as he walked, but he could not have resisted this one movement, even if a futile one, towards the object of his revengeful frenzy. Ten hours to wait – ten hours to be passive, inactive – to be doing nothing! How could he pass the time? He could sharpen his knife. He could buy a new one. He could purchase a better pistol. He remembered passing a gunsmith's shop with a display of glittering weapons in its window. He retraced his steps, and entered the shop, spending some moments in turning over the gunsmith's various wares. Especially was he fascinated by a long broad-bladed bowie-knife. "My own make," said the tradesman, with professional pride, passing a broad, leathery thumb along the keen edge of the blade. "It'll split a half-dollar. See!"

He threw a half-dollar on the counter, and with a quick, straight, down-darting stab pierced it in halves. Mr. Ramirez was pleased, and professed a desire to make the experiment himself. But the point slipped, sending the half-dollar across the shop and cutting a long splintering furrow in the counter. "Yer narves ain't steady. And ye try too hard," said the man, coolly. "Thet's the way it's apt to be with you gents. Ye jest work yourself up into a fever 'bout a little thing like thet, ez if everything depended on it. Don't make sich a big thing of it. Take it easy like this," and with a quick, firm, workmanlike stroke the tradesman repeated the act successfully. Mr. Ramirez bought the knife. As the man wrapped it up in paper, he remarked with philosophic kindness – "I wouldn't try to do it agin this mornin'. It's early in the day, and I've noticed thet gents ez hez been runnin' free all night ain't apt to do theirselves justice next mornin'. Take it quietly alone by yourself, this artemnoon; don't think you're goin' to do anythin' big, and you'll fetch it, sure!"

When Mr. Ramirez was in the street again he looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock! Only one hour gone. He buttoned his coat tightly over the knife in his breast pocket, and started on again feverishly. Twelve o'clock found him rambling over the sand hills near the Mission Dolores. In one of the by-streets he came upon a woman looking so like the one that filled all his thoughts, that he turned to look at her again with a glance so full of malevolence that she turned from him in terror. This circumstance, his agitation, and the continual dryness of his lips sent him into a saloon, where he drank freely, without, however, increasing or abating his excitement. When he returned to the crowded streets again he walked quickly, imagining that his manner was noticed by others, in such intervals as he snatched from the contemplation of a single intention. There were several ways of doing it. One was to tax her with her deceit and then kill her in the tempest of his indignation. Another and a more favourable thought was to surprise her and her new accomplice – for Mr. Ramirez, after the manner of most jealous reasoners, never gave her credit for any higher motive than that she had shown to him – and kill them both. Another and a later idea was to spend the strength of his murderous passion upon the man, and then to enjoy her discomfiture, the failure of her plans, and perhaps her appeals for forgiveness. But it would still be two days before he could reach them. Perhaps they were already married. Perhaps they would be gone! In all this wild, passionate, and tumultuous contemplation of an effect, there never had been for a single moment in his mind the least doubt of the adequacy of the cause. That he was a *dupe*, – a hopeless, helpless dupe, – was sufficient. Since he had read the letter, his self-consciousness had centred upon a single thought, expressed to him in a single native word, "Bobo." It was continually before his eyes. He spelled it on the signs in the street. It kept up a dull monotonous echo in his ears. "Bobo." Ah! she should see!

It was past noon, and the fog had deepened. Afar from the bay came the sounds of bells and whistles. If the steamer should not go? If she should be delayed, as often happened, for several hours? He would go down to the wharf and inquire. In the meantime, let the devil seize the fog! Might the Holy St. Bartholomew damn for ever the cowardly dog of a captain and the coyote crew who would refuse to go! He came sharply enough down Commercial Street, and then, when

opposite the Arcade Saloon, with the instinct that leads desperate men into desperate places, he entered and glared vindictively around him. The immense room, bright with lights and glittering with gilding and mirrors, seemed quiet and grave in contrast with the busy thoroughfare without. It was still too early for the usual *habitués* of the place; only a few of the long gambling tables were occupied. There was only a single *monte* bank "open," and to this Ramirez bent his steps with the peculiar predilections of his race. It so chanced that Mr. Jack Hamlin was temporarily in charge of the interests of this bank, and was dealing in a listless, perfunctory manner. It may be parenthetically remarked that his own game was *faro*. His present position was one of pure friendliness to the absent dealer, who was taking his dinner above stairs. Ramirez flung a piece of gold on the table and lost. Again he attempted fortune and lost. He lost the third time. Then his pent-up feelings found vent in the characteristic "*Carámba!*" Mr. Jack Hamlin looked up. It was not the oath, it was not the expression of ill-humour, both of which were common enough in Mr. Hamlin's experience, but a certain distinguishing quality in the voice which awoke Jack's peculiarly retentive memory. He looked up, and, to borrow his own dialect, at once "spotted" the owner of the voice. He made no outward sign of his recognition, but quietly pursued the game. In the next deal Mr. Ramirez won! Mr. Hamlin quietly extended his *croupe* and raked down Mr. Ramirez's money with the losers'.

As Mr. Hamlin doubtless had fully expected, Mr. Ramirez rose with a passionate scream of rage. Whereat Mr. Hamlin coolly pushed back Mr. Ramirez's stake and winnings without looking up. Leaving it upon the table, Ramirez leaped to the gambler's side.

"You would insult me, so! You would ch – ee – at! eh? You would take my money, so!" he said, hoarsely, gesticulating passionately with one hand, while with the other he grasped as wildly in his breast.

Mr. Jack Hamlin turned a pair of dark eyes on the speaker, and said, quietly, "Sit down, Johnny!"

With the pent-up passion of the last few hours boiling in his blood, with the murderous intent of the morning still darkling in his mind, with the passionate sense of a new insult stinging him to madness, Mr. Ramirez should have struck the gambler to the earth. Possibly that was his intention as he crossed to his side; possibly that was his conviction as he heard himself — *he* — Victor Ramirez! whose presence in two days should strike terror to two hearts in One Horse Gulch! — addressed as Johnny! But he looked into the eyes of Mr. Hamlin and hesitated. What he saw there I cannot say. They were handsome eyes, clear and well opened, and had been considered by several members of a fond and confiding sex as peculiarly arch and tender. But, it must be confessed, Mr. Ramirez returned to his seat without doing anything.

"Ye don't know that man," said Mr. Hamlin to the two players nearest him, in a tone of the deepest confidence, which was, however, singularly enough, to be heard distinctly by every one at the table, including Ramirez. "You don't know him, but I do! He's a desprit character," continued Mr. Hamlin, glancing at him and quietly shuffling the cards, "a very desprit character! Make your game, gentlemen! Keeps a cattle ranch in Sonoma, and a private graveyard whar he buries his own dead. They call him the 'Yaller Hawk of Sonoma.' He's outer sorts jest now: probably jest killed some one up thar, and smells blood." Mr. Ramirez smiled a ghastly smile, and affected to examine the game minutely and critically as Mr. Hamlin paused to rake in the gold. "He's artful – is Johnny!" continued Mr. Hamlin, in the interval of shuffling, "artful and sly! Partikerly when he's after blood! See him sittin' thar and smilin'. He doesn't want to interrupt the game. He knows, gentlemen, thet in five minutes from now, Jim will be back here and I'll be free. Thet's what he's waitin' for! Thet's what's the matter with the 'Yaller Slaughterer of Sonoma!' Got his knife ready in his breast, too. Done up in brown paper to keep it clean. He's mighty pertikler 'bout his weppins is Johnny. Hez a knife for every new man." Ramirez rose with an attempt at jocularly, and pocketed his gains. Mr. Hamlin affected not to notice him until he was about to leave the table. "He's goin' to wait for me outside," he exclaimed. "In five minutes, Johnny," he called to Ramirez's retreating figure. "If

you can't wait, I'll expect to see you at the Marysville Hotel next week, Room No. 95, the next room, Johnny, the next room!"

The Mr. Ramirez who reached the busy thoroughfare again was so different from the Mr. Ramirez who twenty minutes before had entered the Arcade that his identity might have easily been doubted. He did not even breathe in the same way; his cheek, although haggard, had resumed its colour; his eyes, which hitherto had been fixed and contemplative, had returned to their usual restless vivacity. With the exception that at first he walked quickly on leaving the saloon, and once or twice hurriedly turned to see if anybody were following him, his manner was totally changed. And this without effusion of blood, or the indulgence of an insatiable desire for revenge! As I prefer to deal with Mr. Ramirez without affecting to know any more of that gentleman than he did himself, I am unable to explain any more clearly than he did to himself the reason for this change in his manner, or the utter subjection of his murderous passion. When it is remembered that for several hours he had had unlimited indulgence, without opposition, in his own instincts, but that for the last twenty minutes he had some reason to doubt their omnipotence, perhaps some explanation may be adduced. I only know that by half-past six Mr. Ramirez had settled in his mind that physical punishment of his enemies was not the most efficacious means of revenge, and that at half-past seven he had concluded *not* to take the Sacramento boat. And yet for the previous six hours I have reason to believe that Mr. Ramirez was as sincere a murderer as ever suffered the penalty of his act, or to whom circumstances had not offered a Mr. Hamlin to at upon a constitutional cowardice.

Mr. Ramirez proceeded leisurely down Montgomery Street until he came to Pacific Street. At the corner of the street his way was for a moment stopped by a rattling team and waggon that dashed off through the fog in the direction of the wharf. Mr. Ramirez recognised the express and mail for the Sacramento boat. But Mr. Ramirez did not know that the express contained a letter which ran as follows —

"Dear Madam, — Yours of the 10th received, and contents noted. Am willing to make our services contingent upon your success. We believe your present course will be quite as satisfactory as the plan you first proposed. Would advise you not to give a personal interview to Mr. Ramirez, but refer him to Mr. Gabriel Conroy. Mr. Ramirez's manner is such as to lead us to suppose that he might offer violence, unless withheld by the presence of a third party. — Yours respectfully,
"Peter Dumphy."

CHAPTER II. A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

The street into which Ramirez plunged at first sight appeared almost impassable, and but for a certain regularity in the parallels of irregular, oddly-built houses, its original intention as a thoroughfare might have been open to grave doubt. It was dirty, it was muddy, it was ill-lighted; it was rocky and precipitous in some places, and sandy and monotonous in others. The grade had been changed two or three times, and each time apparently for the worse, but always with a noble disregard for the dwellings, which were invariably treated as an accident in the original design, or as obstacles to be overcome at any hazard. The near result of this large intent was to isolate some houses completely, to render others utterly inaccessible except by scaling ladders, and to produce the general impression that they were begun at the top and built down. The remoter effect was to place the locality under a social ban, and work a kind of outlawry among the inhabitants. Several of the houses were originally occupied by the Spanish native Californians, who, with the conservative instincts of their race, still clung to their *casas* after the Americans had flown to pastures new and less rocky and inaccessible beyond. Their vacant places were again filled by other native Californians, through that social law which draws the members of an inferior and politically degraded race into gregarious solitude and isolation, and the locality became known as the Spanish Quarter. That they lived in houses utterly inconsistent with their habits and tastes, that they affected a locality utterly foreign to their inclinations or customs, was not the least pathetic and grotesque element to a contemplative observer.

Before, or rather beneath one of these structures, Mr. Ramirez stopped, and began the ascent of a long flight of wooden steps, that at last brought him to the foundations of the dwelling. Another equally long exterior staircase brought him at last to the verandah or gallery of the second story, the first being partly hidden by an embankment. Here Mr. Ramirez discovered another flight of narrower steps leading down to a platform before the front door. It was open. In the hall-way two or three dark-faced men were lounging, smoking *cigaritos*, and enjoying, in spite of the fog, the apparently unsociable *négligé* of shirt sleeves and no collars. At the open front windows of the parlour two or three women were sitting, clad in the lightest and whitest of flounced muslin skirts, with heavy shawls over their heads and shoulders, as if summer had stopped at their waists, like an equator.

The house was feebly lighted, or rather the gloom of yellowish-browened walls and dark furniture, from which all lustre and polish had been smoked, made it seem darker. Nearly every room and all the piazzas were dim with the yellow haze of burning *cigaritos*. There were light brown stains on the shirt sleeves of the men, there were yellowish streaks on the otherwise spotless skirts of the women; every masculine and feminine forefinger and thumb was steeped to its first joint with yellow. The fumes of burnt paper and tobacco permeated the whole house like some religious incense, through which occasionally struggled an inspiration of red peppers and garlic.

Two or three of the loungers addressed Ramirez in terms of grave recognition. One of the women – the stoutest – appeared at the doorway, holding her shawl tightly over her shoulders with one hand, as if to conceal a dangerous dishabille above the waist and playfully shaking a black fan at the young man with the other hand, applied to him the various epithets of "Ingrate," "Traitor," and "Judas," with great vivacity and volubility. Then she faced him coquettishly. "And after so long, whence now, thou little blackguard?"

"It is of business my heart and soul," exclaimed Ramirez, with hasty and somewhat perfunctory gallantry. "Who is above?" – "Those who testify."

"And Don Pedro?"

"He is there, and the Señor Perkins."

"Good. I will go on after a little," he nodded apologetically, as he hastily ascended the staircase. On the first landing above he paused, turned doubtfully toward the nearest door, and knocked hesitatingly. There was no response. Ramirez knocked again more sharply and decidedly. This resulted in a quick rattling of the lock, the sudden opening of the door, and the abrupt appearance of a man in ragged alpaca coat and frayed trousers. He stared fiercely at Ramirez, said in English, "What in h – ! next door!" and as abruptly slammed the door in Ramirez's face. Ramirez entered hastily the room indicated by the savage stranger, and was at once greeted by a dense cloud of smoke and the sound of welcoming voices.

Around a long table covered with quaint-looking legal papers, maps, and parchments, a half-dozen men were seated. The greater number were past the middle age, dark-featured and grizzle-haired, and one, whose wrinkled face was the colour and texture of red-wood bark, was bowed with decrepitude.

"He had one hundred and two years day before yesterday. He is the principal witness to Micheltorrena's signature in the Castro claim," exclaimed Don Pedro.

"Is he able to remember?" asked Ramirez.

"Who knows?" said Don Pedro, shrugging his shoulder. "He will swear; it is enough!"

"What animal have we in the next room?" asked Ramirez. "Is it wolf or bear?"

"The Señor Perkins," said Don Pedro.

"Why is he?"

"He translates."

Here Ramirez related, with some vehemence how he mistook the room, and the stranger's brusque salutation. The company listened attentively and even respectfully. An American audience would have laughed. The present company did not alter their serious demeanour; a breach of politeness to a stranger was a matter of grave importance even to these doubtful characters. Don Pedro explained —

"Ah, so it is believed that God has visited him here." He tapped his forehead. "He is not of their country fashion at all. He has punctuality, he has secrecy, he has the habitude. When strikes the clock three he is here; when it strikes nine he is gone. Six hours to work in that room! Ah, heavens! The quantity of work – it is astounding! Folios! Volumes! Good! it is done. Punctually at nine of the night he takes up a paper left on his desk by his *padrone*, in which is enwrapped ten dollars – the golden eagle, and he departs for that day. They tell to me that five dollars is gone at the gambling table, but no more! then five dollars for subsistence – always the same. Always! Always! He is a scholar – so profound, so admirable! He has the Spanish, the French, perfect. He is worth his weight in gold to the lawyers – you understand – but they cannot use him. To them he says – 'I translate, lies or what not! Who knows? I care not – but no more.' He is wonderful!"

The allusion to the gaming-table revived Victor's recollection, and his intention in his present visit. "Thou hast told me, Don Pedro," he said, lowering his voice in confidence, "how much is fashioned the testimony of the witnesses in regard of the old land grants by the Governors and Alcaldes. Good. Is it so?"

Don Pedro glanced around the room. "Of those that are here to-night five will swear as they are prepared by me – you comprehend – and there is a Governor, a Military Secretary, an Alcalde, a Comandante, and saints preserve us! an Archbishop! They are respectable *caballeros*; but they have been robbed, you comprehend, by the *Americanos*. What matters? They have been taught a lesson. They will get the best price for their memory. Eh? They will sell it where it pays best. Believe me, Victor; it is so."

"Good," said Victor. "Listen; if there was a man – a brigand, a devil – an American! – who had extorted from Pico a grant – you comprehend – a grant, formal, and regular, and recorded – accepted of the Land Commission – and some one, eh? – even myself, should say to you it is all wrong, my friend, my brother – ah!"

"From Pico?" asked Don Pedro.

"*Si*, from Pico, in '47," responded Victor, – "a grant."

Don Pedro rose, opened a secretary in the corner, and took out some badly-printed, yellowish blanks, with a seal in the right hand lower corner.

"Custom House paper from Monterey," explained Don Pedro, "blank with Governor Pico's signature and rubric. Comprehendest thou, Victor, my friend? A second grant is simple enough!"

Victor's eyes sparkled.

"But two for the same land, my brother?"

Don Pedro shrugged his shoulders, and rolled a fresh *cigarito*.

"There are two for nearly every grant of his late Excellency. Art thou certain, my brave friend, there are not *three* to this of which thou speakest? If there be but one – Holy Mother! it is nothing. Surely the land has no value. Where is this modest property? How many leagues square? Come, we will retire in this room, and thou mayest talk undisturbed. There is excellent *aguardiente* too, my Victor, come," and Don Pedro rose, conducted Victor into a smaller apartment, and closed the door.

Nearly an hour elapsed. During that interval the sound of Victor's voice, raised in passionate recital, might have been heard by the occupants of the larger room but that they were completely involved in their own smoky atmosphere, and were perhaps politely oblivious of the stranger's business. They chatted, compared notes, and examined legal documents with the excited and pleased curiosity of men to whom business and the present importance of its results was a novelty. At a few minutes before nine Don Pedro reappeared with Victor. I grieve to say that either from the reaction of the intense excitement of the morning, from the active sympathy of his friend, or from the equally soothing anodyne of *aguardiente*, he was somewhat incoherent, interjectional, and effusive. The effect of excessive stimulation on passionate natures like Victor's is to render them either maudlin or affectionate. Mr. Ramirez was both. He demanded with tears in his eyes to be led to the ladies. He would seek in the company of Manuela, the stout female before introduced to the reader, that sympathy which an injured, deceived, and confiding nature like his own so deeply craved.

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