BRET HARTE

TRENT'S TRUST, AND OTHER STORIES

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Содержание

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TRENT'S TRUST

I

Randolph Trent stepped from the Stockton boat on the San Francisco wharf, penniless, friendless, and unknown. Hunger might have been added to his trials, for, having paid his last coin in passage money, he had been a day and a half without food. Yet he knew it only by an occasional lapse into weakness as much mental as physical. Nevertheless, he was first on the gangplank to land, and hurried feverishly ashore, in that vague desire for action and change of scene common to such irritation; yet after mixing for a few moments with the departing passengers, each selfishly hurrying to some rendezvous of rest or business, he insensibly drew apart from them, with the instinct of a vagabond and outcast. Although he was conscious that he was neither, but merely an unsuccessful miner suddenly reduced to the point of soliciting work or alms of any kind, he took advantage of the

first crossing to plunge into a side street, with a vague sense of hiding his shame.

A rising wind, which had rocked the boat for the last few hours, had now developed into a strong sou'wester, with torrents of rain which swept the roadway. His well-worn working clothes, fitted to the warmer Southern mines, gave him more concern from their visible, absurd contrast to the climate than from any actual sense of discomfort, and his feverishness defied the chill of his soaking garments, as he hurriedly faced the blast through the dimly lighted street. At the next corner he paused; he had reached another, and, from its dilapidated appearance, apparently an older wharf than that where he had landed, but, like the first, it was still a straggling avenue leading toward the higher and more animated part of the city. He again mechanically —for a part of his trouble was a vague, undefined purpose— turned toward it.

In his feverish exaltation his powers of perception seemed to be quickened: he was vividly alive to the incongruous, half-marine, half-backwoods character of the warehouses and commercial buildings; to the hull of a stranded ship already built into a block of rude tenements; to the dark stockaded wall of a house framed of corrugated iron, and its weird contiguity to a Swiss chalet, whose galleries were used only to bear the signs of the shops, and whose frame had been carried across seas in sections to be set up at random here.

Moving past these, as in a nightmare dream, of which even

the turbulency of the weather seemed to be a part, he stumbled, blinded, panting, and unexpectedly, with no consciousness of his rapid pace beyond his breathlessness, upon the dazzling main thoroughfare of the city. In spite of the weather, the slippery pavements were thronged by hurrying crowds of well-dressed people, again all intent on their own purposes,—purposes that seemed so trifling and unimportant beside his own. The shops were brilliantly lighted, exposing their brightest wares through plate-glass windows; a jeweler's glittered with precious stones; a fashionable apothecary's next to it almost outrivaled it with its gorgeous globes, the gold and green precision of its shelves, and the marble and silver soda fountain like a shrine before it. All this specious show of opulence came upon him with the shock of contrast, and with it a bitter revulsion of feeling more hopeless than his feverish anxiety,—the bitterness of disappointment.

For during his journey he had been buoyed up with the prospect of finding work and sympathy in this youthful city,—a prospect founded solely on his inexperienced hopes. For this he had exchanged the poverty of the mining district,—a poverty that had nothing ignoble about it, that was a part of the economy of nature, and shared with his fellow men and the birds and beasts in their rude encampments. He had given up the brotherhood of the miner, and that practical help and sympathy which brought no degradation with it, for this rude shock of self-interested, self-satisfied civilization. He, who would not have shrunk from asking rest, food, or a night's lodging at the cabin of a brother miner

or woodsman, now recoiled suddenly from these well-dressed citizens. What madness had sent him here, an intruder, or, even, as it seemed to him in his dripping clothes, an impostor? And yet these were the people to whom he had confidently expected to tell his story, and who would cheerfully assist him with work! He could almost anticipate the hard laugh or brutal hurried negative in their faces. In his foolish heart he thanked God he had not tried it. Then the apathetic recoil which is apt to follow any keen emotion overtook him. He was dazedly conscious of being rudely shoved once or twice, and even heard the epithet "drunken lout" from one who had run against him.

He found himself presently staring vacantly in the apothecary's window. How long he stood there he could not tell, for he was aroused only by the door opening in front of him, and a young girl emerging with some purchase in her hand. He could see that she was handsomely dressed and quite pretty, and as she passed out she lifted to his withdrawing figure a pair of calm, inquiring eyes, which, however, changed to a look of half-wondering, half-amused pity as she gazed. Yet that look of pity stung his pride more deeply than all. With a deliberate effort he recovered his energy. No, he would not beg, he would not ask assistance from these people; he would go back—anywhere! To the steamboat first; they might let him sleep there, give him a meal, and allow him to work his passage back to Stockton. He might be refused. Well, what then? Well, beyond, there was the bay! He laughed bitterly—his mind was sane enough for that—

but he kept on repeating it vaguely to himself, as he crossed the street again, and once more made his way to the wharf.

The wind and rain had increased, but he no longer heeded them in his feverish haste and his consciousness that motion could alone keep away that dreadful apathy which threatened to overcloud his judgment. And he wished while he was able to reason logically to make up his mind to end this unsupportable situation that night. He was scarcely twenty, yet it seemed to him that it had already been demonstrated that his life was a failure; he was an orphan, and when he left college to seek his own fortune in California, he believed he had staked his all upon that venture—and lost.

That bitterness which is the sudden recoil of boyish enthusiasm, and is none the less terrible for being without experience to justify it,—that melancholy we are too apt to look back upon with cynical jeers and laughter in middle age,—is more potent than we dare to think, and it was in no mere pose of youthful pessimism that Randolph Trent now contemplated suicide. Such scraps of philosophy as his education had given him pointed to that one conclusion. And it was the only refuge that pride—real or false—offered him from the one supreme terror of youth—shame.

The street was deserted, and the few lights he had previously noted in warehouses and shops were extinguished. It had grown darker with the storm; the incongruous buildings on either side had become misshapen shadows; the long perspective of the

wharf was a strange gloom from which the spars of a ship stood out like the cross he remembered as a boy to have once seen in a picture of the tempest-smitten Calvary. It was his only fancy connected with the future—it might have been his last, for suddenly one of the planks of the rotten wharf gave way beneath his feet, and he felt himself violently precipitated toward the gurgling and oozing tide below. He threw out his arms desperately, caught at a strong girder, drew himself up with the energy of desperation, and staggered to his feet again, safe—and sane. For with this terrible automatic struggle to avoid that death he was courting came a flash of reason. If he had resolutely thrown himself from the pier head as he intended, would he have undergone a hopeless revulsion like this? Was he sure that this might not be, after all, the terrible penalty of self-destruction—this inevitable fierce protest of mind and body when TOO LATE? He was momentarily touched with a sense of gratitude at his escape, but his reason told him it was not from his ACCIDENT, but from his intention.

He was trying carefully to retrace his steps, but as he did so he saw the figure of a man dimly lurching toward him out of the darkness of the wharf and the crossed yards of the ship. A gleam of hope came over him, for the emotion of the last few minutes had rudely displaced his pride and self-love. He would appeal to this stranger, whoever he was; there was more chance that in this rude locality he would be a belated sailor or some humbler wayfarer, and the darkness and solitude made him feel

less ashamed. By the last flickering street lamp he could see that he was a man about his own size, with something of the rolling gait of a sailor, which was increased by the weight of a traveling portmanteau he was swinging in his hand. As he approached he evidently detected Randolph's waiting figure, slackened his speed slightly, and changed his portmanteau from his right hand to his left as a precaution for defense.

Randolph felt the blood flush his cheek at this significant proof of his disreputable appearance, but determined to accost him. He scarcely recognized the sound of his own voice now first breaking the silence for hours, but he made his appeal. The man listened, made a slight gesture forward with his disengaged hand, and impelled Randolph slowly up to the street lamp until it shone on both their faces. Randolph saw a man a few years his senior, with a slightly trimmed beard on his dark, weather-beaten cheeks, well-cut features, a quick, observant eye, and a sailor's upward glance and bearing. The stranger saw a thin, youthful, anxious, yet refined and handsome face beneath straggling damp curls, and dark eyes preternaturally bright with suffering. Perhaps his experienced ear, too, detected some harmony with all this in Randolph's voice.

"And you want something to eat, a night's lodging, and a chance of work afterward," the stranger repeated with good-humored deliberation.

"Yes," said Randolph.

"You look it."

Randolph colored faintly.

"Do you ever drink?"

"Yes," said Randolph wonderingly.

"I thought I'd ask," said the stranger, "as it might play hell with you just now if you were not accustomed to it. Take that. Just a swallow, you know—that's as good as a jugful."

He handed him a heavy flask. Randolph felt the burning liquor scald his throat and fire his empty stomach. The stranger turned and looked down the vacant wharf to the darkness from which he came. Then he turned to Randolph again and said abruptly,—

"Strong enough to carry this bag?"

"Yes," said Randolph. The whiskey—possibly the relief—had given him new strength. Besides, he might earn his alms.

"Take it up to room 74, Niantic Hotel—top of next street to this, one block that way—and wait till I come."

"What name shall I say?" asked Randolph.

"Needn't say any. I ordered the room a week ago. Stop; there's the key. Go in; change your togs; you'll find something in that bag that'll fit you. Wait for me. Stop—no; you'd better get some grub there first." He fumbled in his pockets, but fruitlessly. "No matter. You'll find a buckskin purse, with some scads in it, in the bag. So long." And before Randolph could thank him, he lurched away again into the semi-darkness of the wharf.

Overflowing with gratitude at a hospitality so like that of his reckless brethren of the mines, Randolph picked up the portmanteau and started for the hotel. He walked warily now,

with a new interest in life, and then, suddenly thinking of his own miraculous escape, he paused, wondering if he ought not to warn his benefactor of the perils of the rotten wharf; but he had already disappeared. The bag was not heavy, but he found that in his exhausted state this new exertion was telling, and he was glad when he reached the hotel. Equally glad was he in his dripping clothes to slip by the porter, and with the key in his pocket ascend unnoticed to 74.

Yet had his experience been larger he might have spared himself that sensitiveness. For the hotel was one of those great caravansaries popular with the returning miner. It received him and his gold dust in his worn-out and bedraggled working clothes, and returned him the next day as a well-dressed citizen on Montgomery Street. It was hard indeed to recognize the unshaven, unwashed, and unkempt "arrival" one met on the principal staircase at night in the scrupulously neat stranger one sat opposite to at breakfast the next morning. In this daily whirl of mutation all identity was swamped, as Randolph learned to know.

At present, finding himself in a comfortable bedroom, his first act was to change his wet clothes, which in the warmer temperature and the decline of his feverishness now began to chill him. He opened the portmanteau and found a complete suit of clothing, evidently a foreign make, well preserved, as if for "shore-going." His pride would have preferred a humbler suit as lessening his obligation, but there was no other. He discovered

the purse, a chamois leather bag such as miners and travelers carried, which contained a dozen gold pieces and some paper notes. Taking from it a single coin to defray the expenses of a meal, he restrapped the bag, and leaving the key in the door lock for the benefit of his returning host, made his way to the dining room.

For a moment he was embarrassed when the waiter approached him inquisitively, but it was only to learn the number of his room to "charge" the meal. He ate it quickly, but not voraciously, for his appetite had not yet returned, and he was eager to get back to the room and see the stranger again and return to him the coin which was no longer necessary.

But the stranger had not yet arrived when he reached the room. Over an hour had elapsed since their strange meeting. A new fear came upon him: was it possible he had mistaken the hotel, and his benefactor was awaiting him elsewhere, perhaps even beginning to suspect not only his gratitude but his honesty! The thought made him hot again, but he was helpless. Not knowing the stranger's name, he could not inquire without exposing his situation to the landlord. But again, there was the key, and it was scarcely possible that it fitted another 74 in another hotel. He did not dare to leave the room, but sat by the window, peering through the streaming panes into the storm-swept street below. Gradually the fatigue his excitement had hitherto kept away began to overcome him; his eyes once or twice closed during his vigil, his head nodded against the pane. He rose and walked

up and down the room to shake off his drowsiness. Another hour passed—nine o'clock, blown in fitful, far-off strokes from some wind-rocked steeple. Still no stranger. How inviting the bed looked to his weary eyes! The man had told him he wanted rest; he could lie down on the bed in his clothes until he came. He would waken quickly and be ready for his benefactor's directions. It was a great temptation. He yielded to it. His head had scarcely sunk upon the pillow before he slipped into a profound and dreamless sleep.

He awoke with a start, and for a few moments lay vaguely staring at the sunbeams that stretched across his bed before he could recall himself. The room was exactly as before, the portmanteau strapped and pushed under the table as he had left it. There came a tap at the door—the chambermaid to do up the room. She had been there once already, but seeing him asleep, she had forborne to wake him. Apparently the spectacle of a gentleman lying on the bed fully dressed, even to his boots, was not an unusual one at that hotel, for she made no comment. It was twelve o'clock, but she would come again later.

He was bewildered. He had slept the round of the clock—that was natural after his fatigue—but where was his benefactor? The lateness of the time forbade the conclusion that he had merely slept elsewhere; he would assuredly have returned by this time to claim his portmanteau. The portmanteau! He unstrapped it and examined the contents again. They were undisturbed as he had left them the night before. There was a further change of

linen, the buckskin bag, which he could see now contained a couple of Bank of England notes, with some foreign gold mixed with American half-eagles, and a cheap, rough memorandum book clasped with elastic, containing a letter in a boyish hand addressed "Dear Daddy" and signed "Bobby," and a photograph of a boy taken by a foreign photographer at Callao, as the printed back denoted, but nothing giving any clue whatever to the name of the owner.

A strange idea seized him: did the portmanteau really belong to the man who had given it to him? Had he been the innocent receiver of stolen goods from some one who wished to escape detection? He recalled now that he had heard stories of robbery of luggage by thieves "Sydney ducks"—on the deserted wharves, and remembered, too,—he could not tell why the thought had escaped him before,—that the man had spoken with an English accent. But the next moment he recalled his frank and open manner, and his mind cleared of all unworthy suspicion. It was more than likely that his benefactor had taken this delicate way of making a free, permanent gift for that temporary service. Yet he smiled faintly at the return of that youthful optimism which had caused him so much suffering.

Nevertheless, something must be done: he must try to find the man; still more important, he must seek work before this dubious loan was further encroached upon. He restrapped the portmanteau and replaced it under the table, locked the door, gave the key to the office clerk, saying that any one who called

upon him was to await his return, and sallied forth. A fresh wind and a blue sky of scudding clouds were all that remained of last night's storm. As he made his way to the fateful wharf, still deserted except by an occasional "wharf-rat,"—as the longshore vagrant or petty thief was called,—he wondered at his own temerity of last night, and the trustfulness of his friend in yielding up his portmanteau to a stranger in such a place. A low drinking saloon, feebly disguised as a junk shop, stood at the corner, with slimy green steps leading to the water.

The wharf was slowly decaying, and here and there were occasional gaps in the planking, as dangerous as the one from which he had escaped the night before. He thought again of the warning he might have given to the stranger; but he reflected that as a seafaring man he must have been familiar with the locality where he had landed. But had he landed there? To Randolph's astonishment, there was no sign or trace of any late occupation of the wharf, and the ship whose crossyards he had seen dimly through the darkness the night before was no longer there. She might have "warped out" in the early morning, but there was no trace of her in the stream or offing beyond. A bark and brig quite dismantled at an adjacent wharf seemed to accent the loneliness. Beyond, the open channel between him and Verba Buena Island was racing with white-maned seas and sparkling in the shifting sunbeams. The scudding clouds above him drove down the steel-blue sky. The lateen sails of the Italian fishing boats were like shreds of cloud, too, blown over the blue and distant bay. His

ears sang, his eyes blinked, his pulses throbbed, with the untiring, fierce activity of a San Francisco day.

With something of its restlessness he hurried back to the hotel. Still the stranger was not there, and no one had called for him. The room had been put in order; the portmanteau, that sole connecting link with his last night's experience, was under the table. He drew it out again, and again subjected it to a minute examination. A few toilet articles, not of the best quality, which he had overlooked at first, the linen, the buckskin purse, the memorandum book, and the suit of clothes he stood in, still comprised all he knew of his benefactor. He counted the money in the purse; it amounted, with the Bank of England notes, to about seventy dollars, as he could roughly guess. There was a scrap of paper, the torn-off margin of a newspaper, lying in the purse, with an address hastily scribbled in pencil. It gave, however, no name, only a number: "85 California Street." It might be a clue. He put it, with the purse, carefully in his pocket, and after hurriedly partaking of his forgotten breakfast, again started out.

He presently found himself in the main thoroughfare of last night, which he now knew to be Montgomery Street. It was more thronged than then, but he failed to be impressed, as then, with the selfish activity of the crowd. Yet he was half conscious that his own brighter fortune, more decent attire, and satisfied hunger had something to do with this change, and he glanced hurriedly at the druggist's broad plate-glass windows, with a faint hope

that the young girl whose amused pity he had awakened might be there again. He found California Street quickly, and in a few moments he stood before No. 85. He was a little disturbed to find it a rather large building, and that it bore the inscription "Bank." Then came the usual shock to his mercurial temperament, and for the first time he began to consider the absurd hopelessness of his clue.

He, however, entered desperately, and approaching the window of the receiving teller, put the question he had formulated in his mind: Could they give him any information concerning a customer or correspondent who had just arrived in San Francisco and was putting up at the Niantic Hotel, room 74? He felt his face flushing, but, to his astonishment, the clerk manifested no surprise. "And you don't know his name?" said the clerk quietly. "Wait a moment." He moved away, and Randolph saw him speaking to one of the other clerks, who consulted a large register. In a few minutes he returned. "We don't have many customers," he began politely, "who leave only their hotel-room addresses," when he was interrupted by a mumbling protest from one of the other clerks. "That's very different," he replied to his fellow clerk, and then turned to Randolph. "I'm afraid we cannot help you; but I'll make other inquiries if you'll come back in ten minutes." Satisfied to be relieved from the present perils of his questioning, and doubtful of returning, Randolph turned away. But as he left the building he saw a written notice on the swinging door, "Wanted: a Night Porter;" and this one chance of

employment determined his return.

When he again presented himself at the window the clerk motioned him to step inside through a lifted rail. Here he found himself confronted by the clerk and another man, distinguished by a certain air of authority, a keen gray eye, and singularly compressed lips set in a closely clipped beard. The clerk indicated him deferentially but briefly—everybody was astonishingly brief and businesslike there—as the president. The president absorbed and possessed Randolph with eyes that never seemed to leave him. Then leaning back against the counter, which he lightly grasped with both hands, he said: "We've sent to the Niantic Hotel to inquire about your man. He ordered his room by letter, giving no name. He arrived there on time last night, slept there, and has occupied the room No. 74 ever since. WE don't know him from Adam, but"—his eyes never left Randolph's—"from the description the landlord gave our clerk, you're the man himself."

For an instant Randolph flushed crimson. The natural mistake of the landlord flashed upon him, his own stupidity in seeking this information, the suspicious predicament in which he was now placed, and the necessity of telling the whole truth. But the president's eye was at once a threat and an invitation. He felt himself becoming suddenly cool, and, with a business brevity equal to their own, said:—

"I was looking for work last night on the wharf. He employed me to carry his bag to the hotel, saying I was to wait for him.

I have waited since nine o'clock last night in his room, and he has not come."

"What are you in such a d–d hurry for? He's trusted you; can't you trust him? You've got his bag?" returned the president.

Randolph was silent for a moment. "I want to know what to do with it," he said.

"Hang on to it. What's in it?"

"Some clothes and a purse containing about seventy dollars."

"That ought to pay you for carrying it and storage afterward," said the president decisively. "What made you come here?"

"I found this address in the purse," said Randolph, producing it.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"And that's the only reason you came here, to find an owner for that bag?"

"Yes."

The president disengaged himself from the counter.

"I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble," said Randolph concludingly. "Thank you and good-morning."

"Good-morning."

As Randolph turned away he remembered the advertisement for the night watchman. He hesitated and turned back. He was a little surprised to find that the president had not gone away, but was looking after him.

"I beg your pardon, but I see you want a night watchman.

Could I do?" said Randolph resolutely.

"No. You're a stranger here, and we want some one who knows the city,—Dewslake," he returned to the receiving teller, "who's taken Larkin's place?"

"No one yet," returned the teller, "but," he added parenthetically, "Judge Boompointer, you know, was speaking to you about his son."

"Yes, I know that." To Randolph: "Go round to my private room and wait for me. I won't be as long as your friend last night." Then he added to a negro porter, "Show him round there."

He moved away, stopping at one or two desks to give an order to the clerks, and once before the railing to speak to a depositor. Randolph followed the negro into the hall, through a "board room," and into a handsomely furnished office. He had not to wait long. In a few moments the president appeared with an older man whose gray side whiskers, cut with a certain precision, and whose black and white checked neckerchief, tied in a formal bow, proclaimed the English respectability of the period. At the president's dictation he took down Randolph's name, nativity, length of residence, and occupation in California. This concluded, the president, glancing at his companion, said briefly,—

"Well?"

"He had better come to-morrow morning at nine," was the answer.

"And ask for Mr. Dingwall, the deputy manager," added the

president, with a gesture that was at once an introduction and a dismissal to both.

Randolph had heard before of this startling brevity of San Francisco business detail, yet he lingered until the door closed on Mr. Dingwall. His heart was honestly full.

"You have been very kind, sir," he stammered.

"I haven't run half the risks of that chap last night," said the president grimly, the least tremor of a smile on his set mouth.

"If you would only let me know what I can do to thank you," persisted Randolph.

"Trust the man that trusts you, and hang on to your trust," returned the president curtly, with a parting nod.

Elated and filled with high hopes as Randolph was, he felt some trepidation in returning to his hotel. He had to face his landlord with some explanation of the bank's inquiry. The landlord might consider him an impostor, and request him to leave, or, more dreadful still, insist upon keeping the bag. He thought of the parting words of the president, and resolved upon "hanging on to his trust," whatever happened. But he was agreeably surprised to find that he was received at the office with a certain respect not usually shown to the casual visitor. "Your caller turned up to-day"—Randolph started—"from the Eureka bank," continued the clerk. "Sorry we could not give your name, but you know you only left a deposit in your letter and sent a messenger for your key yesterday afternoon. When you came you went straight to your room. Perhaps you would like to

register now." Randolph no longer hesitated, reflecting that he could explain it all later to his unknown benefactor, and wrote his name boldly. But he was still more astonished when the clerk continued: "I reckon it was a case of identifying you for a draft —it often happens here—and we'd have been glad to do it for you. But the bank clerk seemed satisfied with out description of you—you're easily described, you know" (this in a parenthesis, complimentarily intended)—"so it's all right. We can give you a better room lower down, if you're going to stay longer." Not knowing whether to laugh or to be embarrassed at this extraordinary conclusion of the blunder, Randolph answered that he had just come from the bank, adding, with a pardonable touch of youthful pride, that he was entering the bank's employment the next day.

Another equally agreeable surprise met him on his arrival there the next morning. Without any previous examination or trial he was installed at once as a corresponding clerk in the place of one just promoted to a sub-agency in the interior. His handwriting, his facility of composition, had all been taken for granted, or perhaps predicated upon something the president had discerned in that one quick, absorbing glance. He ventured to express the thought to his neighbor.

"The boss," said that gentleman, "can size a man in and out, and all through, in about the time it would take you and me to tell the color of his hair. HE don't make mistakes, you bet; but old Dingy—the dep—you settled with your clothes."

"My clothes!" echoed Randolph, with a faint flush.

"Yes, English cut—that fetched him."

And so his work began. His liberal salary, which seemed to him munificent in comparison with his previous earnings in the mines, enabled him to keep the contents of the buckskin purse intact, and presently to return the borrowed suit of clothes to the portmanteau. The mysterious owner should find everything as when he first placed it in his hands. With the quick mobility of youth and his own rather mercurial nature, he had begun to forget, or perhaps to be a little ashamed of his keen emotions and sufferings the night of his arrival, until that night was recalled to him in a singular way.

One Sunday a vague sense of duty to his still missing benefactor impelled him to spend part of his holiday upon the wharves. He had rambled away among the shipping at the newer pier slips, and had gazed curiously upon decks where a few seamen or officers in their Sunday apparel smoked, paced, or idled, trying vainly to recognize the face and figure which had once briefly flashed out under the flickering wharf lamp. Was the stranger a shipmaster who had suddenly transferred himself to another vessel on another voyage? A crowd which had gathered around some landing steps nearer shore presently attracted his attention. He lounged toward it and looked over the shoulders of the bystanders down upon the steps. A boat was lying there, which had just towed in the body of a man found floating on the water. Its features were already swollen and defaced like a

hideous mask; its body distended beyond all proportion, even to the bursting of its sodden clothing. A tremulous fascination came over Randolph as he gazed. The bystanders made their brief comments, a few authoritatively and with the air of nautical experts.

"Been in the water about a week, I reckon."

"'Bout that time; just rucked up and floated with the tide."

"Not much chance o' spottin' him by his looks, eh?"

"Nor anything else, you bet. Reg'larly cleaned out. Look at his pockets."

"Wharf-rats or shanghai men?"

"Betwixt and between, I reckon. Man who found him says he's got an ugly cut just back of his head. Ye can't see it for his floating hair."

"Wonder if he got it before or after he got in the water."

"That's for the coroner to say."

"Much he knows or cares," said another cynically. "It'll just be a case of 'Found drowned' and the regular twenty-five dollars to HIM, and five to the man who found the body. That's enough for him to know."

Thrilled with a vague anxiety, Randolph edged forward for a nearer view of the wretched derelict still gently undulating on the towline. The closer he looked the more he was impressed by the idea of some frightful mask that hid a face that refused to be recognized. But his attention became fixed on a man who was giving some advice or orders and examining the body

scrutinizingly. Without knowing why, Randolph felt a sudden aversion to him, which was deepened when the man, lifting his head, met Randolph's eyes with a pair of shifting yet aggressive ones. He bore, nevertheless, an odd, weird likeness to the missing man Randolph was seeking, which strangely troubled him. As the stranger's eyes followed him and lingered with a singular curiosity on Randolph's dress, he remembered with a sudden alarm that he was wearing the suit of the missing man. A quick impulse to conceal himself came upon him, but he as quickly conquered it, and returned the man's cold stare with an anger he could not account for, but which made the stranger avert his eyes. Then the man got into the boat beside the boatman, and the two again towed away the corpse. The head rose and fell with the swell, as if nodding a farewell. But it was still defiant, under its shapeless mask, that even wore a smile, as if triumphant in its hideous secret.

II

The opinion of the cynical bystander on the wharf proved to be a correct one. The coroner's jury brought in the usual verdict of "Found drowned," which was followed by the usual newspaper comment upon the insecurity of the wharves and the inadequate protection of the police.

Randolph Trent read it with conflicting emotions. The possibility he had conceived of the corpse being that of his benefactor was dismissed when he had seen its face, although he was sometimes tortured with doubt, and a wonder if he might not have learned more by attending the inquest. And there was still the suggestion that the mysterious disappearance might have been accomplished by violence like this. He was satisfied that if he had attempted publicly to identify the corpse as his missing friend he would have laid himself open to suspicion with a story he could hardly corroborate.

He had once thought of confiding his doubts to Mr. Revelstoke, the bank president, but he had a dread of that gentleman's curt conclusions and remembered his injunction to "hang on to his trust." Since his installation, Mr. Revelstoke had merely acknowledged his presence by a good-humored nod now and then, although Randolph had an instinctive feeling that he was perfectly informed as to his progress. It was wiser for Randolph to confine himself strictly to his duty and keep his own

counsel.

Yet he was young, and it was not strange that in his idle moments his thoughts sometimes reverted to the pretty girl he had seen on the night of his arrival, nor that he should wish to parade his better fortune before her curious eyes. Neither was it strange that in this city, whose day-long sunshine brought every one into the public streets, he should presently have that opportunity. It chanced that one afternoon, being in the residential quarter, he noticed a well-dressed young girl walking before him in company with a delicate looking boy of seven or eight years. Something in the carriage of her graceful figure, something in a certain consciousness and ostentation of coquetry toward her youthful escort, attracted his attention. Yet it struck him that she was neither related to the child nor accustomed to children's ways, and that she somewhat unduly emphasized this to the passers-by, particularly those of his own sex, who seemed to be greatly attracted by her evident beauty. Presently she ascended the steps of a handsome dwelling, evidently their home, and as she turned he saw her face. It was the girl he remembered. As her eye caught his, he blushed with the consciousness of their former meeting; yet, in the very embarrassment of the moment, he lifted his hat in recognition. But the salutation was met only by a cold, critical stare. Randolph bit his lip and passed on. His reason told him she was right, his instinct told him she was unfair; the contradiction fascinated him.

Yet he was destined to see her again. A month later, while

seated at his desk, which overlooked the teller's counter, he was startled to see her enter the bank and approach the counter. She was already withdrawing a glove from her little hand, ready to affix her signature to the receipted form to be proffered by the teller. As she received the gold in exchange, he could see, by the increased politeness of that official, his evident desire to prolong the transaction, and the sidelong glances of his fellow clerks, that she was apparently no stranger but a recognized object of admiration. Although her face was slightly flushed at the moment, Randolph observed that she wore a certain proud reserve, which he half hoped was intended as a check to these attentions. Her eyes were fixed upon the counter, and this gave him a brief opportunity to study her delicate beauty. For in a few moments she was gone; whether she had in her turn observed him he could not say. Presently he rose and sauntered, with what he believed was a careless air, toward the paying teller's counter and the receipt, which, being the last, was plainly exposed on the file of that day's "taking." He was startled by a titter of laughter from the clerks and by the teller ironically lifting the file and placing it before him.

"That's her name, sonny, but I didn't think that you'd tumble to it quite as quick as the others. Every new man manages to saunter round here to get a sight of that receipt, and I've seen hoary old depositors outside edge around inside, pretendin' they wanted to see the dep, jest to feast their eyes on that girl's name. Take a good look at it and paste a copy in your hat, for that's

all you'll know of her, you bet. Perhaps you think she's put her address and her 'at home' days on the receipt. Look hard and maybe you'll see 'em."

The instinct of youthful retaliation to say he knew her address already stirred Randolph, but he shut his lips in time, and moved away. His desk neighbor informed him that the young lady came there once a month and drew a hundred dollars from some deposit to her credit, but that was all they knew. Her name was Caroline Avondale, yet there was no one of that name in the San Francisco Directory.

But Randolph's romantic curiosity would not allow the incident to rest there. A favorable impression he had produced on Mr. Dingwall enabled him to learn more, and precipitated what seemed to him a singular discovery. "You will find," said the deputy manager, "the statement of the first deposit to Miss Avondale's credit in letters in your own department. The account was opened two years ago through a South American banker. But I am afraid it will not satisfy your curiosity." Nevertheless, Randolph remained after office hours and spent some time in examining the correspondence of two years ago. He was rewarded at last by a banker's letter from Callao advising the remittance of one thousand dollars to the credit of Miss Avondale of San Francisco. The letter was written in Spanish, of which Randolph had a fair knowledge, but it was made plainer by a space having been left in the formal letter for the English name, which was written in another hand, together with a copy of Miss

Avondale's signature for identification—the usual proceeding in those early days, when personal identification was difficult to travelers, emigrants, and visitors in a land of strangers.

But here he was struck by a singular resemblance which he at first put down to mere coincidence of names. The child's photograph which he had found in the portmanteau was taken at Callao. That was a mere coincidence, but it suggested to his mind a more singular one—that the handwriting of the address was, in some odd fashion, familiar to him. That night when he went home he opened the portmanteau and took from the purse the scrap of paper with the written address of the bank, and on comparing it with the banker's letter the next day he was startled to find that the handwriting of the bank's address and that in which the girl's name was introduced in the banker's letter were apparently the same. The letters in the words "Caroline" and "California" appeared as if formed by the same hand. How this might have struck a chirographical expert he did not know. He could not consult the paying teller, who was supposed to be familiar with signatures, without exposing his secret and himself to ridicule. And, after all, what did it prove? Nothing. Even if this girl were cognizant of the man who supplied her address to the Callao banker two years ago, and he was really the missing owner of the portmanteau, would she know where he was now? It might make an opening for conversation if he ever met her familiarly, but nothing more. Yet I am afraid another idea occasionally took possession of Randolph's romantic fancy. It was pleasant to think

that the patron of his own fortunes might be in some mysterious way the custodian of hers. The money was placed to her credit —a liberal sum for a girl so young. The large house in which she lived was sufficient to prove to the optimistic Randolph that this income was something personal and distinct from her family. That his unknown benefactor was in the habit of mysteriously rewarding deserving merit after the fashion of a marine fairy godmother, I fear did not strike him as being ridiculous.

But an unfortunate query in that direction, addressed to a cynical fellow clerk, who had the exhaustive experience with the immature mustaches of twenty-three, elicited a reply which shocked him. To his indignant protest the young man continued: —

"Look here; a girl like that who draws money regularly from some man who doesn't show up by name, who comes for it herself, and hasn't any address, and calls herself 'Avondale'— only an innocent from Dutch Flat, like you, would swallow."

"Impossible," said Randolph indignantly. "Anybody could see she's a lady by her dress and bearing."

"Dress and bearing!" echoed the clerk, with the derision of blase youth. "If that's your test, you ought to see Florry –."

But here one may safely leave the young gentleman as abruptly as Randolph did. Yet a drop of this corrosive criticism irritated his sensitiveness, and it was not until he recalled his last meeting with her and her innocent escort that he was himself again. Fortunately, he did not relate it to the critic, who would in all

probability have added a precocious motherhood to the young lady's possible qualities.

He could now only look forward to her reappearance at the bank, and here he was destined to a more serious disappointment. For when she made her customary appearance at the counter, he noticed a certain businesslike gravity in the paying teller's reception of her, and that he was consulting a small register before him instead of handing her the usual receipt form. "Perhaps you are unaware, Miss Avondale, that your account is overdrawn," Randolph distinctly heard him say, although in a politely lowered voice.

The young girl stopped in taking off her glove; her delicate face expressed her wonder, and paled slightly; she cast a quick and apparently involuntary glance in the direction of Randolph, but said quietly,—

"I don't think I understand."

"I thought you did not—ladies so seldom do," continued the paying teller suavely. "But there are no funds to your credit. Has not your banker or correspondent advised you?"

The girl evidently did not comprehend. "I have no correspondent or banker," she said. "I mean—I have heard nothing."

"The original credit was opened from Callao," continued the official, "but since then it has been added to by drafts from Melbourne. There may be one nearly due now."

The young girl seemed scarcely to comprehend, yet her face

remained pale and thoughtful. It was not until the paying teller resumed with suggestive politeness that she roused herself: "If you would like to see the president, he might oblige you until you hear from your friends. Of course, my duty is simply to"—

"I don't think I require you to exceed it," returned the young girl quietly, "or that I wish to see the president." Her delicate little face was quite set with resolution and a mature dignity, albeit it was still pale, as she drew away from the counter.

"If you would leave your address," continued the official with persistent politeness, "we could advise you of any later deposit to your credit."

"It is hardly necessary," returned the young lady. "I should learn it myself, and call again. Thank you. Good-morning." And settling her veil over her face, she quietly passed out.

The pain and indignation with which Randolph overheard this colloquy he could with the greatest difficulty conceal. For one wild moment he had thought of calling her back while he made a personal appeal to Revelstoke; but the conviction borne in upon him by her resolute bearing that she would refuse it, and he would only lay himself open to another rebuff, held him to his seat. Yet he could not entirely repress his youthful indignation.

"Where I come from," he said in an audible voice to his neighbor, "a young lady like that would have been spared this public disappointment. A dozen men would have made up that sum and let her go without knowing anything about her account being overdrawn." And he really believed it.

"Nice, comf'able way of doing banking business in Dutch Flat," returned the cynic. "And I suppose you'd have kept it up every month? Rather a tall price to pay for looking at a pretty girl once a month! But I suppose they're scarcer up there than here. All the same, it ain't too late now. Start up your subscription right here, sonny, and we'll all ante up."

But Randolph, who seldom followed his heroics to their ultimate prosaic conclusions, regretted he had spoken, although still unconvinced. Happily for his temper, he did not hear the comment of the two tellers.

"Won't see HER again, old boy," said one.

"I reckon not," returned the other, "now that she's been chucked by her fancy man—until she gets another. But cheer up; a girl like that won't want friends long."

It is not probable that either of these young gentlemen believed what they said, or would have been personally disrespectful or uncivil to any woman; they were fairly decent young fellows, but the rigors of business demanded this appearance of worldly wisdom between themselves. Meantime, for a week after, Randolph indulged in wild fancies of taking his benefactor's capital of seventy dollars, adding thirty to it from his own hard-earned savings, buying a draft with it from the bank for one hundred dollars, and in some mysterious way getting it to Miss Avondale as the delayed remittance.

The brief wet winter was nearly spent; the long dry season was due, although there was still the rare beauty of cloud scenery in

the steel-blue sky, and the sudden return of quick but transient showers. It was on a Sunday of weather like this that the nature-loving Randolph extended his usual holiday excursion as far as Contra Costa by the steamer after his dutiful round of the wharves and shipping. It was with a gayety born equally of his youth and the weather that he overcame his constitutional shyness, and not only mingled without restraint among the pleasure-seekers that thronged the crowded boat, but, in the consciousness of his good looks and a new suit of clothes, even penetrated into the aristocratic seclusion of the "ladies' cabin"—sacred to the fair sex and their attendant swains or chaperones.

But he found every seat occupied, and was turning away, when he suddenly recognized Miss Avondale sitting beside her little escort. She appeared, however, in a somewhat constrained attitude, sustaining with one hand the boy, who had clambered on the seat. He was looking out of the cabin window, which she was also trying to do, with greater difficulty on account of her position. He could see her profile presented with such marked persistency that he was satisfied she had seen him and was avoiding him. He turned and left the cabin.

Yet, once on the deck again, he repented his haste. Perhaps she had not actually recognized him; perhaps she wished to avoid him only because she was in plainer clothes—a circumstance that, with his knowledge of her changed fortunes, struck him to the heart. It seemed to him that even as a humble employee of the bank he was in some way responsible for it, and wondered if she

associated him with her humiliation. He longed to speak with her and assure her of his sympathy, and yet he was equally conscious that she would reject it.

When the boat reached the Alameda wharf she slipped away with the other passengers. He wandered about the hotel garden and the main street in the hope of meeting her again, although he was instinctively conscious that she would not follow the lines of the usual Sunday sight-seers, but had her own destination. He penetrated the depths of the Alameda, and lost himself among its low, trailing oaks, to no purpose. The hope of the morning had died within him; the fire of adventure was quenched, and when the clouds gathered with a rising wind he felt that the promise of that day was gone. He turned to go back to the ferry, but on consulting his watch he found that he had already lost so much time in his devious wanderings that he must run to catch the last boat. The few drops that spattered through the trees presently increased to a shower; he put up his umbrella without lessening his speed, and finally dashed into the main street as the last bell was ringing. But at the same moment a slight, graceful figure slipped out of the woods just ahead of him, with no other protection from the pelting storm than a handkerchief tied over her hat, and ran as swiftly toward the wharf. It needed only one glance for Randolph to recognize Miss Avondale. The moment had come, the opportunity was here, and the next instant he was panting at her side, with the umbrella over her head.

The girl lifted her head quickly, gave a swift look of

recognition, a brief smile of gratitude, and continued her pace. She had not taken his arm, but had grasped the handle of the umbrella, which linked them together. Not a word was spoken. Two people cannot be conversational or sentimental flying at the top of their speed beneath a single umbrella, with a crowd of impatient passengers watching and waiting for them. And I grieve to say that, being a happy American crowd, there was some irreverent humor. "Go it, sis! He's gainin' on you!" "Keep it up!" "Steady, sonny! Don't prance!" "No fancy licks! You were nearly over the traces that time!" "Keep up to the pole!" (i. e. the umbrella). "Don't crowd her off the track! Just swing on together; you'll do it."

Randolph had glanced quickly at his companion. She was laughing, yet looking at him shyly as if wondering how HE was taking it. The paddle wheels were beginning to revolve. Another rush, and they were on board as the plank was drawn in.

But they were only on the edge of a packed and seething crowd. Randolph managed, however, to force a way for her to an angle of the paddle box, where they were comparatively alone although still exposed to the rain. She recognized their enforced companionship by dropping her grasp of the umbrella, which she had hitherto been holding over him with a singular kind of mature superiority very like—as Randolph felt—her manner to the boy.

"You have left your little friend?" he said, grasping at the idea for a conversational opening.

"My little cousin? Yes," she said. "I left him with friends. I could not bear to make him run any risk in this weather. But," she hesitated half apologetically, half mischievously, "perhaps I hurried you."

"Oh, no," said Randolph quickly. "This is the last boat, and I must be at the bank to-morrow morning at nine."

"And I must be at the shop at eight," she said. She did not speak bitterly or pointedly, nor yet with the entire familiarity of custom. He noticed that her dress was indeed plainer, and yet she seemed quite concerned over the water-soaked state of that cheap thin silk pelerine and merino skirt. A big lump was in his throat.

"Do you know," he said desperately, yet trying to laugh, "that this is not the first time you have seen me dripping?"

"Yes," she returned, looking at him interestedly; "it was outside of the druggist's in Montgomery Street, about four months ago. You were wetter then even than you are now."

"I was hungry, friendless, and penniless, Miss Avondale." He had spoken thus abruptly in the faint hope that the revelation might equalize their present condition; but somehow his confession, now that it was uttered, seemed exceedingly weak and impotent. Then he blundered in a different direction. "Your eyes were the only kind ones I had seen since I landed." He flushed a little, feeling himself on insecure ground, and ended desperately: "Why, when I left you, I thought of committing suicide."

"Oh, dear, not so bad as that, I hope!" she said quickly, smiling kindly, yet with a certain air of mature toleration, as if she were addressing her little cousin. "You only fancied it. And it isn't very complimentary to my eyes if their kindness drove you to such horrid thoughts. And then what happened?" she pursued smilingly.

"I had a job to carry a man's bag, and it got me a night's lodging and a meal," said Randolph, almost brusquely, feeling the utter collapse of his story.

"And then?" she said encouragingly.

"I got a situation at the bank."

"When?"

"The next day," faltered Randolph, expecting to hear her laugh. But Miss Avondale heaved the faintest sigh.

"You are very lucky," she said.

"Not so very," returned Randolph quickly, "for the next time you saw me you cut me dead."

"I believe I did," she said smilingly.

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"Are you sure you won't be angry?"

"I may be pained," said Randolph prudently.

"I apologize for that beforehand. Well, that first night I saw a young man looking very anxious, very uncomfortable, and very weak. The second time—and not very long after—I saw him well dressed, lounging like any other young man on a Sunday afternoon, and I believed that he took the liberty of bowing to me

then because I had once looked at him under a misapprehension."

"Oh, Miss Avondale!"

"Then I took a more charitable view, and came to the conclusion that the first night he had been drinking. But," she added, with a faint smile at Randolph's lugubrious face, "I apologize. And you have had your revenge; for if I cut you on account of your smart clothes, you have tried to do me a kindness on account of my plain ones."

"Oh, Miss Avondale," burst out Randolph, "if you only knew how sorry and indignant I was at the bank—when—you know—the other day"—he stammered. "I wanted to go with you to Mr. Revelstoke, you know, who had been so generous to me, and I know he would have been proud to befriend you until you heard from your friends."

"And I am very glad you did nothing so foolish," said the young lady seriously, "or"—with a smile—"I should have been still more aggravating to you when we met. The bank was quite right. Nor have I any pathetic story like yours. Some years ago my little half-cousin whom you saw lost his mother and was put in my charge by his father, with a certain sum to my credit, to be expended for myself and the child. I lived with an uncle, with whom, for some family reasons, the child's father was not on good terms, and this money and the charge of the child were therefore intrusted entirely to me; perhaps, also, because Bobby and I were fond of each other and I was a friend of his mother. The father was a shipmaster, always away on long voyages, and

has been home but once in the three years I have had charge of his son. I have not heard from him since. He is a good-hearted man, but of a restless, roving disposition, with no domestic tastes. Why he should suddenly cease to provide for my little cousin—if he has done so—or if his omission means only some temporary disaster to himself or his fortunes, I do not know. My anxiety was more for the poor boy's sake than for myself, for as long as I live I can provide for him." She said this without the least display of emotion, and with the same mature air of also repressing any emotion on the part of Randolph. But for her size and girlish figure, but for the dripping tangles of her hair and her soft eyes, he would have believed he was talking to a hard, middle-aged matron.

"Then you—he—has no friends here?" asked Randolph.

"No. We are all from Callao, where Bobby was born. My uncle was a merchant there, who came here lately to establish an agency. We lived with him in Sutter Street—where you remember I was so hateful to you," she interpolated, with a mischievous smile—"until his enterprise failed and he was obliged to return; but I stayed here with Bobby, that he might be educated in his father's own tongue. It was unfortunate, perhaps," she said, with a little knitting of her pretty brows, "that the remittances ceased and uncle left about the same time; but, like you, I was lucky, and I managed to get a place in the Emporium."

"The Emporium!" repeated Randolph in surprise. It was a popular "magasin of fashion" in Montgomery Street. To connect

this refined girl with its garish display and vulgar attendants seemed impossible.

"The Emporium," reiterated Miss Avondale simply. "You see, we used to dress a good deal in Callao and had the Paris fashions, and that experience was of great service to me. I am now at the head of what they call the 'mantle department,' if you please, and am looked up to as an authority." She made him a mischievous bow, which had the effect of causing a trickle from the umbrella to fall across his budding mustache, and another down her own straight little nose—a diversion that made them laugh together, although Randolph secretly felt that the young girl's quiet heroism was making his own trials appear ridiculous. But her allusion to Callao and the boy's name had again excited his fancy and revived his romantic dream of their common benefactor. As soon as they could get a more perfect shelter and furl the umbrella, he plunged into the full story of the mysterious portmanteau and its missing owner, with the strange discovery that he had made of the similarity of the two handwritings. The young lady listened intently, eagerly, checking herself with what might have been a half smile at his enthusiasm.

"I remember the banker's letter, certainly," she said, "and Captain Dornton—that was the name of Bobby's father—asked me to sign my name in the body of it where HE had also written it with my address. But the likeness of the handwriting to your slip of paper may be only a fancied one. Have you shown it to any one," she said quickly—"I mean," she corrected herself as

quickly, “any one who is an expert?”

“Not the two together,” said Randolph, explaining how he had shown the paper to Mr. Revelstoke.

But Miss Avondale had recovered herself, and laughed. “That that bit of paper should have been the means of getting you a situation seems to me the more wonderful occurrence. Of course it is quite a coincidence that there should be a child’s photograph and a letter signed ‘Bobby’ in the portmanteau. But”—she stopped suddenly and fixed her dark eyes on his—“you have seen Bobby. Surely you can say if it was his likeness?”

Randolph was embarrassed. The fact was he had always been so absorbed in HER that he had hardly glanced at the child. He ventured to say this, and added a little awkwardly, and coloring, that he had seen Bobby only twice.

“And you still have this remarkable photograph and letter?” she said, perhaps a little too carelessly.

“Yes. Would you like to see them?”

“Very much,” she returned quickly; and then added, with a laugh, “you are making me quite curious.”

“If you would allow me to see you home,” said Randolph, “we have to pass the street where my room is, and,” he added timidly, “I could show them to you.”

“Certainly,” she replied, with sublime unconsciousness of the cause of his hesitation; “that will be very nice?”

Randolph was happy, albeit he could not help thinking that

she was treating him like the absent Bobby.

"It's only on Commercial Street, just above Montgomery," he went on. "We go straight up from the wharf"—he stopped short here, for the bulk of a bystander, a roughly clad miner, was pressing him so closely that he was obliged to resist indignantly—partly from discomfort, and partly from a sense that the man was overhearing him. The stranger muttered a kind of apology, and moved away.

"He seems to be perpetually in your way," said Miss Avondale, smiling. "He was right behind you, and you nearly trod on his toes, when you bolted out of the cabin this morning."

"Ah, then you DID see me!" said Randolph, forgetting all else in his delight at the admission.

But Miss Avondale was not disconcerted. "Thanks to your collision, I saw you both."

It was still raining when they disembarked at the wharf, a little behind the other Passengers, who had crowded on the bow of the steamboat. It was only a block or two beyond the place where Randolph had landed that eventful night. He had to pass it now; but with Miss Avondale clinging to his arm, with what different feelings! The rain still fell, the day was fading, but he walked in an enchanted dream, of which the prosaic umbrella was the mystic tent and magic pavilion. He must needs even stop at the corner of the wharf, and show her the exact spot where his unknown benefactor appeared.

"Coming out of the shadow like that man there," she added

brightly, pointing to a figure just emerging from the obscurity of an overhanging warehouse. "Why, it's your friend the miner!"

Randolph looked. It was indeed the same man, who had probably reached the wharf by a cross street.

"Let us go on, do!" said Miss Avondale, suddenly tightening her hold of Randolph's arm in some instinctive feminine alarm. "I don't like this place."

But Randolph, with the young girl's arm clinging to his, felt supremely daring. Indeed, I fear he was somewhat disappointed when the stranger peacefully turned into the junk shop at the corner and left them to pursue their way.

They at last stopped before some business offices on a central thoroughfare, where Randolph had a room on the third story. When they had climbed the flight of stairs he unlocked a door and disclosed a good-sized apartment which had been intended for an office, but which was now neatly furnished as a study and bedroom. Miss Avondale smiled at the singular combination.

"I should fancy," she said, "you would never feel as if you had quite left the bank behind you." Yet, with her air of protection and mature experience, she at once began to move one or two articles of furniture into a more tasteful position, while Randolph, nevertheless a little embarrassed at his audacity in asking this goddess into his humble abode, hurriedly unlocked a closet, brought out the portmanteau, and handed her the letter and photograph.

Woman-like, Miss Avondale looked at the picture first. If she

experienced any surprise, she repressed it. “It is LIKE Bobby,” she said meditatively, “but he was stouter then; and he’s changed sadly since he has been in this climate. I don’t wonder you didn’t recognize him. His father may have had it taken some day when they were alone together. I didn’t know of it, though I know the photographer.” She then looked at the letter, knit her pretty brows, and with an abstracted air sat down on the edge of Randolph’s bed, crossed her little feet, and looked puzzled. But he was unable to detect the least emotion.

“You see,” she said, “the handwriting of most children who are learning to write is very much alike, for this is the stage of development when they ‘print.’ And their composition is the same: they talk only of things that interest all children—pets, toys, and their games. This is only ANY child’s letter to ANY father. I couldn’t really say it WAS Bobby’s. As to the photograph, they have an odd way in South America of selling photographs of anybody, principally of pretty women, by the packet, to any one who wants them. So that it does not follow that the owner of this photograph had any personal interest in it. Now, as to your mysterious patron himself, can you describe him?” She looked at Randolph with a certain feline intensity.

He became embarrassed. “You know I only saw him once, under a street lamp”—he began.

“And I have only seen Captain Dornton—if it were he—twice in three years,” she said. “But go on.”

Again Randolph was unpleasantly impressed with her cold,

dryly practical manner. He had never seen his benefactor but once, but he could not speak of him in that way.

"I think," he went on hesitatingly, "that he had dark, pleasant eyes, a thick beard, and the look of a sailor."

"And there were no other papers in the portmanteau?" she said, with the same intense look.

"None."

"These are mere coincidences," said Miss Avondale, after a pause, "and, after all, they are not as strange as the alternative. For we would have to believe that Captain Dornton arrived here —where he knew his son and I were living—without a word of warning, came ashore for the purpose of going to a hotel and the bank also, and then unaccountably changed his mind and disappeared."

The thought of the rotten wharf, his own escape, and the dead body were all in Randolph's mind; but his reasoning was already staggered by the girl's conclusions, and he felt that it might only pain, without convincing her. And was he convinced himself? She smiled at his blank face and rose. "Thank you all the same. And now I must go."

Randolph rose also. "Would you like to take the photograph and letter to show your cousin?"

"Yes. But I should not place much reliance on his memory." Nevertheless, she took up the photograph and letter, and Randolph, putting the portmanteau back in the closet, locked it, and stood ready to accompany her.

On their way to her house they talked of other things. Randolph learned something of her life in Callao: that she was an orphan like himself, and had been brought from the Eastern States when a child to live with a rich uncle in Callao who was childless; that her aunt had died and her uncle had married again; that the second wife had been at variance with his family, and that it was consequently some relief to Miss Avondale to be independent as the guardian of Bobby, whose mother was a sister of the first wife; that her uncle had objected as strongly as a brother-in-law could to his wife's sister's marriage with Captain Dornton on account of his roving life and unsettled habits, and that consequently there would be little sympathy for her or for Bobby in his mysterious disappearance. The wind blew and the rain fell upon these confidences, yet Randolph, walking again under that umbrella of felicity, parted with her at her own doorstep all too soon, although consoled with the permission to come and see her when the child returned.

He went back to his room a very hopeful, foolish, but happy youth. As he entered he seemed to feel the charm of her presence again in the humble apartment she had sanctified. The furniture she had moved with her own little hands, the bed on which she had sat for a half moment, was glorified to his youthful fancy. And even that magic portmanteau which had brought him all this happiness, that, too,—but he gave a sudden start. The closet door, which he had shut as he went out, was unlocked and open, the portmanteau—his "trust"—gone!

III

Randolph Trent's consternation at the loss of the portmanteau was partly superstitious. For, although it was easy to make up the small sum taken, and the papers were safe in Miss Avondale's possession, yet this displacement of the only link between him and his missing benefactor, and the mystery of its disappearance, raised all his old doubts and suspicions. A vague uneasiness, a still more vague sense of some remissness on his own part, possessed him.

That the portmanteau was taken from his room during his absence with Miss Avondale that afternoon was evident. The door had been opened by a skeleton key, and as the building was deserted on Sunday, there had been no chance of interference with the thief. If mere booty had been his object, the purse would have satisfied him without his burdening himself with a portmanteau which might be identified. Nothing else in the room had been disturbed. The thief must have had some cognizance of its location, and have kept some espionage over Randolph's movements—a circumstance which added to the mystery and his disquiet. He placed a description of his loss with the police authorities, but their only idea of recovering it was by leaving that description with pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers, a proceeding that Randolph instinctively felt was in vain.

A singular but instinctive reluctance to inform Miss Avondale

of his loss kept him from calling upon her for the first few days. When he did, she seemed concerned at the news, although far from participating in his superstition or his suspicions.

"You still have the letter and photograph—whatever they may be worth—for identification," she said dryly, "although Bobby cannot remember about the letter. He thinks he went once with his father to a photographer and had a picture taken, but he cannot remember seeing it afterward." She was holding them in her hand, and Randolph almost mechanically took them from her and put them in his pocket. He would not, perhaps, have noticed his own brusqueness had she not looked a little surprised, and, he thought, annoyed. "Are you quite sure you won't lose them?" she said gently. "Perhaps I had better keep them for you."

"I shall seal them up and put them in the bank safe," he said quickly. He could not tell whether his sudden resolution was an instinct or the obstinacy that often comes to an awkward man. "But," he added, coloring, "I shall always regret the loss of the portmanteau, for it was the means of bringing us together."

"I thought it was the umbrella," said Miss Avondale dryly.

She had once before halted him on the perilous edge of sentiment by a similar cynicism, but this time it cut him deeply. For he could not be blind to the fact that she treated him like a mere boy, and in dispelling the illusions of his instincts and beliefs seemed as if intent upon dispelling his illusions of HER; and in her half-smiling abstraction he read only the well-bred toleration of one who is beginning to be bored. He made his

excuses early and went home. Nevertheless, although regretting he had not left her the letter and photograph, he deposited them in the bank safe the next day, and tried to feel that he had vindicated his character for grown-up wisdom.

Then, in his conflicting emotions, he punished himself, after the fashion of youth, by avoiding the beloved one's presence for several days. He did this in the belief that it would enable him to make up his mind whether to reveal his real feelings to her, and perhaps there was the more alluring hope that his absence might provoke some manifestations of sentiment on her part. But she made no sign. And then came a reaction in his feelings, with a heightened sense of loyalty to his benefactor. For, freed of any illusion or youthful fancy now, a purely unselfish gratitude to the unknown man filled his heart. In the lapse of his sentiment he clung the more closely to this one honest romance of his life.

One afternoon, at the close of business, he was a little astonished to receive a message from Mr. Dingwall, the deputy manager, that he wished to see him in his private office. He was still more astonished when Mr. Dingwall, after offering him a chair, stood up with his hands under his coat tails before the fireplace, and, with a hesitancy half reserved, half courteous, but wholly English, said,—

"I—er—would be glad, Mr. Trent, if you would—er—give me the pleasure of your company at dinner to-morrow."

Randolph, still amazed, stammered his acceptance.

"There will be—er—a young lady in whom you were—er—

interested some time ago. Er—Miss Avondale."

Randolph, feeling he was coloring, and uncertain whether he should speak of having met her since, contented himself with expressing his delight.

"In fact," continued Mr. Dingwall, clearing his throat as if he were also clearing his conscience of a tremendous secret, "she—er—mentioned your name. There is Sir William Dornton coming also. Sir William has recently succeeded his elder brother, who—er—it seems, was the gentleman you were inquiring about when you first came here, and who, it is now ascertained, was drowned in the bay a few months ago. In fact—er—it is probable that you were the last one who saw him alive. I thought I would tell you," continued Mr. Dingwall, settling his chin more comfortably in his checked cravat, "in case Sir William should speak of him to you."

Randolph was staggered. The abrupt revelation of his benefactor's name and fate, casually coupled with an invitation to dinner, shocked and confounded him. Perhaps Mr. Dingwall noticed it and misunderstood the cause, for he added in parenthetical explanation: "Yes, the man whose portmanteau you took charge of is dead; but you did your duty, Mr. Trent, in the matter, although the recovery of the portmanteau was unessential to the case."

"Dead," repeated Randolph, scarcely heeding him. "But is it true? Are they sure?"

Mr. Dingwall elevated his eyebrows. "The large property

at stake of course rendered the most satisfactory proofs of it necessary. His father had died only a month previous, and of course they were seeking the presumptive heir, the so-called 'Captain John Dornton'—your man—when they made the discovery of his death."

Randolph thought of the strange body at the wharf, of the coroner's vague verdict, and was unconvinced. "But," he said impulsively, "there was a child." He checked himself as he remembered this was one of Miss Avondale's confidences to him.

"Ah—Miss Avondale has spoken of a child?" said Mr. Dingwall dryly.

"I saw her with one which she said was Captain Dornton's, which had been left in her care after the death of his wife," said Randolph in hurried explanation.

"John Dornton had no WIFE," said Mr. Dingwall severely. "The boy is a natural son. Captain John lived a wild, rough, and —er—an eccentric life."

"I thought—I understood from Miss Avondale that he was married," stammered the young man.

"In your rather slight acquaintance with that young lady I should imagine she would have had some delicacy in telling you otherwise," returned Mr. Dingwall primly.

Randolph felt the truth of this, and was momentarily embarrassed. Yet he lingered.

"Has Miss Avondale known of this discovery long?" he asked.

"About two weeks, I should say," returned Mr. Dingwall. "She was of some service to Sir William in getting up certain proofs he required."

It was three weeks since she had seen Randolph, yet it would have been easy for her to communicate the news to him. In these three weeks his romance of their common interest in his benefactor—even his own dream of ever seeing him again—had been utterly dispelled.

It was in no social humor that he reached Dingwall's house the next evening. Yet he knew the difficulty of taking an aggressive attitude toward his previous idol or of inviting a full explanation from her then.

The guests, with the exception of himself and Miss Avondale, were all English. She, self-possessed and charming in evening dress, nodded to him with her usual mature patronage, but did not evince the least desire to seek him for any confidential aside. He noticed the undoubted resemblance of Sir William Dornton to his missing benefactor, and yet it produced a singular repulsion in him, rather than any sympathetic predilection. At table he found that Miss Avondale was separated from him, being seated beside the distinguished guest, while he was placed next to the young lady he had taken down—a Miss Eversleigh, the cousin of Sir William. She was tall, and Randolph's first impression of her was that she was stiff and constrained—an impression he quickly corrected at the sound of her voice, her frank ingenuousness, and her unmistakable youth. In the habit of being crushed by Miss

Avondale's unrelenting superiority, he found himself apparently growing up beside this tall English girl, who had the naivete of a child. After a few commonplaces she suddenly turned her gray eyes on his, and said,—

"Didn't you like Jack? I hope you did. Oh, say you did—do!"

"You mean Captain John Dornton?" said Randolph, a little confused.

"Yes, of course; HIS brother"—glancing toward Sir William. "We always called him Jack, though I was ever so little when he went away. No one thought of calling him anything else but Jack. Say you liked him!"

"I certainly did," returned Randolph impulsively. Then checking himself, he added, "I only saw him once, but I liked his face and manner—and—he was very kind to me."

"Of course he was," said the young girl quickly. "That was only like him, and yet"—lowering her voice slightly—"would you believe that they all say he was wild and wicked and dissipated? And why? Fancy! Just because he didn't care to stay at home and shoot and hunt and race and make debts, as heirs usually do. No, he wanted to see the world and do something for himself. Why, when he was quite young, he could manage a boat like any sailor. Dornton Hall, their place, is on the coast, you know, and they say that, just for adventure's sake, after he went away, he shipped as first mate somewhere over here on the Pacific, and made two or three voyages. You know—don't you?—and how every one was shocked at such conduct in the heir."

Her face was so girlishly animated, with such sparkle of eye and responsive color, that he could hardly reconcile it with her first restraint or with his accepted traditions of her unemotional race, or, indeed, with her relationship to the principal guest. His latent feeling of gratitude to the dead man warmed under the young girl's voice.

"It's so dreadful to think of him as drowned, you know, though even that they put against him," she went on hurriedly, "for they say he was probably drowned in some drunken fit—fell through the wharf or something shocking and awful—worse than suicide. But"—she turned her frank young eyes upon him again—"YOU saw him on the wharf that night, and you could tell how he looked."

"He was as sober as I was," returned Randolph indignantly, as he recalled the incident of the flask and the dead man's caution. From recalling it to repeating it followed naturally, and he presently related the whole story of his meeting with Captain Dornton to the brightly interested eyes beside him. When he had finished, she leaned toward him in girlish confidence, and said: —

"Yes; but EVEN THAT they tell to show how intoxicated be must have been to have given up his portmanteau to an utter stranger like you." She stopped, colored, and yet, reflecting his own half smile, she added: "You know what I mean. For they all agree how nice it was of you not to take any advantage of his condition, and Dingwall said your honesty and faithfulness

struck Revelstoke so much that he made a place for you at the bank. Now I think," she continued, with delightful naivete, "it was a proof of poor Jack's BEING PERFECTLY SOBER, that he knew whom he was trusting, and saw just what you were, at once. There! But I suppose you must not talk to me any longer, but must make yourself agreeable to some one else. But it was very nice of you to tell me all this. I wish you knew my guardian. You'd like him. Do you ever go to England? Do come and see us."

These confidences had not been observed by the others, and Miss Avondale appeared to confine her attentions to Sir William, who seemed to be equally absorbed, except that once he lifted his eyes toward Randolph, as if in answer to some remark from her. It struck Randolph that he was the subject of their conversation, and this did not tend to allay the irritation of a mind already wounded by the contrast of HER lack of sympathy for the dead man who had befriended and trusted her to the simple faith of the girl beside him, who was still loyal to a mere childish recollection.

After the ladies had rustled away, Sir William moved his seat beside Randolph. His manner seemed to combine Mr. Dingwall's restraint with a certain assumption of the man of the world, more notable for its frankness than its tactfulness.

"Sad business this of my brother's, eh," he said, lighting a cigar; "any way you take it, eh? You saw him last, eh?" The interrogating word, however, seemed to be only an exclamation of habit, for he seldom waited for an answer.

"I really don't know," said Randolph, "as I saw him only ONCE, and he left me on the wharf. I know no more where he went to then than where he came from before. Of course you must know all the rest, and how he came to be drowned."

"Yes; it really did not matter much. The whole question was identification and proof of death, you know. Beastly job, eh?"

"Was that his body YOU were helping to get ashore at the wharf one Sunday?" asked Randolph bluntly, now fully recognizing the likeness that had puzzled him in Sir William. "I didn't see any resemblance."

"Precious few would. I didn't—though it's true I hadn't seen him for eight years. Poor old chap been knocked about so he hadn't a feature left, eh? But his shipmate knew him, and there were his traps on the ship."

Then, for the first time, Randolph heard the grim and sordid details of John Dornton's mysterious disappearance. He had arrived the morning before that eventful day on an Australian bark as the principal passenger. The vessel itself had an evil repute, and was believed to have slipped from the hands of the police at Melbourne. John Dornton had evidently amassed a considerable fortune in Australia, although an examination of his papers and effects showed it to be in drafts and letters of credit and shares, and that he had no ready money—a fact borne out by the testimony of his shipmates. The night he arrived was spent in an orgy on board ship, which he did not leave until the early evening of the next day, although, after his erratic

fashion, he had ordered a room at a hotel. That evening he took ashore a portmanteau, evidently intending to pass the night at his hotel. He was never seen again, although some of the sailors declared that they had seen him on the wharf WITHOUT THE PORTMANTEAU, and they had drunk together at a low grog shop on the street corner. He had evidently fallen through some hole in the wharf. As he was seen only with the sailors, who also knew he had no ready money on his person, there was no suspicion of foul play.

"For all that, don't you know," continued Sir William, with a forced laugh, which struck Randolph as not only discordant, but as having an insolent significance, "it might have been a deuced bad business for YOU, eh? Last man who was with him, eh? In possession of his portmanteau, eh? Wearing his clothes, eh? Awfully clever of you to go straight to the bank with it. 'Pon my word, my legal man wanted to pounce down on you as 'accessory' until I and Dingwall called him off. But it's all right now."

Randolph's antagonism to the man increased. "The investigation seems to have been peculiar," he said dryly, "for, if I remember rightly, at the coroner's inquest on the body I saw you with, the verdict returned was of the death of an UNKNOWN man."

"Yes; we hadn't clear proof of identity then," he returned coolly, "but we had a reexamination of the body before witnesses afterward, and a verdict according to the facts. That was kept out of the papers in deference to the feelings of the family and

friends. I fancy you wouldn't have liked to be cross-examined before a stupid jury about what you were doing with Jack's portmanteau, even if WE were satisfied with it."

"I should have been glad to testify to the kindness of your brother, at any risk," returned Randolph stoutly. "You have heard that the portmanteau was stolen from me, but the amount of money it contained has been placed in Mr. Dingwall's hands for disposal."

"Its contents were known, and all that's been settled," returned Sir William, rising. "But," he continued, with his forced laugh, which to Randolph's fancy masked a certain threatening significance, "I say, it would have been a beastly business, don't you know, if you HAD been called upon to produce it again—ha, ha!—eh?"

Returning to the dining room, Randolph found Miss Avondale alone on a corner of the sofa. She swept her skirts aside as he approached, as an invitation for him to sit beside her. Still sore from his experience, he accepted only in the hope that she was about to confide to him her opinion of this strange story. But, to his chagrin, she looked at him over her fan with a mischievous tolerance. "You seemed more interested in the cousin than the brother of your patron."

Once Randolph might have been flattered at this. But her speech seemed to him only an echo of the general heartlessness. "I found Miss Eversleigh very sympathetic over the fate of the unfortunate man, whom nobody else here seems to care for," said

Randolph coldly.

"Yes," returned Miss Avondale composedly; "I believe she was a great friend of Captain Dornton when she was quite a child, and I don't think she can expect much from Sir William, who is very different from his brother. In fact, she was one of the relatives who came over here in quest of the captain, when it was believed he was living and the heir. He was quite a patron of hers."

"But was he not also one of yours?" said Randolph bluntly.

"I think I told you I was the friend of the boy and of poor Paquita, the boy's mother," said Miss Avondale quietly. "I never saw Captain Dornton but twice."

Randolph noticed that she had not said "wife," although in her previous confidences she had so described the mother. But, as Dingwall had said, why should she have exposed the boy's illegitimacy to a comparative stranger; and if she herself had been deceived about it, why should he expect her to tell him? And yet—he was not satisfied.

He was startled by a little laugh. "Well, I declare, you look as if you resented the fact that your benefactor had turned out to be a baronet—just as in some novel—and that you have rendered a service to the English aristocracy. If you are thinking of poor Bobby," she continued, without the slightest show of self-consciousness, "Sir William will provide for him, and thinks of taking him to England to restore his health. Now"—with her smiling, tolerant superiority—"you must go and talk to Miss

Eversleigh. I see her looking this way, and I don't think she half likes me as it is."

Randolph, who, however, also saw that Sir William was lounging toward them, here rose formally, as if permitting the latter to take the vacated seat. This partly imposed on him the necessity of seeking Miss Eversleigh, who, having withdrawn to the other end of the room, was turning over the leaves of an album. As Randolph joined her, she said, without looking up, "Is Miss Avondale a friend of yours?"

The question was so pertinent to his reflections at the moment that he answered impulsively, "I really don't know."

"Yes, that's the answer, I think, most of her acquaintances would give, if they were asked the same question and replied honestly," said the young girl, as if musing.

"Even Sir William?" suggested Randolph, half smiling, yet wondering at her unlooked-for serious shrewdness as he glanced toward the sofa.

"Yes; but HE wouldn't care. You see, there would be a pair of them." She stopped with a slight blush, as if she had gone too far, but corrected herself in her former youthful frankness: "You don't mind my saying what I did of her? You're not such a PARTICULAR friend?"

"We both owe a debt of gratitude to your cousin Jack," said Randolph, in some embarrassment.

"Yes, but YOU feel it and she doesn't. So that doesn't make you friends."

"But she has taken good care of Captain Dornton's child," suggested Randolph loyally.

He stopped, however, feeling that he was on dangerous ground. But Miss Eversleigh put her own construction on his reticence, and said,—

"I don't think she cares for it much—or for ANY children."

Randolph remembered his own impression the only time he had ever seen her with the child, and was struck with the young girl's instinct again coinciding with his own. But, possibly because he knew he could never again feel toward Miss Avondale as he had, he was the more anxious to be just, and he was about to utter a protest against this general assumption, when the voice of Sir William broke in upon them. He was taking his leave —and the opportunity of accompanying Miss Avondale to her lodgings on the way to his hotel. He lingered a moment over his handshaking with Randolph.

"Awfully glad to have met you, and I fancy you're awfully glad to get rid of what they call your 'trust.' Must have given you a beastly lot of bother, eh—might have given you more?"

He nodded familiarly to Miss Eversleigh, and turned away with Miss Avondale, who waved her usual smiling patronage to Randolph, even including his companion in that half-amused, half-superior salutation. Perhaps it was this that put a sudden hauteur into the young girl's expression as she stared at Miss Avondale's departing figure.

"If you ever come to England, Mr. Trent," she said, with a

pretty dignity in her youthful face, "I hope you will find some people not quite so rude as my cousin and"—

"Miss Avondale, you would say," returned Randolph quietly. "As to HER, I am quite accustomed to her maturer superiority, which, I am afraid, is the effect of my own youth and inexperience; and I believe that, in course of time, your cousin's brusqueness might be as easily understood by me. I dare say," he added, with a laugh, "that I must seem to them a very romantic visionary with my 'trust,' and the foolish importance I have put upon a very trivial occurrence."

"I don't think so," said the girl quickly, "and I consider Bill very rude, and," she added, with a return of her boyish frankness, "I shall tell him so. As for Miss Avondale, she's AT LEAST thirty, I understand; perhaps she can't help showing it in that way, too."

But here Randolph, to evade further personal allusions, continued laughingly: "And as I've LOST my 'trust,' I haven't even that to show in defense. Indeed, when you all are gone I shall have nothing to remind me of my kind benefactor. It will seem like a dream."

Miss Eversleigh was silent for a moment, and then glanced quickly around her. The rest of the company were their elders, and, engaged in conversation at the other end of the apartment, had evidently left the young people to themselves.

"Wait a moment," she said, with a youthful air of mystery and earnestness. Randolph saw that she had slipped an Indian

bracelet, profusely hung with small trinkets, from her arm to her wrist, and was evidently selecting one. It proved to be a child's tiny ring with a small pearl setting. "This was given to me by Cousin Jack," said Miss Eversleigh in a low voice, "when I was a child, at some frolic or festival, and I have kept it ever since. I brought it with me when we came here as a kind of memento to show him. You know that is impossible now. You say you have nothing of his to keep. Will you accept this? I know he would be glad to know you had it. You could wear it on your watch chain. Don't say no, but take it."

Protesting, yet filled with a strange joy and pride, Randolph took it from the young girl's hand. The little color which had deepened on her cheek cleared away as he thanked her gratefully, and with a quiet dignity she arose and moved toward the others. Randolph did not linger long after this, and presently took his leave of his host and hostess.

It seemed to him that he walked home that night in the whirling clouds of his dispelled dream. The airy structure he had built up for the last three months had collapsed. The enchanted canopy under which he had stood with Miss Avondale was folded forever. The romance he had evolved from his strange fortune had come to an end, not prosaically, as such romances are apt to do, but with a dramatic termination which, however, was equally fatal to his hopes. At any other time he might have projected the wildest hopes from the fancy that he and Miss Avondale were orphaned of a common benefactor; but it was plain that

her interests were apart from his. And there was an indefinable something he did not understand, and did not want to understand, in the story she had told him. How much of it she had withheld, not so much from delicacy or contempt for his understanding as a desire to mislead him, he did not know. His faith in her had gone with his romance. It was not strange that the young English girl's unsophisticated frankness and simple confidences lingered longest in his memory, and that when, a few days later, Mr. Dingwall informed him that Miss Avondale had sailed for England with the Dornton family, he was more conscious of a loss in the stranger girl's departure.

"I suppose Miss Avondale takes charge of—of the boy, sir?" he said quietly.

Mr. Dingwall gave him a quick glance. "Possibly. Sir William has behaved with great—er—consideration," he replied briefly.

IV

Randolph's nature was too hopeful and recuperative to allow him to linger idly in the past. He threw himself into his work at the bank with his old earnestness and a certain simple conscientiousness which, while it often provoked the raillery of his fellow clerks, did not escape the eyes of his employers. He was advanced step by step, and by the end of the year was put in charge of the correspondence with banks and agencies. He had saved some money, and had made one or two profitable investments. He was enabled to take better apartments in the same building he had occupied. He had few of the temptations of youth. His fear of poverty and his natural taste kept him from the speculative and material excesses of the period. A distrust of his romantic weakness kept him from society and meaner entanglements which might have beset his good looks and good nature. He worked in his rooms at night and forbore his old evening rambles.

As the year wore on to the anniversary of his arrival, he thought much of the dead man who had inspired his fortunes, and with it a sense of his old doubts and suspicions revived. His reason had obliged him to accept the loss of the fateful portmanteau as an ordinary theft; his instinct remained unconvinced. There was no superstition connected with his loss. His own prosperity had not been impaired by it. On the contrary,

he reflected bitterly that the dead man had apparently died only to benefit others. At such times he recalled, with a pleasure that he knew might become perilous, the tall English girl who had defended Dornton's memory and echoed his own sympathy. But that was all over now.

One stormy night, not unlike that eventful one of his past experience, Randolph sought his rooms in the teeth of a southwest gale. As he buffeted his way along the rain-washed pavement of Montgomery Street, it was not strange that his thoughts reverted to that night and the memory of his dead protector. But reaching his apartment, he sternly banished them with the vanished romance they revived, and lighting his lamp, laid out his papers in the prospect of an evening of uninterrupted work. He was surprised, however, after a little interval, by the sound of uncertain and shuffling steps on the half-lighted passage outside, the noise of some heavy article set down on the floor, and then a tentative knock at his door. A little impatiently he called, "Come in."

The door opened slowly, and out of the half obscurity of the passage a thickset figure lurched toward him into the full light of the room. Randolph half rose, and then sank back into his chair, awed, spellbound, and motionless. He saw the figure standing plainly before him; he saw distinctly the familiar furniture of his room, the storm-twinkling lights in the windows opposite, the flash of passing carriage lamps in the street below. But the figure before him was none other than the dead man of whom he had

just been thinking.

The figure looked at him intently, and then burst into a fit of unmistakable laughter. It was neither loud nor unpleasant, and yet it provoked a disagreeable recollection. Nevertheless, it dissipated Randolph's superstitious tremor, for he had never before heard of a ghost who laughed heartily.

"You don't remember me," said the man. "Belay there, and I'll freshen your memory." He stepped back to the door, opened it, put his arm out into the hall, and brought in a portmanteau, closed the door, and appeared before Randolph again with the portmanteau in his hand. It was the one that had been stolen. "There!" he said.

"Captain Dornton," murmured Randolph.

The man laughed again and flung down the portmanteau. "You've got my name pat enough, lad, I see; but I reckoned you'd have spotted ME without that portmanteau."

"I see you've got it back," stammered Randolph in his embarrassment. "It was—stolen from me."

Captain Dornton laughed again, dropped into a chair, rubbed his hands on his knees, and turned his face toward Randolph. "Yes; I stole it—or had it stolen—the same thing, for I'm responsible."

"But I would have given it up to YOU at once," said Randolph reproachfully, clinging to the only idea he could understand in his utter bewilderment. "I have religiously and faithfully kept it for you, with all its contents, ever since—you disappeared."

"I know it, lad," said Captain Dornton, rising, and extending a brown, weather-beaten hand which closed heartily on the young man's; "no need to say that. And you've kept it even better than you know. Look here!"

He lifted the portmanteau to his lap and disclosed BEHIND the usual small pouch or pocket in the lid a slit in the lining. "Between the lining and the outer leather," he went on grimly, "I had two or three bank notes that came to about a thousand dollars, and some papers, lad, that, reckoning by and large, might be worth to me a million. When I got that portmanteau back they were all there, gummed in, just as I had left them. I didn't show up and come for them myself, for I was lying low at the time, and—no offense, lad—I didn't know how you stood with a party who was no particular friend of mine. An old shipmate whom I set to watch that party quite accidentally run across your bows in the ferry boat, and heard enough to make him follow in your wake here, where he got the portmanteau. It's all right," he said, with a laugh, waving aside with his brown hand Randolph's protesting gesture. "The old bag's only got back to its rightful owner. It mayn't have been got in shipshape 'Frisco style, but when a man's life is at stake, at least, when it's a question of his being considered dead or alive, he's got to take things as he finds 'em, and I found 'em d– bad."

In a flash of recollection Randolph remembered the obtruding miner on the ferry boat, the same figure on the wharf corner, and the advantage taken of his absence with Miss Avondale.

And Miss Avondale was the "party" this man's shipmate was watching! He felt his face crimsoning, yet he dared not question him further, nor yet defend her. Captain Dornton noticed it, and with a friendly tact, which Randolph had not expected of him, rising again, laid his hand gently on the young man's shoulder.

"Look here, lad," he said, with his pleasant smile; "don't you worry your head about the ways or doings of the Dornton family, or any of their friends. They're a queer lot—including your humble servant. You've done the square thing accordin' to your lights. You've ridden straight from start to finish, with no jockeying, and I shan't forget it. There are only two men who haven't failed me when I trusted them. One was you when I gave you my portmanteau; the other was Jack Redhill when he stole it from you."

He dropped back in his chair again, and laughed silently.

"Then you did not fall overboard as they supposed," stammered Randolph at last.

"Not much! But the next thing to it. It wasn't the water that I took in that knocked me out, my lad, but something stronger. I was shanghaied."

"Shanghaied?" repeated Randolph vacantly.

"Yes, shanghaied! Hocused! Drugged at that gin mill on the wharf by a lot of crimps, who, mistaking me for a better man, shoved me, blind drunk and helpless, down the steps into a boat, and out to a short-handed brig in the stream. When I came to I was outside the Heads, pointed for Guayaquil. When they

found they'd captured, not a poor Jack, but a man who'd trod a quarterdeck, who knew, and was known at every port on the trading line, and who could make it hot for them, they were glad to compromise and set me ashore at Acapulco, and six weeks later I landed in 'Frisco."

"Safe and sound, thank Heaven!" said Randolph joyously.

"Not exactly, lad," said Captain Dornton grimly, "but dead and sat upon by the coroner, and my body comfortably boxed up and on its way to England."

"But that was nine months ago. What have you been doing since? Why didn't you declare yourself then?" said Randolph impatiently, a little irritated by the man's extreme indifference. He really talked like an amused spectator of his own misfortunes.

"Steady, lad. I know what you're going to say. I know all that happened. But the first thing I found when I got back was that the shanghai business had saved my life; that but for that I would have really been occupying that box on its way to England, instead of the poor devil who was taken for me."

A cold tremor passed over Randolph. Captain Dornton, however, was tolerantly smiling.

"I don't understand," said Randolph breathlessly.

Captain Dornton rose and, walking to the door, looked out into the passage; then he shut the door carefully and returned, glancing about the room and at the storm-washed windows. "I thought I heard some one outside. I'm lying low just now, and only go out at night, for I don't want this thing blown before I'm

ready. Got anything to drink here?"

Randolph replied by taking a decanter of whiskey and glasses from a cupboard. The captain filled his glass, and continued with the same gentle but exasperating nonchalance, "Mind my smoking?"

"Not at all," said Randolph, pushing a cigar toward him. But the captain put it aside, drew from his pocket a short black clay pipe, stuffed it with black "Cavendish plug," which he had first chipped off in the palm of his hand with a large clasp knife, lighted it, and took a few meditative whiffs. Then, glancing at Randolph's papers, he said, "I'm not keeping you from your work, lad?" and receiving a reply in the negative, puffed at his pipe and once more settled himself comfortably in his chair, with his dark, bearded profile toward Randolph.

"You were saying just now you didn't understand," he went on slowly, without looking up; "so you must take your own bearings from what I'm telling you. When I met you that night I had just arrived from Melbourne. I had been lucky in some trading speculations I had out there, and I had some bills with me, but no money except what I had tucked in the skin of that portmanteau and a few papers connected with my family at home. When a man lives the roving kind of life I have, he learns to keep all that he cares for under his own hat, and isn't apt to blab to friends. But it got out in some way on the voyage that I had money, and as there was a mixed lot of 'Sydney ducks' and 'ticket of leave men' on board, it seems they hatched a nice little plot to waylay me on

the wharf on landing, rob me, and drop me into deep water. To make it seem less suspicious, they associated themselves with a lot of crimps who were on the lookout for our sailors, who were going ashore that night too. I'd my suspicions that a couple of those men might be waiting for me at the end of the wharf. I left the ship just a minute or two before the sailors did. Then I met you. That meeting, my lad, was my first step toward salvation. For the two men let you pass with my portmanteau, which they didn't recognize, as I knew they would ME, and supposed you were a stranger, and lay low, waiting for me. I, who went into the gin-mill with the other sailors, was foolish enough to drink, and was drugged and crimped as they were. I hadn't thought of that. A poor devil of a ticket of leave man, about my size, was knocked down for me, and," he added, suppressing a laugh, "will be buried, deeply lamented, in the chancel of Dornton Church. While the row was going on, the skipper, fearing to lose other men, warped out into the stream, and so knew nothing of what happened to me. When they found what they thought was my body, he was willing to identify it in the hope that the crime might be charged to the crimps, and so did the other sailor witnesses. But my brother Bill, who had just arrived here from Callao, where he had been hunting for me, hushed it up to prevent a scandal. All the same, Bill might have known the body wasn't mine, even though he hadn't seen me for years."

"But it was frightfully disfigured, so that even I, who saw you only once, could not have sworn it was NOT you," said Randolph

quickly.

"Humph!" said Captain Dornton musingly. "Bill may have acted on the square—though he was in a d–d hurry."

"But," said Randolph eagerly, "you will put an end to all this now. You will assert yourself. You have witnesses to prove your identity."

"Steady, lad," said the captain, waving his pipe gently. "Of course I have. But"—he stopped, laid down his pipe, and put his hands doggedly in his pockets—"IS IT WORTH IT?" Seeing the look of amazement in Randolph's face, he laughed his low laugh, and settled himself back in his chair again. "No," he said quietly, "if it wasn't for my son, and what's due him as my heir, I suppose —I reckon I'd just chuck the whole d–d thing."

"What!" said Randolph. "Give up the property, the title, the family honor, the wrong done to your reputation, the punishment"—He hesitated, fearing he had gone too far.

Captain Dornton withdrew his pipe from his mouth with a gesture of caution, and holding it up, said: "Steady, lad. We'll come to THAT by and by. As to the property and title, I cut and run from THEM ten years ago. To me they meant only the old thing—the life of a country gentleman, the hunting, the shooting, the whole beastly business that the land, over there, hangs like a millstone round your neck. They meant all this to me, who loved adventure and the sea from my cradle. I cut the property, for I hated it, and I hate it still. If I went back I should hear the sea calling me day and night; I should feel the breath of the southwest

trades in every wind that blew over that tight little island yonder; I should be always scenting the old trail, lad, the trail that leads straight out of the Gate to swoop down to the South Seas. Do you think a man who has felt his ship's bows heave and plunge under him in the long Pacific swell—just ahead of him a reef breaking white into the lagoon, and beyond a fence of feathery palms—cares to follow hounds over gray hedges under a gray November sky? And the society? A man who's got a speaking acquaintance in every port from Acapulco to Melbourne, who knows every den and every longshoreman in it from a South American tienda to a Samoan beach-comber's hut,—what does he want with society?" He paused as Randolph's eyes were fixed wonderingly on the first sign of emotion on his weather-beaten face, which seemed for a moment to glow with the strength and freshness of the sea, and then said, with a laugh: "You stare, lad. Well, for all the Dorntons are rather proud of their family, like as not there was some beastly old Danish pirate among them long ago, and I've got a taste of his blood in me. But I'm not quite as bad as that yet."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.