BRET HARTE

THE TWINS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN, AND OTHER STORIES

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THE TWINS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN

CHAPTER I
A CLOUD ON THE MOUNTAIN

They lived on the verge of a vast stony level, upheaved so far above the surrounding country that its vague outlines, viewed from the nearest valley, seemed a mere cloud-streak resting upon the lesser hills. The rush and roar of the turbulent river that washed its eastern base were lost at that height; the winds that strove with the giant pines that half way climbed its flanks spent their fury below the summit; for, at variance with most meteorological speculation, an eternal calm seemed to invest this serene altitude. The few Alpine flowers seldom thrilled their petals to a passing breeze; rain and snow fell alike perpendicularly, heavily, and monotonously over the granite

bowlders scattered along its brown expanse. Although by actual measurement an inconsiderable elevation of the Sierran range, and a mere shoulder of the nearest white-faced peak that glimmered in the west, it seemed to lie so near the quiet, passionless stars, that at night it caught something of their calm remoteness.

The articulate utterance of such a locality should have been a whisper; a laugh or exclamation was discordant; and the ordinary tones of the human voice on the night of the 15th of May, 1868, had a grotesque incongruity.

In the thick darkness that clothed the mountain that night, the human figure would have been lost, or confounded with the outlines of outlying bowlders, which at such times took upon themselves the vague semblance of men and animals. Hence the voices in the following colloquy seemed the more grotesque and incongruous from being the apparent expression of an upright monolith, ten feet high, on the right, and another mass of granite, that, reclining, peeped over the verge.

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself!"

"You're late."

"I lost the trail, and climbed up the slide."

Here followed a stumble, the clatter of stones down the mountain-side, and an oath so very human and undignified that it at once relieved the bowlders of any complicity of expression. The voices, too, were close together now, and unexpectedly in

quite another locality.

"Anything up?"

"Looey Napoleon's declared war agin Germany."

"Sho-o-o!"

Notwithstanding this exclamation, the interest of the latter speaker was evidently only polite and perfunctory. What, indeed, were the political convulsions of the Old World to the dwellers on this serene, isolated eminence of the New?

"I reckon it's so," continued the first voice. "French Pete and that thar feller that keeps the Dutch grocery hev hed a row over it; emptied their six-shooters into each other. The Dutchman's got two balls in his leg, and the Frenchman's got an onnessary buttonhole in his shirt-buzzum, and hez caved in."

This concise, local corroboration of the conflict of remote nations, however confirmatory, did not appear to excite any further interest. Even the last speaker, now that he was in this calm, dispassionate atmosphere, seemed to lose his own concern in his tidings, and to have abandoned every thing of a sensational and lower-worldly character in the pines below. There were a few moments of absolute silence, and then another stumble. But now the voices of both speakers were quite patient and philosophical.

"Hold on, and I'll strike a light," said the second speaker. "I brought a lantern along, but I didn't light up. I kem out afore sundown, and you know how it allers is up yer. I didn't want it, and didn't keer to light up. I forgot you're always a little dazed and strange-like when you first come up."

There was a crackle, a flash, and presently a steady glow, which the surrounding darkness seemed to resent. The faces of the two men thus revealed were singularly alike. The same thin, narrow outline of jaw and temple; the same dark, grave eyes; the same brown growth of curly beard and mustache, which concealed the mouth, and hid what might have been any individual idiosyncrasy of thought or expression,—showed them to be brothers, or better known as the "Twins of Table Mountain." A certain animation in the face of the second speaker,—the first-comer,—a certain light in his eye, might have at first distinguished him; but even this faded out in the steady glow of the lantern, and had no value as a permanent distinction, for, by the time they had reached the western verge of the mountain, the two faces had settled into a homogeneous calmness and melancholy.

The vague horizon of darkness, that a few feet from the lantern still encompassed them, gave no indication of their progress, until their feet actually trod the rude planks and thatch that formed the roof of their habitation; for their cabin half burrowed in the mountain, and half clung, like a swallow's nest, to the side of the deep declivity that terminated the northern limit of the summit. Had it not been for the windlass of a shaft, a coil of rope, and a few heaps of stone and gravel, which were the only indications of human labor in that stony field, there was nothing to interrupt its monotonous dead level. And, when they descended a dozen well-worn steps to the door of their cabin,

they left the summit, as before, lonely, silent, motionless, its long level uninterrupted, basking in the cold light of the stars.

The simile of a "nest" as applied to the cabin of the brothers was no mere figure of speech as the light of the lantern first flashed upon it. The narrow ledge before the door was strewn with feathers. A suggestion that it might be the home and haunt of predatory birds was promptly checked by the spectacle of the nailed-up carcasses of a dozen hawks against the walls, and the outspread wings of an extended eagle emblazoning the gable above the door, like an armorial bearing. Within the cabin the walls and chimney-piece were dazzlingly bedecked with the party-colored wings of jays, yellow-birds, woodpeckers, kingfishers, and the poly-tinted wood-duck. Yet in that dry, highly-rarefied atmosphere, there was not the slightest suggestion of odor or decay.

The first speaker hung the lantern upon a hook that dangled from the rafters, and, going to the broad chimney, kicked the half-dead embers into a sudden resentful blaze. He then opened a rude cupboard, and, without looking around, called, "Ruth!"

The second speaker turned his head from the open doorway where he was leaning, as if listening to something in the darkness, and answered abstractedly,—

"Rand!"

"I don't believe you have touched grub to-day!"

Ruth grunted out some indifferent reply.

"Thar hezen't been a slice cut off that bacon since I left,"

continued Rand, bringing a side of bacon and some biscuits from the cupboard, and applying himself to the discussion of them at the table. "You're gettin' off yer feet, Ruth. What's up?"

Ruth replied by taking an uninvited seat beside him, and resting his chin on the palms of his hands. He did not eat, but simply transferred his inattention from the door to the table.

"You're workin' too many hours in the shaft," continued Rand. "You're always up to some such d—n fool business when I'm not yer."

"I dipped a little west to-day," Ruth went on, without heeding the brotherly remonstrance, "and struck quartz and pyrites."

"Thet's you!—allers dippin' west or east for quartz and the color, instead of keeping on plumb down to the 'cement'!"[1]

"We've been three years digging for cement," said Ruth, more in abstraction than in reproach,—"three years!"

"And we may be three years more,—may be only three days. Why, you couldn't be more impatient if—if—if you lived in a valley."

Delivering this tremendous comparison as an unanswerable climax, Rand applied himself once more to his repast. Ruth, after a moment's pause, without speaking or looking up, disengaged his hand from under his chin, and slid it along, palm uppermost, on the table beside his brother. Thereupon Rand slowly reached forward his left hand, the right being engaged in conveying victual to his mouth, and laid it on his brother's palm. The act

[1] The local name for gold-bearing alluvial drift,—the bed of a prehistoric river.

was evidently an habitual, half mechanical one; for in a few moments the hands were as gently disengaged, without comment or expression. At last Rand leaned back in his chair, laid down his knife and fork, and, complacently loosening the belt that held his revolver, threw it and the weapon on his bed. Taking out his pipe, and chipping some tobacco on the table, he said carelessly, "I came a piece through the woods with Mornie just now."

The face that Ruth turned upon his brother was very distinct in its expression at that moment, and quite belied the popular theory that the twins could not be told apart. "Thet gal," continued Rand, without looking up, "is either flighty, or—or suthin'," he added in vague disgust, pushing the table from him as if it were the lady in question. "Don't tell me!"

Ruth's eyes quickly sought his brother's, and were as quickly averted, as he asked hurriedly, "How?"

"What gets me," continued Rand in a petulant non sequitur, "is that YOU, my own twin-brother, never lets on about her comin' yer, permiskus like, when I ain't yer, and you and her gallivantin' and promanadin', and swoppin' sentiments and mottoes."

Ruth tried to contradict his blushing face with a laugh of worldly indifference.

"She came up yer on a sort of pasear."

"Oh, yes!—a short cut to the creek," interpolated Rand satirically.

"Last Tuesday or Wednesday," continued Ruth, with affected forgetfulness.

"Oh, in course, Tuesday, or Wednesday, or Thursday! You've so many folks climbing up this yer mountain to call on ye," continued the ironical Rand, "that you disremember; only you remembered enough not to tell me. SHE did. She took me for you, or pretended to."

The color dropped from Ruth's cheek.

"Took you for me?" he asked, with an awkward laugh.

"Yes," sneered Rand; "chirped and chattered away about OUR picnic, OUR nose-gays, and lord knows what! Said she'd keep them blue-jay's wings, and wear 'em in her hat. Spouted poetry, too,—the same sort o' rot you get off now and then."

Ruth laughed again, but rather ostentatiously and nervously.

"Ruth, look yer!"

Ruth faced his brother.

"What's your little game? Do you mean to say you don't know what thet gal is? Do you mean to say you don't know thet she's the laughing-stock of the Ferry; thet her father's a d–d old fool, and her mother's a drunkard and worse; thet she's got any right to be hanging round yer? You can't mean to marry her, even if you kalkilate to turn me out to do it, for she wouldn't live alone with ye up here. 'Tain't her kind. And if I thought you was thinking of—"

"What?" said Ruth, turning upon his brother quickly.

"Oh, thet's right! holler; swear and yell, and break things, do! Tear round!" continued Rand, kicking his boots off in a corner, "just because I ask you a civil question. That's brotherly," he

added, jerking his chair away against the side of the cabin, "ain't it?"

"She's not to blame because her mother drinks, and her father's a shyster," said Ruth earnestly and strongly. "The men who make her the laughing-stock of the Ferry tried to make her something worse, and failed, and take this sneak's revenge on her. 'Laughing-stock!' Yes, they knew she could turn the tables on them."

"Of course; go on! She's better than me. I know I'm a fratricide, that's what I am," said Rand, throwing himself on the upper of the two berths that formed the bedstead of the cabin.

"I've seen her three times," continued Ruth.

"And you've known me twenty years," interrupted his brother.

Ruth turned on his heel, and walked towards the door.

"That's right; go on! Why don't you get the chalk?"

Ruth made no reply. Rand descended from the bed, and, taking a piece of chalk from the shelf, drew a line on the floor, dividing the cabin in two equal parts.

"You can have the east half," he said, as he climbed slowly back into bed.

This mysterious rite was the usual termination of a quarrel between the twins. Each man kept his half of the cabin until the feud was forgotten. It was the mark of silence and separation, over which no words of recrimination, argument, or even explanation, were delivered, until it was effaced by one or the other. This was considered equivalent to apology or

reconciliation, which each were equally bound in honor to accept.

It may be remarked that the floor was much whiter at this line of demarcation, and under the fresh chalk-line appeared the faint evidences of one recently effaced.

Without apparently heeding this potential ceremony, Ruth remained leaning against the doorway, looking upon the night, the bulk of whose profundity and blackness seemed to be gathered below him. The vault above was serene and tranquil, with a few large far-spaced stars; the abyss beneath, untroubled by sight or sound. Stepping out upon the ledge, he leaned far over the shelf that sustained their cabin, and listened. A faint rhythmical roll, rising and falling in long undulations against the invisible horizon, to his accustomed ears told him the wind was blowing among the pines in the valley. Yet, mingling with this familiar sound, his ear, now morbidly acute, seemed to detect a stranger inarticulate murmur, as of confused and excited voices, swelling up from the mysterious depths to the stars above, and again swallowed up in the gulfs of silence below. He was roused from a consideration of this phenomenon by a faint glow towards the east, which at last brightened, until the dark outline of the distant walls of the valley stood out against the sky. Were his other senses participating in the delusion of his ears? for with the brightening light came the faint odor of burning timber.

His face grew anxious as he gazed. At last he rose, and re-entered the cabin. His eyes fell upon the faint chalk-mark, and, taking his soft felt hat from his head, with a few practical sweeps

of the brim he brushed away the ominous record of their late estrangement. Going to the bed whereon Rand lay stretched, open-eyed, he would have laid his hand upon his arm lightly; but the brother's fingers sought and clasped his own. "Get up," he said quietly; "there's a strange fire in the Canyon head that I can't make out."

Rand slowly clambered from his shelf, and hand in hand the brothers stood upon the ledge. "It's a right smart chance beyond the Ferry, and a piece beyond the Mill, too," said Rand, shading his eyes with his hand, from force of habit. "It's in the woods where—" He would have added where he met Mornie; but it was a point of honor with the twins, after reconciliation, not to allude to any topic of their recent disagreement.

Ruth dropped his brother's hand. "It doesn't smell like the woods," he said slowly.

"Smell!" repeated Rand incredulously. "Why, it's twenty miles in a bee-line yonder. Smell, indeed!"

Ruth was silent, but presently fell to listening again with his former abstraction. "You don't hear anything, do you?" he asked after a pause.

"It's blowin' in the pines on the river," said Rand shortly.

"You don't hear anything else?"

"No."

"Nothing like—like—like—"

Rand, who had been listening with an intensity that distorted the left side of his face, interrupted him impatiently.

"Like what?"

"Like a woman sobbin'?"

"Ruth," said Rand, suddenly looking up in his brother's face, "what's gone of you?"

Ruth laughed. "The fire's out," he said, abruptly re-entering the cabin. "I'm goin' to turn in."

Rand, following his brother half reproachfully, saw him divest himself of his clothing, and roll himself in the blankets of his bed.

"Good-night, Randy!"

Rand hesitated. He would have liked to ask his brother another question; but there was clearly nothing to be done but follow his example.

"Good-night, Ruthy!" he said, and put out the light. As he did so, the glow in the eastern horizon faded, too, and darkness seemed to well up from the depths below, and, flowing in the open door, wrapped them in deeper slumber.

CHAPTER II
THE CLOUDS GATHER

Twelve months had elapsed since the quarrel and reconciliation, during which interval no reference was made by either of the brothers to the cause which had provoked it. Rand was at work in the shaft, Ruth having that morning undertaken the replenishment of the larder with game from the wooded skirt of the mountain. Rand had taken advantage of his brother's absence to "prospect" in the "drift,"—a proceeding utterly at variance with his previous condemnation of all such speculative essay; but Rand, despite his assumption of a superior practical nature, was not above certain local superstitions. Having that morning put on his gray flannel shirt wrong side out,—an abstraction recognized among the miners as the sure forerunner of divination and treasure-discovery,—he could not forego that opportunity of trying his luck, without hazarding a dangerous example. He was also conscious of feeling "chipper,"—another local expression for buoyancy of spirit, not common to men who work fifty feet below the surface, without the stimulus of air and sunshine, and not to be overlooked as an important factor in fortunate adventure. Nevertheless, noon came without the discovery of any treasure. He had attacked the walls on either side of the lateral "drift" skilfully, so as to expose their quality without destroying their cohesive integrity, but had found nothing. Once

or twice, returning to the shaft for rest and air, its grim silence had seemed to him pervaded with some vague echo of cheerful holiday voices above. This set him to thinking of his brother's equally extravagant fancy of the wailing voices in the air on the night of the fire, and of his attributing it to a lover's abstraction.

"I laid it to his being struck after that gal; and yet," Rand continued to himself, "here's me, who haven't been foolin' round no gal, and dog my skin if I didn't think I heard one singin' up thar!" He put his foot on the lower round of the ladder, paused, and slowly ascended a dozen steps. Here he paused again. All at once the whole shaft was filled with the musical vibrations of a woman's song. Seizing the rope that hung idly from the windlass, he half climbed, half swung himself, to the surface.

The voice was there; but the sudden transition to the dazzling level before him at first blinded his eyes, so that he took in only by degrees the unwonted spectacle of the singer,—a pretty girl, standing on tiptoe on a bowlder not a dozen yards from him, utterly absorbed in tying a gayly-striped neckerchief, evidently taken from her own plump throat, to the halliards of a freshly-cut hickory-pole newly reared as a flag-staff beside her. The hickory-pole, the halliards, the fluttering scarf, the young lady herself, were all glaring innovations on the familiar landscape; but Rand, with his hand still on the rope, silently and demurely enjoyed it.

For the better understanding of the general reader, who does not live on an isolated mountain, it may be observed that the young lady's position on the rock exhibited some study of POSE,

and a certain exaggeration of attitude, that betrayed the habit of an audience; also that her voice had an artificial accent that was not wholly unconscious, even in this lofty solitude. Yet the very next moment, when she turned, and caught Rand's eye fixed upon her, she started naturally, colored slightly, uttered that feminine adjuration, "Good Lord! gracious! goodness me!" which is seldom used in reference to its effect upon the hearer, and skipped instantly from the bowlder to the ground. Here, however, she alighted in a POSE, brought the right heel of her neatly-fitting left boot closely into the hollowed side of her right instep, at the same moment deftly caught her flying skirt, whipped it around her ankles, and, slightly raising it behind, permitted the chaste display of an inch or two of frilled white petticoat. The most irreverent critic of the sex will, I think, admit that it has some movements that are automatic.

"Hope I didn't disturb ye," said Rand, pointing to the flag-staff.

The young lady slightly turned her head. "No," she said; "but I didn't know anybody was here, of course. Our PARTY"—she emphasized the word, and accompanied it with a look toward the further extremity of the plateau, to show she was not alone —"our party climbed this ridge, and put up this pole as a sign to show they did it." The ridiculous self-complacency of this record in the face of a man who was evidently a dweller on the mountain apparently struck her for the first time. "We didn't know," she stammered, looking at the shaft from which Rand

had emerged, "that—that—" She stopped, and, glancing again towards the distant range where her friends had disappeared, began to edge away.

"They can't be far off," interposed Rand quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for the lady to be there. "Table Mountain ain't as big as all that. Don't you be scared! So you thought nobody lived up here?"

She turned upon him a pair of honest hazel eyes, which not only contradicted the somewhat meretricious smartness of her dress, but was utterly inconsistent with the palpable artificial color of her hair,—an obvious imitation of a certain popular fashion then known in artistic circles as the "British Blonde,"—and began to ostentatiously resume a pair of lemon-colored kid gloves. Having, as it were, thus indicated her standing and respectability, and put an immeasurable distance between herself and her bold interlocutor, she said impressively, "We evidently made a mistake: I will rejoin our party, who will, of course, apologize."

"What's your hurry?" said the imperturbable Rand, disengaging himself from the rope, and walking towards her. "As long as you're up here, you might stop a spell."

"I have no wish to intrude; that is, our party certainly has not," continued the young lady, pulling the tight gloves, and smoothing the plump, almost bursting fingers, with an affectation of fashionable ease.

"Oh! I haven't any thing to do just now," said Rand, "and it's

about grub time, I reckon. Yes, I live here, Ruth and me,—right here."

The young woman glanced at the shaft.

"No, not down there," said Rand, following her eye, with a laugh. "Come here, and I'll show you."

A strong desire to keep up an appearance of genteel reserve, and an equally strong inclination to enjoy the adventurous company of this good-looking, hearty young fellow, made her hesitate. Perhaps she regretted having undertaken a role of such dignity at the beginning: she could have been so perfectly natural with this perfectly natural man, whereas any relaxation now might increase his familiarity. And yet she was not without a vague suspicion that her dignity and her gloves were alike thrown away on him,—a fact made the more evident when Rand stepped to her side, and, without any apparent consciousness of disrespect or gallantry, laid his large hand, half persuasively, half fraternally, upon her shoulder, and said, "Oh, come along, do!"

The simple act either exceeded the limits of her forbearance, or decided the course of her subsequent behavior. She instantly stepped back a single pace, and drew her left foot slowly and deliberately after her; then she fixed her eyes and uplifted eyebrows upon the daring hand, and, taking it by the ends of her thumb and forefinger, lifted it, and dropped it in mid-air. She then folded her arms. It was the indignant gesture with which "Alice," the Pride of Dumballin Village, received the loathsome advances of the bloated aristocrat, Sir Parkyns Parkyn, and had

at Marysville, a few nights before, brought down the house.

This effect was, I think, however, lost upon Rand. The slight color that rose to his cheek as he looked down upon his clay-soiled hands was due to the belief that he had really contaminated her outward superfine person. But his color quickly passed: his frank, boyish smile returned, as he said, "It'll rub off. Lord, don't mind that! Thar, now—come on!"

The young woman bit her lip. Then nature triumphed; and she laughed, although a little scornfully. And then Providence assisted her with the sudden presentation of two figures, a man and woman, slowly climbing up over the mountain verge, not far from them. With a cry of "There's Sol, now!" she forgot her dignity and her confusion, and ran towards them.

Rand stood looking after her neat figure, less concerned in the advent of the strangers than in her sudden caprice. He was not so young and inexperienced but that he noted certain ambiguities in her dress and manner: he was by no means impressed by her dignity. But he could not help watching her as she appeared to be volubly recounting her late interview to her companions; and, still unconscious of any impropriety or obtrusiveness, he lounged down lazily towards her. Her humor had evidently changed; for she turned an honest, pleased face upon him, as she girlishly attempted to drag the strangers forward.

The man was plump and short; unlike the natives of the locality, he was closely cropped and shaven, as if to keep down the strong blue-blackness of his beard and hair, which

nevertheless asserted itself over his round cheeks and upper lip like a tattooing of Indian ink. The woman at his side was reserved and indistinctive, with that appearance of being an unenthusiastic family servant peculiar to some men's wives. When Rand was within a few feet of him, he started, struck a theatrical attitude, and, shading his eyes with his hand, cried, "What, do me eyes deceive me!" burst into a hearty laugh, darted forward, seized Rand's hand, and shook it briskly.

"Pinkney, Pinkney, my boy! how are you? And this is your little 'prop'? your quarter-section, your country-seat, that we've been trespassing on, eh? A nice little spot, cool, sequestered, remote,—a trifle unimproved; carriage-road as yet unfinished. Ha, ha! But to think of our making a discovery of this inaccessible mountain, climbing it, sir, for two mortal hours, christening it 'Sol's Peak,' getting up a flag-pole, unfurling our standard to the breeze, sir, and then, by Gad, winding up by finding Pinkney, the festive Pinkney, living on it at home!"

Completely surprised, but still perfectly good-humored, Rand shook the stranger's right hand warmly, and received on his broad shoulders a welcoming thwack from the left, without question. "She don't mind her friends making free with ME evidently," said Rand to himself, as he tried to suggest that fact to the young lady in a meaning glance.

The stranger noted his glance, and suddenly passed his hand thoughtfully over his shaven cheeks. "No," he said—"yes, surely, I forget—yes, I see; of course you don't! Rosy," turning to his

wife, “of course Pinkney doesn’t know Phemie, eh?”

“No, nor ME either, Sol,” said that lady warningly.

“Certainly!” continued Sol. “It’s his misfortune. You weren’t with me at Gold Hill.—Allow me,” he said, turning to Rand, “to present Mrs. Sol Saunders, wife of the undersigned, and Miss Euphemia Neville, otherwise known as the ‘Marysville Pet,’ the best variety actress known on the provincial boards. Played Ophelia at Marysville, Friday; domestic drama at Gold Hill, Saturday; Sunday night, four songs in character, different dress each time, and a clog-dance. The best clog-dance on the Pacific Slope,” he added in a stage aside. “The minstrels are crazy to get her in ‘Frisco. But money can’t buy her—prefers the legitimate drama to this sort of thing.” Here he took a few steps of a jig, to which the “Marysville Pet” beat time with her feet, and concluded with a laugh and a wink—the combined expression of an artist’s admiration for her ability, and a man of the world’s scepticism of feminine ambition.

Miss Euphemia responded to the formal introduction by extending her hand frankly with a re-assuring smile to Rand, and an utter obliviousness of her former hauteur. Rand shook it warmly, and then dropped carelessly on a rock beside them.

“And you never told me you lived up here in the attic, you rascal!” continued Sol with a laugh.

“No,” replied Rand simply. “How could I? I never saw you before, that I remember.”

Miss Euphemia stared at Sol. Mrs. Sol looked up in her lord’s

face, and folded her arms in a resigned expression. Sol rose to his feet again, and shaded his eyes with his hand, but this time quite seriously, and gazed at Rand's smiling face.

"Good Lord! Do you mean to say your name isn't Pinkney?" he asked, with a half embarrassed laugh.

"It IS Pinkney," said Rand; "but I never met you before."

"Didn't you come to see a young lady that joined my troupe at Gold Hill last month, and say you'd meet me at Keeler's Ferry in a day or two?"

"No-o-o," said Rand, with a good-humored laugh. "I haven't left this mountain for two months."

He might have added more; but his attention was directed to Miss Euphemia, who during this short dialogue, having stuffed alternately her handkerchief, the corner of her mantle, and her gloves, into her mouth, restrained herself no longer, but gave way to an uncontrollable fit of laughter. "O Sol!" she gasped explanatorily, as she threw herself alternately against him, Mrs. Sol, and a bowlder, "you'll kill me yet! O Lord! first we take possession of this man's property, then we claim HIM." The contemplation of this humorous climax affected her so that she was fain at last to walk away, and confide the rest of her speech to space.

Sol joined in the laugh until his wife plucked his sleeve, and whispered something in his ear. In an instant his face became at once mysterious and demure. "I owe you an apology," he said, turning to Rand, but in a voice ostentatiously pitched high enough

for Miss Euphemia to overhear: "I see I have made a mistake. A resemblance—only a mere resemblance, as I look at you now—led me astray. Of course you don't know any young lady in the profession?"

"Of course he doesn't, Sol," said Miss Euphemia. "I could have told you that. He didn't even know ME!"

The voice and mock-heroic attitude of the speaker was enough to relieve the general embarrassment with a laugh. Rand, now pleasantly conscious of only Miss Euphemia's presence, again offered the hospitality of his cabin, with the polite recognition of her friends in the sentence, "and you might as well come along too."

"But won't we incommode the lady of the house?" said Mrs. Sol politely.

"What lady of the house"? said Rand almost angrily.

"Why, Ruth, you know!"

It was Rand's turn to become hilarious. "Ruth," he said, "is short for Rutherford, my brother." His laugh, however, was echoed only by Euphemia.

"Then you have a brother?" said Mrs. Sol benignly.

"Yes," said Rand: "he will be here soon." A sudden thought dropped the color from his cheek. "Look here," he said, turning impulsively upon Sol. "I have a brother, a twin-brother. It couldn't be HIM—"

Sol was conscious of a significant feminine pressure on his right arm. He was equal to the emergency. "I think not," he said

dubiously, "unless your brother's hair is much darker than yours. Yes! now I look at you, yours is brown. He has a mole on his right cheek hasn't he?"

The red came quickly back to Rand's boyish face. He laughed. "No, sir: my brother's hair is, if any thing, a shade lighter than mine, and nary mole. Come along!"

And leading the way, Rand disclosed the narrow steps winding down to the shelf on which the cabin hung. "Be careful," said Rand, taking the now unresisting hand of the "Marysville Pet" as they descended: "a step that way, and down you go two thousand feet on the top of a pine-tree."

But the girl's slight cry of alarm was presently changed to one of unaffected pleasure as they stood on the rocky platform. "It isn't a house: it's a NEST, and the loveliest!" said Euphemia breathlessly.

"It's a scene, a perfect scene, sir!" said Sol, enraptured. "I shall take the liberty of bringing my scene-painter to sketch it some day. It would do for 'The Mountaineer's Bride' superbly, or," continued the little man, warming through the blue-black border of his face with professional enthusiasm, "it's enough to make a play itself. 'The Cot on the Crags.' Last scene—moonlight—the struggle on the ledge! The Lady of the Crags throws herself from the beetling heights!—A shriek from the depths—a woman's wail!"

"Dry up!" sharply interrupted Rand, to whom this speech recalled his brother's half-forgotten strangeness. "Look at the

prospect."

In the full noon of a cloudless day, beneath them a tumultuous sea of pines surged, heaved, rode in giant crests, stretched and lost itself in the ghostly, snow-peaked horizon. The thronging woods choked every defile, swept every crest, filled every valley with its dark-green tilting spears, and left only Table Mountain sunlit and bare. Here and there were profound olive depths, over which the gray hawk hung lazily, and into which blue jays dipped. A faint, dull yellowish streak marked an occasional watercourse; a deeper reddish ribbon, the mountain road and its overhanging murky cloud of dust.

"Is it quite safe here?" asked Mrs. Sol, eying the little cabin. "I mean from storms?"

"It never blows up here," replied Rand, "and nothing happens."

"It must be lovely," said Euphemia, clasping her hands.

"It IS that," said Rand proudly. "It's four years since Ruth and I took up this yer claim, and raised this shanty. In that four years we haven't left it alone a night, or cared to. It's only big enough for two, and them two must be brothers. It wouldn't do for mere pardners to live here alone,—they couldn't do it. It wouldn't be exactly the thing for man and wife to shut themselves up here alone. But Ruth and me know each other's ways, and here we'll stay until we've made a pile. We sometimes—one of us—takes a pasear to the Ferry to buy provisions; but we're glad to crawl up to the back of old 'Table' at night."

"You're quite out of the world here, then?" suggested Mrs. Sol.

"That's it, just it! We're out of the world,—out of rows, out of liquor, out of cards, out of bad company, out of temptation. Cussedness and foolishness hez got to follow us up here to find us, and there's too many ready to climb down to them things to tempt 'em to come up to us."

There was a little boyish conceit in his tone, as he stood there, not altogether unbecoming his fresh color and simplicity. Yet, when his eyes met those of Miss Euphemia, he colored, he hardly knew why, and the young lady herself blushed rosily.

When the neat cabin, with its decorated walls, and squirrel and wild-cat skins, was duly admired, the luncheon-basket of the Saunders party was re-enforced by provisions from Rand's larder, and spread upon the ledge; the dimensions of the cabin not admitting four. Under the potent influence of a bottle, Sol became hilarious and professional. The "Pet" was induced to favor the company with a recitation, and, under the plea of teaching Rand, to perform the clog-dance with both gentlemen. Then there was an interval, in which Rand and Euphemia wandered a little way down the mountain-side to gather laurel, leaving Mr. Sol to his siesta on a rock, and Mrs. Sol to take some knitting from the basket, and sit beside him.

When Rand and his companion had disappeared, Mrs. Sol nudged her sleeping partner. "Do you think that WAS the brother?"

Sol yawned. "Sure of it. They're as like as two peas, in looks."

"Why didn't you tell him so, then?"

"Will you tell me, my dear, why you stopped me when I began?"

"Because something was said about Ruth being here; and I supposed Ruth was a woman, and perhaps Pinkney's wife, and knew you'd be putting your foot in it by talking of that other woman. I supposed it was for fear of that he denied knowing you."

"Well, when HE—this Rand—told me he had a twin-brother, he looked so frightened that I knew he knew nothing of his brother's doings with that woman, and I threw him off the scent. He's a good fellow, but awfully green, and I didn't want to worry him with tales. I like him, and I think Phemie does too."

"Nonsense! He's a conceited prig! Did you hear his sermon on the world and its temptations? I wonder if he thought temptation had come up to him in the person of us professionals out on a picnic. I think it was positively rude."

"My dear woman, you're always seeing slights and insults. I tell you he's taken a shine to Phemie; and he's as good as four seats and a bouquet to that child next Wednesday evening, to say nothing of the eclat of getting this St. Simeon—what do you call him?—Stalactites?"

"Stylites," suggested Mrs. Sol.

"Stylites, off from his pillar here. I'll have a paragraph in the paper, that the hermit crabs of Table Mountain—"

"Don't be a fool, Sol!"

"The hermit twins of Table Mountain bespoke the chaste performance."

"One of them being the protector of the well-known Mornie Nixon," responded Mrs. Sol, viciously accenting the name with her knitting-needles.

"Rosy, you're unjust. You're prejudiced by the reports of the town. Mr. Pinkney's interest in her may be a purely artistic one, although mistaken. She'll never make a good variety-actress: she's too heavy. And the boys don't give her a fair show. No woman can make a debut in my version of 'Somnambula,' and have the front row in the pit say to her in the sleepwalking scene, 'You're out rather late, Mornie. Kinder forgot to put on your things, didn't you? Mother sick, I suppose, and you're goin' for more gin? Hurry along, or you'll ketch it when ye get home.' Why, you couldn't do it yourself, Rosy!"

To which Mrs. Sol's illogical climax was, that, "bad as Rutherford might be, this Sunday-school superintendent, Rand, was worse."

Rand and his companion returned late, but in high spirits. There was an unnecessary effusiveness in the way in which Euphemia kissed Mrs. Sol,—the one woman present, who UNDERSTOOD, and was to be propitiated,—which did not tend to increase Mrs. Sol's good humor. She had her basket packed all ready for departure; and even the earnest solicitation of Rand, that they would defer their going until sunset, produced no effect.

"Mr. Rand—Mr. Pinkney, I mean—says the sunsets here are so lovely," pleaded Euphemia.

"There is a rehearsal at seven o'clock, and we have no time to lose," said Mrs. Sol significantly.

"I forgot to say," said the "Marysville Pet" timidly, glancing at Mrs. Sol, "that Mr. Rand says he will bring his brother on Wednesday night, and wants four seats in front, so as not to be crowded."

Sol shook the young man's hand warmly. "You'll not regret it, sir: it's a surprising, a remarkable performance."

"I'd like to go a piece down the mountain with you," said Rand, with evident sincerity, looking at Miss Euphemia; "but Ruth isn't here yet, and we make a rule never to leave the place alone. I'll show you the slide: it's the quickest way to go down. If you meet any one who looks like me, and talks like me, call him 'Ruth,' and tell him I'm waitin' for him yer."

Miss Phemia, the last to go, standing on the verge of the declivity, here remarked, with a dangerous smile, that, if she met any one who bore that resemblance, she might be tempted to keep him with her,—a playfulness that brought the ready color to Rand's cheek. When she added to this the greater audacity of kissing her hand to him, the young hermit actually turned away in sheer embarrassment. When he looked around again, she was gone, and for the first time in his experience the mountain seemed barren and lonely.

The too sympathetic reader who would rashly deduce from

this any newly awakened sentiment in the virgin heart of Rand would quite misapprehend that peculiar young man. That singular mixture of boyish inexperience and mature doubt and disbelief, which was partly the result of his temperament, and partly of his cloistered life on the mountain, made him regard his late companions, now that they were gone, and his intimacy with them, with remorseful distrust. The mountain was barren and lonely, because it was no longer HIS. It had become a part of the great world, which four years ago he and his brother had put aside, and in which, as two self-devoted men, they walked alone. More than that, he believed he had acquired some understanding of the temptations that assailed his brother, and the poor little vanities of the "Marysville Pet" were transformed into the blandishments of a Circe. Rand, who would have succumbed to a wicked, superior woman, believed he was a saint in withstanding the foolish weakness of a simple one.

He did not resume his work that day. He paced the mountain, anxiously awaiting his brother's return, and eager to relate his experiences. He would go with him to the dramatic entertainment; from his example and wisdom, Ruth should learn how easily temptation might be overcome. But, first of all, there should be the fullest exchange of confidences and explanations. The old rule should be rescinded for once, the old discussion in regard to Mornie re-opened, and Rand, having convinced his brother of error, would generously extend his forgiveness.

The sun sank redly. Lingering long upon the ledge before their

cabin, it at last slipped away almost imperceptibly, leaving Rand still wrapped in revery. Darkness, the smoke of distant fires in the woods, and the faint evening incense of the pines, crept slowly up; but Ruth came not. The moon rose, a silver gleam on the farther ridge; and Rand, becoming uneasy at his brother's prolonged absence, resolved to break another custom, and leave the summit, to seek him on the trail. He buckled on his revolvers, seized his gun, when a cry from the depths arrested him. He leaned over the ledge, and listened. Again the cry arose, and this time more distinctly. He held his breath: the blood settled around his heart in superstitious terror. It was the wailing voice of a woman.

"Ruth, Ruth! for God's sake come and help me!"

The blood flew back hotly to Rand's cheek. It was Mornie's voice. By leaning over the ledge, he could distinguish something moving along the almost precipitous face of the cliff, where an abandoned trail, long since broken off and disrupted by the fall of a portion of the ledge, stopped abruptly a hundred feet below him. Rand knew the trail, a dangerous one always: in its present condition a single mis-step would be fatal. Would she make that mis-step? He shook off a horrible temptation that seemed to be sealing his lips, and paralyzing his limbs, and almost screamed to her, "Drop on your face, hang on to the chaparral, and don't move!"

In another instant, with a coil of rope around his arm, he was dashing down the almost perpendicular "slide." When he had nearly reached the level of the abandoned trail, he fastened one

end of the rope to a jutting splinter of granite, and began to "lay out," and work his way laterally along the face of the mountain. Presently he struck the regular trail at the point from which the woman must have diverged.

"It is Rand," she said, without lifting her head.

"It is," replied Rand coldly. "Pass the rope under your arms, and I'll get you back to the trail."

"Where is Ruth?" she demanded again, without moving. She was trembling, but with excitement rather than fear.

"I don't know," returned Rand impatiently. "Come! the ledge is already crumbling beneath our feet."

"Let it crumble!" said the woman passionately.

Rand surveyed her with profound disgust, then passed the rope around her waist, and half lifted, half swung her from her feet. In a few moments she began to mechanically help herself, and permitted him to guide her to a place of safety. That reached, she sank down again.

The rising moon shone full upon her face and figure. Through his growing indignation Rand was still impressed and even startled with the change the few last months had wrought upon her. In place of the silly, fanciful, half-hysterical hoyden whom he had known, a matured woman, strong in passionate self-will, fascinating in a kind of wild, savage beauty, looked up at him as if to read his very soul.

"What are you staring at?" she said finally. "Why don't you help me on?"

"Where do you want to go?" said Rand quietly.

"Where! Up there!"—she pointed savagely to the top of the mountain,—"to HIM! Where else should I go?" she said, with a bitter laugh.

"I've told you he wasn't there," said Rand roughly. "He hasn't returned."

"I'll wait for him—do you hear?—wait for him; stay there till he comes. If you won't help me, I'll go alone."

She made a step forward but faltered, staggered, and was obliged to lean against the mountain for support. Stains of travel were on her dress; lines of fatigue and pain, and traces of burning passionate tears, were on her face; her black hair flowed from beneath her gaudy bonnet; and, shamed out of his brutality, Rand placed his strong arm round her waist, and half carrying, half supporting her, began the ascent. Her head dropped wearily on his shoulder; her arm encircled his neck; her hair, as if caressingly, lay across his breast and hands; her grateful eyes were close to his; her breath was upon his cheek: and yet his only consciousness was of the possibly ludicrous figure he might present to his brother, should he meet him with Mornie Nixon in his arms. Not a word was spoken by either till they reached the summit. Relieved at finding his brother still absent, he turned not unkindly toward the helpless figure on his arm. "I don't see what makes Ruth so late," he said. "He's always here by sundown. Perhaps—"

"Perhaps he knows I'm here," said Mornie, with a bitter laugh.

"I didn't say that," said Rand, "and I don't think it. What I meant was, he might have met a party that was picnicking here to-day,—Sol. Saunders and wife, and Miss Euphemia—"

Mornie flung his arm away from her with a passionate gesture. "THEY here!—picnicking HERE!—those people HERE!"

"Yes," said Rand, unconsciously a little ashamed. "They came here accidentally."

Mornie's quick passion had subsided: she had sunk again wearily and helplessly on a rock beside him. "I suppose," she said, with a weak laugh—"I suppose, they talked of ME. I suppose they told you how, with their lies and fair promises, they tricked me out, and set me before an audience of brutes and laughing hyenas to make merry over. Did they tell you of the insults that I received?—how the sins of my parents were flung at me instead of bouquets? Did they tell you they could have spared me this, but they wanted the few extra dollars taken in at the door? No!"

"They said nothing of the kind," replied Rand surlily.

"Then you must have stopped them. You were horrified enough to know that I had dared to take the only honest way left me to make a living. I know you, Randolph Pinkney! You'd rather see Joaquin Muriatta, the Mexican bandit, standing before you to-night with a revolver, than the helpless, shamed, miserable Mornie Nixon. And you can't help yourself, unless you throw me over the cliff. Perhaps you'd better," she said, with a bitter laugh that faded from her lips as she leaned, pale and breathless, against the bowlder.

"Ruth will tell you—" began Rand.

"D—n Ruth!"

Rand turned away.

"Stop!" she said suddenly, staggering to her feet. "I'm sick—for all I know, dying. God grant that it may be so! But, if you are a man, you will help me to your cabin—to some place where I can lie down NOW, and be at rest. I'm very, very tired."

She paused. She would have fallen again; but Rand, seeing more in her face than her voice interpreted to his sullen ears, took her sullenly in his arms, and carried her to the cabin. Her eyes glanced around the bright party-colored walls, and a faint smile came to her lips as she put aside her bonnet, adorned with a companion pinion of the bright wings that covered it.

"Which is Ruth's bed?" she asked.

Rand pointed to it.

"Lay me there!"

Rand would have hesitated, but, with another look at her face, complied.

She lay quite still a moment. Presently she said, "Give me some brandy or whiskey!"

Rand was silent and confused.

"I forgot," she added half bitterly. "I know you have not that commonest and cheapest of vices."

She lay quite still again. Suddenly she raised herself partly on her elbow, and in a strong, firm voice, said, "Rand!"

"Yes, Mornie."

"If you are wise and practical, as you assume to be, you will do what I ask you without a question. If you do it AT ONCE, you may save yourself and Ruth some trouble, some mortification, and perhaps some remorse and sorrow. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Go to the nearest doctor, and bring him here with you."

"But YOU!"

Her voice was strong, confident, steady, and patient. "You can safely leave me until then."

In another moment Rand was plunging down the "slide." But it was past midnight when he struggled over the last bowlder up the ascent, dragging the half-exhausted medical wisdom of Brown's Ferry on his arm.

"I've been gone long, doctor," said Rand feverishly, "and she looked SO death-like when I left. If we should be too late!"

The doctor stopped suddenly, lifted his head, and pricked his ears like a hound on a peculiar scent. "We ARE too late," he said, with a slight professional laugh.

Indignant and horrified, Rand turned upon him.

"Listen," said the doctor, lifting his hand.

Rand listened, so intently that he heard the familiar moan of the river below; but the great stony field lay silent before him. And then, borne across its bare barren bosom, like its own articulation, came faintly the feeble wail of a new-born babe.

III. STORM.

The doctor hurried ahead in the darkness. Rand, who had

stopped paralyzed at the ominous sound, started forward again mechanically; but as the cry arose again more distinctly, and the full significance of the doctor's words came to him, he faltered, stopped, and, with cheeks burning with shame and helpless indignation, sank upon a stone beside the shaft, and, burying his face in his hands, fairly gave way to a burst of boyish tears. Yet even then the recollection that he had not cried since, years ago, his mother's dying hands had joined his and Ruth's childish fingers together, stung him fiercely, and dried his tears in angry heat upon his cheeks.

How long he sat there, he remembered not; what he thought, he recalled not. But the wildest and most extravagant plans and resolves availed him nothing in the face of this forever desecrated home, and this shameful culmination of his ambitious life on the mountain. Once he thought of flight; but the reflection that he would still abandon his brother to shame, perhaps a self-contented shame, checked him hopelessly. Could he avert the future? He MUST; but how? Yet he could only sit and stare into the darkness in dumb abstraction.

Sitting there, his eyes fell upon a peculiar object in a crevice of the ledge beside the shaft. It was the tin pail containing his dinner, which, according to their custom, it was the duty of the brother who staid above ground to prepare and place for the brother who worked below. Ruth must, consequently, have put it there before he left that morning, and Rand had overlooked it while sharing the repast of the strangers at noon. At the sight of this dumb

witness of their mutual cares and labors, Rand sighed, half in brotherly sorrow, half in a selfish sense of injury done him.

He took up the pail mechanically, removed its cover, and—started; for on top of the carefully bestowed provisions lay a little note, addressed to him in Ruth's peculiar scrawl.

He opened it with feverish hands, held it in the light of the peaceful moon, and read as follows:

> DEAR, DEAR BROTHER,—When you read this, I shall be far away. I go because I shall not stay to disgrace you, and because the girl that I brought trouble upon has gone away too, to hide her disgrace and mine; and where she goes, Rand, I ought to follow her, and, please God, I will! I am not as wise or as good as you are, but it seems the best I can do; and God bless you, dear old Randy, boy! Times and times again I've wanted to tell you all, and reckoned to do so; but whether you was sitting before me in the cabin, or working beside me in the drift, I couldn't get to look upon your honest face, dear brother, and say what things I'd been keeping from you so long. I'll stay away until I've done what I ought to do, and if you can say, "Come, Ruth," I will come; but, until you can say it, the mountain is yours, Randy, boy, the mine is yours, the cabin is yours, ALL is yours. Rub out the old chalk-marks, Rand, as I rub them out here in my —[A few words here were blurred and indistinct, as if the moon had suddenly become dim-eyed too]. God bless you, brother!
>
> P.S.—You know I mean Mornie all the time. It's she I'm going to seek; but don't you think so bad of her as you do,

I am so much worse than she. I wanted to tell you that all along, but I didn't dare. She's run away from the Ferry half crazy; said she was going to Sacramento, and I am going there to find her alive or dead. Forgive me, brother! Don't throw this down right away; hold it in your hand a moment, Randy, boy, and try hard to think it's my hand in yours. And so good-by, and God bless you, old Randy!

From your loving brother,

RUTH.

A deep sense of relief overpowered every other feeling in Rand's breast. It was clear that Ruth had not yet discovered the truth of Mornie's flight: he was on his way to Sacramento, and before he could return, Mornie could be removed. Once despatched in some other direction, with Ruth once more returned and under his brother's guidance, the separation could be made easy and final. There was evidently no marriage as yet; and now, the fear of an immediate meeting over, there should be none. For Rand had already feared this; had recalled the few infelicitous relations, legal and illegal, which were common to the adjoining camp,—the flagrantly miserable life of the husband of a San Francisco anonyma who lived in style at the Ferry, the shameful carousals and more shameful quarrels of the Frenchman and Mexican woman who "kept house" at "the Crossing," the awful spectacle of the three half-bred Indian children who played before the cabin of a fellow miner and townsman. Thank Heaven, the Eagle's Nest on Table Mountain should never be pointed at from the valley as another—

A heavy hand upon his arm brought him trembling to his feet. He turned, and met the half-anxious, half-contemptuous glance of the doctor.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said dryly; "but it's about time you or somebody else put in an appearance at that cabin. Luckily for HER, she's one woman in a thousand; has had her wits about her better than some folks I know, and has left me little to do but make her comfortable. But she's gone through too much,—fought her little fight too gallantly,—is altogether too much of a trump to be played off upon now. So rise up out of that, young man, pick up your scattered faculties, and fetch a woman—some sensible creature of her own sex—to look after her; for, without wishing to be personal, I'm d–d if I trust her to the likes of you."

There was no mistaking Dr. Duchesne' s voice and manner; and Rand was affected by it, as most people were throughout the valley of the Stanislaus. But he turned upon him his frank and boyish face, and said simply, "But I don't know any woman, or where to get one."

The doctor looked at him again. "Well, I'll find you some one," he said, softening.

"Thank you!" said Rand.

The doctor was disappearing. With an effort Rand recalled him. "One moment, doctor." He hesitated, and his cheeks were glowing. "You'll please say nothing about this down there"—he pointed to the valley—"for a time. And you'll say to the woman you send—"

Dr. Duchesne, whose resolute lips were sealed upon the secrets of half Tuolumne County, interrupted him scornfully. "I cannot answer for the woman—you must talk to her yourself. As for me, generally I keep my professional visits to myself; but—" he laid his hand on Rand's arm—"if I find out you're putting on any airs to that poor creature, if, on my next visit, her lips or her pulse tell me you haven't been acting on the square to her, I'll drop a hint to drunken old Nixon where his daughter is hidden. I reckon she could stand his brutality better than yours. Good-night!"

In another moment he was gone. Rand, who had held back his quick tongue, feeling himself in the power of this man, once more alone, sank on a rock, and buried his face in his hands. Recalling himself in a moment, he rose, wiped his hot eyelids, and staggered toward the cabin. It was quite still now. He paused on the topmost step, and listened: there was no sound from the ledge, or the Eagle's Nest that clung to it. Half timidly he descended the winding steps, and paused before the door of the cabin. "Mornie," he said, in a dry, metallic voice, whose only indication of the presence of sickness was in the lowness of its pitch,—"Mornie!" There was no reply. "Mornie," he repeated impatiently, "it's me,—Rand. If you want anything, you're to call me. I am just outside." Still no answer came from the silent cabin. He pushed open the door gently, hesitated, and stepped over the threshold.

A change in the interior of the cabin within the last few hours

showed a new presence. The guns, shovels, picks, and blankets had disappeared; the two chairs were drawn against the wall, the table placed by the bedside. The swinging-lantern was shaded towards the bed,—the object of Rand's attention. On that bed, his brother's bed, lay a helpless woman, pale from the long black hair that matted her damp forehead, and clung to her hollow cheeks. Her face was turned to the wall, so that the softened light fell upon her profile, which to Rand at that moment seemed even noble and strong. But the next moment his eye fell upon the shoulder and arm that lay nearest to him, and the little bundle, swathed in flannel, that it clasped to her breast. His brow grew dark as he gazed. The sleeping woman moved. Perhaps it was an instinctive consciousness of his presence; perhaps it was only the current of cold air from the opened door: but she shuddered slightly, and, still unconscious, drew the child as if away from HIM, and nearer to her breast. The shamed blood rushed to Rand's face; and saying half aloud, "I'm not going to take your precious babe away from you," he turned in half-boyish pettishness away. Nevertheless he came back again shortly to the bedside, and gazed upon them both. She certainly did look altogether more ladylike, and less aggressive, lying there so still: sickness, that cheap refining process of some natures, was not unbecoming to her. But this bundle! A boyish curiosity, stronger than even his strong objection to the whole episode, was steadily impelling him to lift the blanket from it. "I suppose she'd waken if I did," said Rand; "but I'd like to know what

right the doctor had to wrap it up in my best flannel shirt." This fresh grievance, the fruit of his curiosity, sent him away again to meditate on the ledge. After a few moments he returned again, opened the cupboard at the foot of the bed softly, took thence a piece of chalk, and scrawled in large letters upon the door of the cupboard, "If you want anything, sing out: I'm just outside. —RAND." This done, he took a blanket and bear-skin from the corner, and walked to the door. But here he paused, looked back at the inscription (evidently not satisfied with it), returned, took up the chalk, added a line, but rubbed it out again, repeated this operation a few times until he produced the polite postscript, —"Hope you'll be better soon." Then he retreated to the ledge, spread the bear-skin beside the door, and, rolling himself in a blanket, lit his pipe for his night-long vigil. But Rand, although a martyr, a philosopher, and a moralist, was young. In less than ten minutes the pipe dropped from his lips, and he was asleep.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.