THE LEAD OF HONOUR

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[image]

Sargent Everett.
From a painting by Frank T. Merrill

THE LEAD OF HONOUR

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WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLOUR BY
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TO
THE ONE WHO IS THE INSPIRATION OF ALL

THAT IS BEST IN THESE PAGES
L. R.

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BOOK I
THE SCHOOLMASTER

THE LEAD OF HONOUR

CHAPTER I
YOUTH AND AMBITION

Beyond the gleam of the torch basket at the masthead, the bosom of the great Father of Waters widened into a sea, infinite in its solitude, desolately vast in

the impending gloom of the purple night. An orange coloured moon hovered on the dark strip of the horizon; the hot breeze of a Southern August was stirring fitfully.

He was standing alone on the upper deck of the boat, looking straight before him with that intensity of gaze and purpose in his deep hazel eyes that our grandfathers tell us about—a wonderful expression in which the energy of his thoughts seemed to throw out a flamelike glow holding the observer spellbound and charmed into forgetfulness. He was young then, little over twenty, and his thin, slight figure, erect and full of simple dignity, was clothed in plain garments of black, relieved at the wrist bands with fine white linen and at the collar by a high stock whose pointed ends extended up beyond his chin. His face, delicately moulded and oval to perfection, had written upon it, in the freshness of its youth, all the hopes and desires and ambitions that remained with him to the end—for it seems that he never lost his youthful appreciation of life, nor knew what it meant to sink under disappointments. In his hand he carried a small cane which he used to aid him in walking and in standing firmly; for one leg was shrunken into a slight deformity.

On the intense, lonely stillness of the night the throbbing puffs of the engines seemed the voice of the great river—relentless, solemn, insistent. The tinkling of the pilot's bell sounded intermittently from the engine-room; and monotonously reiterated, came the weird call of the leadsman as he sounded the depths of the uncertain channel.

"M-a-r-k eight! M-a-r-k eight! Quarter less eight!"

Sargent Everett turned away from the deepening gloom of the river, restless and impatient, now that his destination was so near. Three days, if all went well, would see him in the town he had chosen for the commencement of his career.

The leadsman's call broke more harshly on the night. "Mark four! Mark four! Quarter—less—"

Suddenly the pulsing of the engines stopped and the boat drifted into the enveloping shadows of the shore. The branches of a tree swept the upper deck, leaving sprays of moss tangled in the railing. A bell crashed out a signal of alarm and the boat came to a full stop.

"Tie up and get out there and sound that channel, Jiggetts," came a sonorous voice from the lower deck. "I'm not a-countin' on goin' a-ground here to-night. God knows what this old river's been up to since we passed up, two months ago."

Directly following the words, a huge line of rope went coiling through the air to the shore. Two negroes sprang after it, hastily wrapping it around a mammoth cottonwood tree that towered out of the darkness. A skiff shot out from the boat; two men at the oars, and one standing well forward recording the depth as they moved carefully along.

In a few minutes the boat became enveloped once more in the stillness of the night; the flare from the torch baskets at the masthead gleamed upon a shore of endless willows, a distant line of cypresses, a land where seemingly no explorer had yet penetrated. The call of the leadsman grew fainter and fainter, dying away at last to an echo.

"Mighty sorry to tie up." The Captain's voice broke the stillness as he approached the young traveller, "but I reckon it's better than runnin' on one of them bars and restin' there till another boat comes along and pulls us off. I reckon you'd rather run the chance, hey, just so's you could get to the end of your travellin'. I know how you feel. You're just itching to get there this minute and get to work—ain't it the truth?"

The Captain, a rugged pioneer, known from one end of the river to the other, shoved his hands deep into his pockets and peered into the darkness.

"Yes, I want to get there, Captain. I'm impatient and restless and all that,—and yet," he hesitated, following the glance of the man beside him. "I believe I've fallen under the spell of this old river. At first it made me think of the ocean in its breadth and loneliness, but I see now that it is not the same at all. This wilderness of lowlands that we have been passing through for the last week makes it seem even more desolate and forsaken. Yet—in its very solitude one feels a certain nearness to God," he ended reflectively.

The old Captain's eyes shifted from the black shore, deepening, as his gaze lingered on the broad expanse of water, into an expression much like that of a dog that gazes into the eyes of the master it worships.

"We-ell, I reckon I'm sorter fond of it, too. When a feller's lived with a thing fifty years he's mighty likely to have some sorter feelin' for it." His eyes twinkled as he continued, "Y' know, sir, that old river always puts me in mind of a woman; it's changing its mind all the time, it's cantankerous—you can't any more count on it than a bad penny, and when it takes a notion to change its channel, it just goes ahead and does it and don't say a thing. Why, sir, haven't I see it cut off ten miles in one place by goin' straight through when it used to make a bend! I like it, though, just because it's notionate and don't bother about anybody. D' you ever hear the old sayin' that when the good Lord made it, He washed His hands in it and told it to go where it damn pleased? Well, sir," the old fellow threw back his head and let out a gust of laughter, "it's been doin' that pretty nigh ever since!"

He turned around as he ended so that he looked into the young man's face, and in the moments of silence that followed, the mass of wrinkles about his eyes moved into an expression of half mirth, half sadness. He had liked the youngster, as he called him, since the moment he had come aboard at St. Louis and taken passage for the South. Something in Sargent Everett's peculiarly winning manner, in his fresh good humour and manliness, or perhaps a sympathy for his

deformity, had awakened an interest in the old boatman. What it was he did not stop to consider, but he liked the boy, and now that his long journey was nearing its end, he felt a pang of regret that was new to him. Looking into the bright, hopeful face before him, he thought that, after all, youth was the only period of life worth living.

"An' so you're another one of them fellers who're comin' down here to make their fortunes," he finally said, as if more in comment than in question.

The young fellow's face brightened responsively.

"I hope it will be my fortune—but at present it is more a living I am seeking."

The Captain put out both hands, taking firm hold of the young fellow's arms and looking squarely into his face.

"Then why in the devil did you come down here?" he said sharply. "It's no place for the likes of you! You're not the sort of youngster for this kind of rough life. Why didn't you go to a big town, son? This country's for pioneers."

The young fellow drew himself away, a look of pain flashing across his face.

"I'm not delicate," he said quickly. "I'm very strong. I was the best swimmer at college. You think because my leg is bad that I can't do what other men have done! Give me time and I'll show you!"

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, lad," the old fellow answered slowly, relighting the pipe which he held always in his mouth. "I know darned well you've got grit enough to pull you through, but why, of all places in this country, you should have chosen Natchez—kinder puzzles me. Haven't you ever heerd about what they call 'Natchez-under-the-Hill?' Why, sir, it's the toughest hole on the river!"

"It was the offer I had that brought me, Captain. New England is crowded with school-teachers; there was nothing for me to do, and I had to work. My father was a sea captain, as I told you, and in the year 1812 he lost everything. Since then we have been very poor. I had to do something—and I had this offer down here."

The Captain drew at his pipe reflectively, letting the words of the young man die away on the stillness of the night.

"So you're goin' to be a school-teacher!" The words came so frankly full of disappointment that the young fellow laughed outright.

"Not always, I hope," he answered, still smiling. "As soon as I finish studying for the examinations, I hope to be admitted to the bar. Then I can practise law."

The Captain gave an expressive grunt.

"That's worse yet—a lawyer—begad! Why, boy, what chance'll you have in this hotbed of pioneers and adventurers that's been flockin' down here for the last fifteen years? Why, sir, with shin-plaster currency and rich cotton plantations

and more slaves than they know what to do with, and gambling and drinking all the time—what can a youngster like you expect to do!" The old fellow's head wagged doubtfully. "I'd a heap rather see you go all the way down to New 'leans with me and take a vessel back to where you come from than stop off in this here country," he added with another expressive grunt and a deep dig into his pockets.

"You think, then," the young fellow smiled with a courage that felt no dampening from the advice given. "You think I'm not fit to make my way in the community you describe?"

"Yes, sir, that's exactly what I'm a-thinkin'. You've been brought up different from these folks and you haven't the first inkling of the life down here. It'll go powerful hard on you and I don't see where the good'll come in."

"Still you are bound to admit that it is a good place for a lawyer," the youth answered, unabashed.

"Ye-es, I grant you that. Natchez is only about fifty miles from Jackson, and I suppose your head's already set on the Capitol. 'Tain't what you're goin' to make out of it that's a-worryin' me—it's what in the devil's going to become of you, with that set of reckless spendthrifts. Ho, there, Jiggetts!" He sprang forward and peered down at the returning skiff. "How 'bout the channel?"

"All right, sir. We can make it safe. Same as when we came up," a voice answered out of the darkness.

"How 'bout wood—got enough?" the Captain called down to the engineer who stood on the lower deck.

"Plenty to get us to ole man Vick's plantation, and I'm a-countin' on bein' thar to-morrow mornin'."

"Good! Let's pull out and get ahead agin."

A little later the boat was pushing towards the middle stream, the shore dwindling on each side to a thin, black ribbon. The moon had risen well into the sky and was shedding its cold light over the glassy surface of the river; the deep puffs of the engines sent columns of black smoke far up into the clear heavens.

"Come over here, youngster," called the Captain from the forward deck, where he had settled himself into a chair, his feet elevated on the railing to the level of his head, the glow from his pipe gleaming full into his face. "Come over here and sit down. You ain't sleepy, yet, I reckon—are you?"

From where they sat the forward part of the lower deck was in full view. Two torch baskets, filled with blazing pine, brilliantly illuminated that part of the boat. On both sides were piles of meal and corn, sacks of salt meat and barrels of flour, and two bales of cotton on their way to New Orleans, and thence to Boston by sea—the first bales of that season.

In the centre, where the light fell strongest, was a group of negroes; some lying full length in the deep sleep of exhaustion, others gathered in small circles

from which came the sound of rattling dice. The twanging of a banjo and the sound of many shuffling feet floated out softly on the silent river.

When the young man had taken his seat beside the Captain, the old fellow laid his hand on his shoulder, almost affectionately.

"If you're bent and determined on gettin' off at Natchez," he began between short puffs at his pipe, "I've a mind to give you some advice. Want to hear it?"

"Of course I do, Captain," he answered quickly. "But I don't want you to think I shall not succeed there. When a fellow is willing to work, and overflowing with energy and ambition, success is bound to come. I know it will come to me—I'm going to it. And if the fight is to be a difficult one, as you say," he added after a moment's hesitation, "perhaps it will make me all the stronger for the struggle. You are not going to discourage me, Captain, no matter how wild or savage you paint this country. I am going to stop here."

The Captain's heavy hand fell on the young man's knee with a hearty slap, and for a moment he looked into the brave face before him yearningly.

"You've got the right spirit, lad. I'm mighty glad to see it, too. But y' see I'm a powerful lot of years older than you—how many d' I tell you t'other day?"

"Forty-three."

"We-ell, you see, forty-three years of experience is worth something, I'd let you know. I've seen this country almost from the beginning of the white settlements. I used to come down here on flat boats with my pa, way back in the days of the Revolution, and when we reached New 'leans, we'd go all the way back to Vincennes in wagons. Ugh! those were days for you! And nights, too, with panthers howling round our prairie schooners, and Indians tryin' to slip up and scalp you 'most any time. Natchez belonged to the Spaniards then—you'll see old Gayosa's government house still standin' there. But now, since Mississippi's been let in as a State, it seems to me like 'most everybody's been tryin' to get down here. If many more of you Yankees come on down, we'll soon be a populated country."

"Then you like Yankees—you do not think that will make me unpopular—down here?" the young fellow interrupted.

"Shucks! It ain't where a man comes from." The old fellow uncrossed his legs and crossed them again. "It's the man himself. That's fust what I was about to tell you. If a man's a good feller, then folks'll treat him like one; but if he comes down here with a lot of bottled-up notions from that there cold country of yours, they'll not have much use for him. And that's where you've got to be precious careful. I tell you right now, if you make a hit at the start, it won't take you long to win out. Go in for a good time, show 'em you're a good feller, and take my word for it, they'll think you're a heap smarter than if you spend your time tryin' to ram your book knowledge down their throats."

The young fellow remained silent, reflecting over the Captain's advice. Through its crudities, he was beginning to see and appreciate the viewpoint of one whom experience had made a reader of human nature.

"At first, go easy, and take things as they come; don't air your own opinions every chance you get; don't strut around like some young lawyers I see, with a long face, and a head full of—what d' you call that feller that wrote the big book?"

"Blackstone?"

"Yes, sir, that's the one. Don't always be talkin' about him and lookin' as independent as a wood-sawyer's clerk. You know exactly what I mean." The Captain tilted his chair to a more dangerous angle.

"If you'll make yourself one of 'em, you'll come out all right—I'll bet my bottom dollar on that! For you've got a way with you, as the sayin' goes, and that's the principal thing a feller needs in this world."

"The only trouble is," the young man answered, smiling broadly, "that I have got some old-fashioned principles, as you call them, and convictions, too."

"Damn your convictions." The Captain's chair came to the floor with a crash. "That's what ruins more men than anything else—convictions! I say if you've got 'em, keep 'em to yourself—don't let 'em out! Remember, you're goin' to a country where everything is wide open and you've got to be one of the boys—or you might just as well turn your head back to where you come from."

The young fellow laughed heartily. Edging his chair closer to the Captain, he watched the play of his features in the glow from his pipe. The thousand wrinkles about his eyes changed eloquently with the intenseness of his words. "Evidently you have decided that I am terribly solemn, Captain. But you are wrong," he said, still laughing easily. "I enjoy life, and a good time as much as anybody—perhaps more than most! Only I haven't taken that enjoyment in gambling and drinking, which you seem to think so necessary."

For answer, the old man's head shook doubtfully.

"Then you'd better give up being a lawyer down here," his grey eyes danced merrily. "Unless," his hands came together with a loud clap, "unless—you'd like to give 'em the idea you're a sport, and at the same time not be one. Gee whilligens!" he cried, laughing until the tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks. "That would be a fine set out. Listen, youngster, I'm going to tell you how to do it, and if you don't get 'em coming your way right from the jump, my name's not Benjamin Mentdrop. Now, first of all, when you land at Natchez, ride right up the hill to the Mansion House. You'll see a lot of fellers loafing 'round there to find who come on the boat—what you are and what's your business—you know the kind I mean; the sort whose business is finding out other people's. Then, there's always a lot of the bloods of the town there, too. Well, don't let 'em know you've even seen 'em. Just walk in and sign your name with a flourish, so," his hand swept the air,

with a rather dangerous gesture for a pen. "Just as soon as you're through, you'll see 'em go up and read your name, and when they all are eyeing you, just walk over to the bar—so." Here the Captain got up and swaggered across the deck with a bravado that bespoke personal experience. "And order—plenty loud enough for the crowd to hear what you're sayin'—a bottle o' champagne and a box o' cigars sent up to your room. I tell you, sir," taking his seat again, "that'll make your reputation without any waiting."

The young fellow joined in the infectious laughter of the Captain. It was too natural a performance not to show that the old fellow was describing his own methods.

"I'm afraid that reputation would be one I'd never outlive," he said, when they had become serious again. "What do you suppose would become of my position as tutor in the family I'm going to?"

"Position-your-grandaddy! The thing is to make a hit; you don't have to live up to it," the Captain promptly rejoined. "All you want is to have the crowd see you know a thing or two and they'll take you up before you know it. And if you're going to be a lawyer, you want these fellows' cases, and I tell you right now, you've got to play 'em a bit. When you get as old as I am you'll see then how this whole blamed thing they call life is nothin' more'n less than a steady game of bluff—right straight through!"

The boat was swinging into a broad bend of the river when he finished, and through the clarity of the night, a long line of hills was coming into view on the eastern horizon. The long journey through banks of endless flat country was left behind and the sloping hills rose as if to extend a welcome to the voyagers.

"That's old Vick's plantation across the point," the Captain said, rising and stretching his arms above his head. "Looks like we're near there, don't it; but it'll be mornin' before we land." Looking at his large watch, its open face characteristic of its owner, he gave an exclamation of surprise and turning away hurried down the ladder to the lower deck.

"Don't forget what I've been telling you!" he called back as he disappeared. "I wa'n't born yesterday, nor the day before neither."

The young fellow walked forward when he was alone, and stood where he could see beneath him the prow of the boat pushing its way into the impenetrable blue of the broad stream. He had felt the influence of the river that night more than at any time during his voyage. Its immensity, its awfulness, gripped him with a new understanding of eternity. The endless legends it embodied rose before him; gorgeous pageants passed in review; into his vision came the long procession of pioneers who had set sail upon these waters; De Soto first, who slept now within its enveloping solitude, afterwards Joliet and Marquette, La Salle with his cross of conquest and his flag of France, the Spaniards from the

Mexican Gulf clashing with the English out of the North, and always, coming first upon the river and still present in their silent, stealthy canoes, the real owners of its breadth and length—the Red Men. All these he saw pushing their way along and seeking their fortune, even as he was doing now.

His face was turned towards the south, the place to which his destiny was calling him; in it lay the mystery of his future. Far behind him was the land of his birth, which held the compelling force that was driving him on and on to that future, as relentlessly as the silent river was sweeping to the sea.

In an incident of his childhood lay this force which had made the severing of home ties less bitter and the setting out towards an unknown country the first step in the realization of years of determination. So filled with suffering was this incident that, after twelve years, it lived in his thoughts' with insistent detail.

It had happened in an apple orchard in Maine. There had been a day of great festivity, gay in the gathering of apples, and in the knowledge that a ship had been sighted in which the sea captain, his father, was returning from a six months' voyage. He saw himself as a little limping boy who had just come home from the town school, flushed with pride at the success of his first speech; then he saw himself late in the day, when the ship had anchored and the friends had gathered in a circle over the completed work, repeating the speech to the enthusiastic crowd.

How well he remembered the encouraging faces, the baskets of red apples all about, the pungent smell of the fruit, the twisted branches of the trees back of them, and beyond, far down the sloping hill, the great Atlantic on which the ship had come to anchor! His first speech! Even the words stuck in his memory! Then, while the great joy he had felt in their applause was flushing his face and making him tingle with the first stirrings of awakened talent, he had been lifted into the arms of the sea captain who had stolen up behind the tree and heard him. In that moment came the blow which was yet to mar or make him. The proud father, holding him up before the crowd, had cried out with a great roar of laughter:

"He's a pretty bright little rascal, isn't he? We'll have to send him to college one of these days and make a big speaker out of him—even if he is a cripple."

"Even if he is a cripple!" The words rang out as sharply now as they had twelve years before. He heard them so distinctly that the inflection of the big man's voice, thoughtless and unmeaning as it had been, made him throb with the first opening of the wound. Cripple! Cripple! The words were as the whistling of knotted thongs. Never before that day had he heard them applied to him. Now they were to be with him always; he was powerless to forget them. They had pushed him on and on from that time forward, in a mad desire to embrace all the learning within his power so as to show the world some day that it was not a

curse of God's, to be less perfect than other men.

CHAPTER II
THE CAPTAIN'S ADVICE

One day later the young pioneer who had come South to make his fortune looked eagerly out upon a distant view of sloping hills. The end of his long journey had come. The little town, nestling at the top of the bluffs, in a setting of thick foliage, brought to him a thrill of expectancy. Everything lay before him there, his beginning on the long journey of his life work, his success or failure, his happiness or his sorrow.

It was still very early in the morning and in the mistiness of the scene, in the shadowy beauty of the daybreak, his imagination carried him far into a future of his own creating. The lazy curling smoke of early morning fires rising from the town became symbolic to him, the soft beauty of an aged oak grove, festooned in grey moss and reflected in the gloomy surface of the water by the pale rose background of dawning day meant to him that disappointments and vain strivings were to pass from him forever now. He was very young and full of expectancy and hope, and as he threw back his head and breathed deeply, the colour rushed into his face, and his shoulders squared themselves unconsciously.

The summons to breakfast called him away for a few minutes, but he was soon back again, watching each detail of the scene as it unfolded before him, impatiently restless at the slow movement of the boat.

Finally the boat rounded a point and made directly across the broad sweeping bend of the river toward the opposite shore where a settlement of houses at the foot of the bluff had suddenly come into view.

"Well, here we are." He felt the grasp of the captain's hand upon his arm. "How d' you like the looks of your new home? You wait till you get on top of the hill, though. Natchez under the hill and on top is a mighty different place. I'm going to liven 'em up a bit this morning and let 'em know we're coming. If these folks didn't see a boat every now and then, they'd think they were dead, sure." He smiled good humouredly as a shrill whistle floated across the water from the town. "Bless me, if they ain't got that saw mill to working—the first one between here and New 'leans, I reckon. Just wait a minute, though, and I'll give 'em an answer. I told the fireman to stuff the engine plumb full of pitch pine—'that'll give

us a powerful lot of black smoke—and when I turn loose oh the whistle, watch out!"

The boat drifted a little below the landing, then turning slowly, pushed its way steadily against the current. In the meantime the Captain had taken his position well forward where he could view the lower deck and direct the landing of the boat. "Hi there—you," followed by a collection of magnificent oaths as he found a negro going contrary to his directions. "Get out there to that capstan—man the bars—now—all together—easy," ending with more eloquent oaths as the heavy coils of rope were thrown to the shore, and the stage planks shoved into place.

The young traveller stood staring down into the throng of upturned faces, realizing that out of all the number there was not one he had seen before or from whom he could claim a welcome. There were bronzed faced woodsmen, there were the old residents, paler by contrast, and as enthusiastic in their welcome of a boat that brought them newspapers and tidings of the world, as children expecting a new toy; there were the black shining faces of the negroes who lounged on the cotton bales lining the banks; there were Indians in their bright blankets and feathers; here and there were dark skinned Spaniards; indeed it would have been difficult to find a nationality that was not represented in Natchez in those days.

Back of this oddly assorted throng extended high piles of cotton bales waiting to be transported to New Orleans, and beyond these a few houses and stores, after which the hill rose abruptly with a winding road climbing to the summit. At the top, wide spreading trees cut off any view of the upper town.

"Good luck to you, my boy," the old Captain said, slipping his arm through the young fellow's as they passed down the stage plank. "I'm counting on hearing big things of you one of these days, and I hate to be disappointed. Don't you forget my advice, and remember—if you're ever in a tight fix or mixed up in some sorter trouble, you know where to come."

"Thank you, Captain," the young fellow answered, his hand tightening in its hold upon the big rough one. To find such honest hearty friendship beaming upon him from the old weather worn face made him regret more keenly their parting. "But if I take your advice I'm afraid I'll need your help sooner than you think."

The Captain gave way to one of his sudden bursts of noisy laughter. "Never you mind that—lad," he said with a chuckle. "What I told you was downright common horse sense. I'll see you some of these days again, and I've a sneaking notion it won't be so far off." He turned away hurriedly and had soon disappeared in the crowd of negroes that were unloading the boat.

The young fellow stepped ashore and was taken possession of by a negro

with a beaming face, who shouldered his trunk and carpet bag without any consultation whatever, and led the way toward a nameless vehicle standing in the road. It was at least some satisfaction to find one who had anticipated his wishes, and the newcomer took his seat in the hack with a sigh of relief and some doubts of a successful ascent of the steep hill which loomed before him.

"Whar to, Boss?" came from the eminently competent guide when he had mounted the box. Evidently he was porter, coachman and owner of the vehicle.

"To the Mansion House."

"I knowed it," with a shake of his head and a display of fine white teeth. "All de sho' 'nough white folks goes dah. It's de place ob de town." Then with a dashing sweep of the whip, he set off up the hill at a rattling pace. Half way up they came to a sudden stop and the driver turned round again. "Boss," he began in an evident desire to be friendly. "is Gin'r'l Jackson still President ob de United States?" His doubts settled on this question, the precarious speed was resumed, the top of the hill reached and the journey ended before a long two story building, proudly bearing a large sign on which was painted in red and yellow letters, "The Mansion House."

Two negro porters rushed forward from the main door that opened directly on the pavement, one grabbing the carpet bag from the vehicle, the other lifting the little hair trunk with an ease that showed the lightness of its contents.

The young fellow stopped a moment as he stepped to the pavement and glanced at his surroundings. The pavement before the tavern was of brick, wide and shaded by overarching elms that cast a thick shade, making the place into a sort of veranda for the hostelry. Tables and chairs were placed here, and several groups of men had gathered on the pavement to procure the papers that had just been brought up from the boat. Near the main door four men were seated about a table, one reading aloud from a paper, interrupted at almost every other word by the vehement and noisy comments of his listeners, while an agile waiter was supplying the party continually with trays of drinks.

As the young fellow slowly made his way toward the door of the hostelry the man who was reading stopped suddenly, laid down his paper, and frankly stared at him. The others followed the glance of the first so that he was forced to undergo the scrutiny of the entire crowd as he entered the tavern.

He instinctively knew that he was being criticized and commented upon, and stopping a moment inside the door, he heard one of them say—"Another Yankee schoolteacher—I'll wager! If we don't look out we'll have nothing but Yankee professors and school marms down here presently." Then followed a burst of laughter and an order for another round of juleps.

The young fellow flushed hotly. The tone of the man's voice, the implied insult, the utter contempt these men felt for his position, made him tingle with a

violent anger; then, with the quick subduing of his resentment came the thought of the old captain's advice. A moment more and he had made a decision that in calm self-possession would have been utterly at variance with his judgment. Following the captain's suggestion he walked with considerable dignity across the room, wrote his name across the ledger with a flourish, ordered the best room the tavern afforded, then asked to be directed to the bar where he gave orders for a box of cigars and a bottle of champagne to be sent to his room.

The first effect of his action was in the attention of the negro who had driven him up from the boat and was now filling the part of waiter; the fellow fairly danced before him in his endeavours to anticipate his wishes. He flung open the door of the bedroom with a superb flourish as if he were admitting some royal personage, bowing obsequiously as the young man passed in. When two cigars had been added to a dollar tip, the negro nearly lost his balance in getting back down stairs to impart his information to the others. Passing through the barroom one of the men at the table outside called to him.

"Who's the limping Yankee, Jonas?"

"Mr. Sargent Everett, Boss, an' a sho' 'nough gentleman too, sir."

"Schoolteacher, Jonas?"

"Lawdy, no-o, Boss, not him. He's a gentleman of means—he is. Ordered a bottle of champagne and a box of cigars soon's he done got in de house."

The questioner whistled.

"Well—that sounds pretty good for a Yankee. Let's ask him down, boys, what do you say? Maybe he can give us some news from Washington."

"By all means; let's have him down and find out what he is," the others assented.

In a few minutes the young traveller was greeted by his black friend with the information that Lawyer Lemuel Jervais presented his compliments and would be pleased to have Mr. Sargent Everett join him and his friends in a round of juleps.

At first his eyes widened in surprise, then he flushed with the memory of his recent anger, finally ending by throwing himself back in his chair and laughing till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

Meanwhile Jonas' eyes were moving with beaming admiration from the face of the stranger to the bottle of champagne and back again.

"Boss," he said finally, seeing that the newcomer showed no signs of seriousness. "Boss, don't you want me to open the wine for you?"

"No," the young man answered, rising. "I'll let you open it for me later. Present my compliments to the gentlemen and tell them I'll be with them in a few minutes."

As he stood before the mirror of his bureau and adjusted a fresh stock, he

smiled at the wavering reflection before him.

"Sargent Everett," he said, half aloud. "You've made a first impression—and—I'm very much of the opinion—that it may prove an uncomfortably lasting one."

CHAPTER III
JULEPS AND POLITICS

"Yes, gentlemen, it is true—the President removed seven hundred office holders and appointed in their places men of his own political beliefs."

"Well, Jefferson did the same—why not Jackson?"

"Yes, but what is his reason?"

"He claims the affairs of a republic will be best administered when the officers hold the same political sentiments as their President."

"That may be, but if we invest such power in our President we might as well not have fought for our liberties at all. Our fathers set us free and now, by Gad, this man wants to make us all slaves again."

"That'll do, Jervais, we've heard enough of your theories for awhile. Let this gentleman continue. What is this news about the Bank of the United States, Mr. Everett?"

Everett was sitting at the table with his newly made friends—old friends now, since two hours had already passed in answering their insatiable store of questions. They were thirsty for news, these men who were eight weeks' travel from the seat of government in a place where incidents happening two months before, were read about and discussed as if just taking place. It was easy enough for Everett to interest them, for one who had just visited Washington and listened to the debates of the eloquent Colonel Hayne with Daniel Webster, the rising young orator from Massachusetts, was to them a man to be respected and listened to. The National Intelligencer lay on the table before them, neglected and unread, even though it had come on that day's boat, for these events of their own country, narrated by a young man whose flushed face and glowing eyes spoke so eloquently a deep interest and grasp of his subject, had an added significance to the group of men about him. His statements were interrupted by exclamations, more often oaths, and once in a heated argument that took place between two of the listeners as to the claims of the Whigs and the Democrats, the whole crowd

was compelled to separate the combatants and enforce silence.

Everett studied the faces of his companions as they leaned on the table and listened to him. He found in them something he had never seen in the friends of his youth, in the constrained countenances of the more civilized New Englanders. Here were quick candour and unconsidered opinions, condemnation and praise in the same breath, sudden resentment of some statement as if it were a personal insult to differ from another's opinion, and in all of them a certain artlessness, the fresh vigour and enthusiasm of a community that was still young and still recklessly successful. In these men the young stranger found a fascination that charmed him, he felt his repressed sympathy surge within him and rush out to meet the cordiality of these new friends. He could call them his friends already, he felt sure, for in their attitude of attention and interest he intuitively felt that they liked him. He saw it in the whimsical smile of the lanky Tennessean who with his chimney pot hat set at a rakish angle and his linsey waistcoat unbuttoned under the stress of the moment, watched him with eyes that were keenly kind; it was in the sparkling eyes of the dark little Creole, who met each description of Washington with praises of New Orleans and La Belle Teche. He saw it in the intense interest of two members of the Legislature, and in the land agent, and even in the critical smile of handsome debonnaire Lemuel Jervais, the Beau of the town, the wealthiest of all the young "bloods," the most promising lawyer admitted to the bar that year—although in his nonchalant indifference Everett saw a certain envy that was flattering.

"About the United States Bank charter," Everett continued, in answer to the last question, "they say Mr. Jackson claims it is unconstitutional and inexpedient. He recommends that the old charter be allowed to expire by its own limitation."

"And when will that be?"

"In '36. It is whispered that he hopes to distribute the surplus which has accumulated among State banks."

"He can't do it, I'm sure. There is no warrant of law for such an act."

"Did you ever know Andrew Jackson to wait for anything when his mind was made up!"

"You didn't finish about the revenues at Charleston—were they collected?"

"Yes, and the President wouldn't hear to the debate of Hayne and Webster. He took matters into his own hands and issued a proclamation denying the right of any state to nullify the laws of Congress."

"There they go again, making us into a worse monarchy than we've just thrown off. In ten years we won't have any rights. I suppose if Andrew Jackson took a notion, he'd abolish slavery. But if he does, do you know what we'll do down here?" Jervais' voice thundered out irritably, and he struck the table with his fist. "We'll secede."

For a second the questions stopped, and in the silence Everett saw that a subject had been mentioned that threw a sullen anger over the entire group.

"So Charleston had to back down, did she!" drawled Mr. Suggs.

"I don't know whether you'd call it backing down or not, but when Scott reached there with his troops and a man-of-war, the nullifying party had disappeared."

"Hmp!" grunted the Tennessean, "I reckon I'll have to go up to the Hermitage and see Andy, he's getting to be such a big bug now-a-days."

"He won't know you any longer, Suggs—better not go. And the Indians, Mr. Everett, how about them?"

Everett went into a long discussion of the formation of the Indian Territory which was being urged by Andrew Jackson as a solution of the Indian problem.

All the while Jervais was sitting with his chair tilted back against the wall, listening with supercilious indifference.

"How does it happen, Mr. Everett?" he said at last, looking into the face of the newcomer with a directness that spoke the doubt beneath his question. "How does it happen that you tell us nothing of this anti-slavery agitation that comes rumoured from Boston? You say you are from that country—so, of course, you oppose slavery too. Have you come down here to sow seeds of abolition?"

Everett met the eyes of his questioner squarely, and realized for the first time that this was the man who had made the slurring remark as he entered the tavern. For a few moments he considered his answer, knowing well that the impression he had made upon these men would be instantly annulled by the wrong words. Any personal prejudice on the subject which he might have acquired from the sentiments already spreading in the North he immediately put aside.

"I think that question," he answered slowly, meeting the intense look of each man in the crowd, "should be settled by the people who are slave owners. I am not—so I know nothing of the subject."

A burst of applause came from the crowd, followed by each fellow extending a hand to Everett and insisting upon his taking another julep.

"If they'd all do that way and mind their own business it'd be a whole lot better," drawled Mr. Suggs. "You ain't like Miss Prudence Varnum that came down here from Salem last year—and I'm certainly glad of it. She gave out she'd come here to teach school, but we soon found out it wasn't that. By Jingo, she'd come down here to write a book on the sins of slavery. We all didn't want the likes of her in town and we all just fixed a way to get her back home where she belonged. I just goes to her one day and tells her I'd heard she was writing a book, and that I could tell her a damn sight more about slavery than any fellow in town—if she wanted to hear it. She said she wasn't writing any book at all, but

if I had a mind to tell her she had no objections to listening. You can bet I laid it on heavy. I lied as fast as a dog can trot, and the whiter her face got the more I'd lie. You can bet I made up a good tale about the way I had spent the last Sunday down on old Seth Burton's plantation. Says I, 'Miss Prudence, it certainly was blood curdling, and you sure want to put it in your book. But somehow, I kinder hate to tell you about it.' Says she, 'Oh, Mr. Suggs, please do. You don't know how it will help me to know the real state of this corrupt country.' Then I told her that we had run out of amusement, and just to liven up things, Seth had a big nigger tied to a tree and rammed a powder horn down his throat. 'Then, madam,' says I, 'he put a slow match to the powder while the rest of us stood off and bet whether the nigger's head would be blown clean off or just half way.' That went pretty hard on her, but I was bent on giving her her fill, so I went right on and told her that when they had too many nigger babies on old Seth's plantation he'd have them brought to town in a cotton basket and sold by the dozen, and if they didn't sell them all, he had what was left thrown in the river. I got up to leave after my last little piece of information, for I saw I'd have a fainting woman on my hands if I didn't. But, bless you, she called me back when I'd reached the door, and said, 'Mr. Suggs, you have opened my eyes. I had no idea it was such a wicked town. It almost makes me wonder what they would do to any one who expressed her disapproval of slavery.' 'Well, ma'm,' says I, 'I never heard tell of but one woman who expressed her opposition to the matter, and considering the reputation of this town, I can't say they treated her so badly. They only tarred and feathered her, and rode her on a rail for a few squares.' She left town on the first boat up the river, believing every word I'd told her, and I reckon she's lecturing right now on the information I gave her. But that's the way we handle 'em down here, if we don't like 'em, and it's a tip to you, sir, because you appear to be the best Yankee we've seen down this way. Hello, there's the stage from Jackson."

The loud fan-fare of a horn broke upon the mid day drowsiness of the town. In a few minutes the pavement before the tavern was crowded. From every direction people came running to get a close view of the day's arrival. A row of negro waiters lined up before the tavern door, an array that went far to impress the provincial voyageur as to the importance of the hostelry. Some Indians gathered in a silently observing group, and in a brick store across the street clerks and customers stood in the front door—for this was the terminus of the forty mile coach trip from Jackson, and the event of the day that broke the monotony of existence.

In a cloud of dust the coach finally made its appearance, a great lumbering car, swung on leather straps, and tilting from side to side, as the six lathered horses were urged into a final gallop by means of a cracking whip, loud blasts of

the horn, and an impressive handling of the reins which the driver managed in magnificent style.

The group about the table, interrupted in their political discussions, wheeled about in their chairs, and though the block where the coach was to pull up was only a few paces directly before them, Jervais had already risen and detached himself from the others.

"Expecting some one, Jervais?" Mr. Suggs called after him, at the same time winking at the rest of the group.

Jervais flushed and turned back for a moment.

"Yes, Mistress Brandon is returning from Cooper's Well to-day."

Everett started and half rose from his chair.

"Mistress James Brandon?" he asked quickly.

"Yes," Jervais answered, looking at him with the hauteur that was his marked characteristic. "Do you know her?"

"No—at least I mean only through letters. I have come down here to be a tutor for her children."

Before he had finished speaking the coach was at the block, and Jervais had rushed forward, to see that the ladder was placed firmly in the door.

The first passenger to appear was a tall woman, enveloped in a voluminous linen duster, her features almost obscured beneath a green barège veil. Jervais assisted her to alight with elaborate courtesy, and then turned to lift out two boys and a little girl.

The girl, when she stepped down to the pavement, evidently disdaining the proffered help of Jervais, looked about her in apparent search for some friend. As her glance travelled from one face to another, it rested for a moment on Everett, half questioning, then quickly shifted to the others. In the second that their eyes met Everett got a vivid impression of her oddly beautiful face—thin, and very dark, with intense grey eyes that contrasted almost weirdly with her black hair. In the deep shadow of a projecting poke bonnet her eyes seemed almost too large for the delicate contour of her face, and as she turned away, he noticed that she wore her hair in two long plaits.

Suddenly she uttered a quick cry of pleasure as she saw an old man coming towards her out of the crowd, and after rushing forward to kiss him they both turned towards a carriage which had just stopped near the pavement.

"So they are to be my first pupils," Everett said half aloud, and smiling as he watched the party drive off.

Mr. Suggs, sitting next to him, heard the words and saw the smile. "And a nice job you'll have, too," he said in a confidential whisper. "That little gal, you saw her, didn't you? She's Natalia Brandon and a whole school in herself, if what I hear going around is so. But she ought to be kinder interesting too, she's got

enough history back of her. You know, her mother," Suggs edged his chair closer to Everett and lowered his voice, "it's whispered hereabouts, was a daughter of Gayosa. Of course, I don't want you to say it as coming from me, but there's a lot of folks think it, just the same."

"Mistress Brandon," Everett exclaimed, "that's impossible! I know her relatives in Boston."

"Oh no—not Mistress Brandon. She's the gal's stepmother. Brandon was married twice."

Everett looked in the direction the party had gone Their carriage had already disappeared down the street.

"And the old gentleman who met her," he asked, "who was he?"

"Shh! Here he comes with Jervais now."

Suggs rose as the two men came towards the table and held out his hand to the older man with the unmistakable signs of feeling a certain importance in the occasion.

"Mighty glad you come over here, Judge," he exclaimed in tones patently unctuous. "We've got something brand new in town to-day—a Yankee that's not an abolitionist."

CHAPTER IV

A GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL

As Everett rose to respond to the introduction of the newcomer, "Judge Houston," as Suggs explained with a flourish, "a Virginian, living in Mississippi, but still breathing the air of Virginia," he felt intuitively that he was standing before a man it would be an honour to know. In that moment the impression the others had made upon him became cheap and vulgar, for in the quiet strong face of this man who was evidently past sixty there was a benignity and gentleness, an intelligence made up not only of cleverness and book learning, but of a long life's experience in which sorrow and thought and difficulties overcome had brought a result near to perfection. He was a tall man, with broad heavy shoulders that were finally admitting the long struggle in a slight stoop; his face was strong, yet mild; his mouth firm with the stability of largeness and generosity. His head, with its high forehead, heavy eyebrows, and prominence in the region that denotes intelligence, would have conveyed an impression of cold intellectuality, had it

not been for the mellowing expression that shone from his clear blue eyes—a look that spoke without effort kindness and sympathy and friendliness toward the world. Beneath the force of his personality one felt something more potent than strength—perhaps it was the strength of sweetness. His carriage was dignified, yet natural; aristocratic yet gentle; and his graciousness softened the somewhat formal manner of the Colonial days which still clung to him. He wore the old fashioned fair top boots and shorts of that elder day, a shirt of fine ruffled linen, a waistcoat of the finest embroidered silk, and his hair, iron grey and thick, was reached back from the noble forehead and hung down in a queue behind, tied with a black silk ribbon—a fashion already passing with the memories of the Revolution. He was close shaven and neat to a nicety, with the exception of some grains of snuff which fell occasionally from the massive gold snuff box that hung from a chain about his collar.

When he had taken his seat at the table, and was mixing with an expression of pleasurable anticipation the toddy the waiter had brought him, he looked at Everett with a curiosity that quickly became flattering interest. The young fellow's eyes fell before the searching gaze of the older man for in them he imagined he saw a faint surprise at the company he had chosen upon his arrival. It was then that he regretted for the first time the wounded pride which had made him descend to the use of the Captain's advice.

The conversation changed from the arguing, tempestuous channel in which it had been running, and with the new influence that was felt by everyone, became more conservative and dignified.

"I suppose you have told them everything," the old man said to Everett when the tavern bell had reminded the group that it was their dinner hour. "Did you ever see fellows so hungry for news?" he added, as Jervais, the last to leave, had moved away. "But you must remember we are a long way off from the world down here."

"I was hardly aware myself that so much had happened until I began to tell them all I knew," Everett answered, happy to find himself alone with Judge Houston. "I believe I told them everything I have read and heard for months, and yet," he stopped suddenly and looked up to see if any of them remained, "do you know, I forgot to tell them that King George was dead and that the Duke of Clarence is now William the Fourth!"

"They will see it in the papers," the old man answered smiling, "I am sure you have told them enough for one day. I am the one who missed it all. Will you do me the honour of going home to dinner with me? It would give me much pleasure to hear all about the world from one who is so recently from the scene of action. Perhaps, too, I can show my appreciation by giving you something better than the corn dodgers and goat meat that you would surely get in this tavern."

Everett kept his eyes on the old man's as he rose from his chair in accepting the invitation. The surprise and pity which people always showed on first noting his deformity had made him morbidly sensitive and watchful, and when he saw no change of expression on the face of this old gentleman of Virginia that gave evidence that he had noticed his lameness, a feeling of great joy, almost love, rushed over him for the other; though, in the slow pace at which they walked and his frequent halts to call attention to some important object along the way, Everett knew that in this lay a veiled consideration.

The street was broad and cool in the shade of overarching trees, and as they strolled along, Judge Houston's arm resting on his, and his deep voice steady and full of the charm of provincial accent, Everett began to feel more and more contented with the call which had brought him to this place.

"That old church—yes—it was built by the Spaniards," the old man leaned against a fence for a moment. "And even I can remember when criminals used it as a place of safety—a sanctuary. I saw a murderer run up those steps and put his finger in the key hole of that same old door and keep his pursuers at bay. A queer old custom—but it has been years ago now. And their old priest, Father Brady, they called him—he was my ideal when I was a boy," he talked on as they resumed their walk. "He had great power over the Indians—used to get out among them and cowhide them into his church. And when it came to hunting he was the best shot in the town, and the best judge of horses and liquor—had a wink and a joke and a blessing and an alms for every one. Oh, I can tell you all the stories you want to know about Natchez; some of them are grewsome and some fantastic—but they are being forgotten now with the changes everywhere. We are getting civilized by degrees down here. Wife said the other day she had no intention of dying till she saw a steam car coming right into our town."

He ended with a smile as they stopped before a house set far back in a grove of trees. Walking beside him up the broad brick pavement, bordered on each side by high box, Everett realized that he was standing before the typically Southern home, with its façade of massive white columns, its wide green blinds against the red bricks, and its broad, hospitable verandas.

When he stood in the cool shade of the hall, the glare of the brilliant day shut out, the old gentleman's wife came forward to meet them. Looking down into her gentle sweet face Everett found himself wondering if Judge Houston and the grey haired gentle woman could not be some kin—for the long life together, the practice of the same pursuits, the indulgence, or more the renunciation of similar tastes had wrought a likeness between them which made the wife seem but a more delicate feminine edition of the man.

"You see the resemblance, Maria?" Judge Houston said to his wife, when the introduction was over.

"Oh yes, indeed—I saw it at once," she murmured in a low voice, and Everett thought he saw tears in her eyes as she turned quickly away. "I shall tell Cynthie to have dinner at once. I know you have been starving. Think of it—on a boat for a month!"

Everett turned back to Judge Houston as they were left alone and found the old gentleman smiling upon him with the same sad expression he had found in Mrs. Houston's eyes.

"I seem to remind you of someone," he said slowly, hesitating in the doubt of intruding upon what was evidently their sorrow.

"Yes—your resemblance to my son is very striking. He went out into the Western territories with some pioneers when he was just about your age. He was unlucky—the Indians—it is a long story—I shall tell it to you one of these days." The old gentleman pulled forward a chair and waved Everett towards one beside him. "And you are going to Mistress Brandon's?" he added, evidently wishing to change the subject.

"Yes," Everett answered. "I shall be glad to have you tell me something about her and her family for I practically know nothing. My chum at college, Morgan Talbot, is a kinsman of Mistress Brandon and he carried on the correspondence with her about me. She is taking me entirely on his recommendation, and I'm sure," he laughed, "she can't know Morgan well, or she wouldn't take a recommendation from a person who lets his heart rule his brain as Morgan does. It was entirely his friendship for me that made him do it."

"You must remember that when we get down here we don't have many opportunities to see relatives who live so far away as Boston. Mistress Brandon is a very capable and well educated woman. She has superintended the management of the plantation ever since Brandon died and has done it remarkably well; indeed, she is the wealthiest woman in this part of the state. There are three children. The eldest is not her child—she is a daughter of Brandon's first wife."

Just then Mrs. Houston reappeared to ask them into dinner.

"I see you are already gossiping," she said, when they vere seated in the high ceilinged dining room, made cool and free from flies by a large wooden fan hung from the ceiling above the table and kept in continual motion by a little negro who stood in one corner of the room and dozed as he automatically pulled the cord. "I've always told Judge Houston that it is an erroneous idea that women do the gossiping," she continued in her gentle, drawling voice, "I assure you, Mr. Everett, everything I know, I find out from him," with a charming glance of accusation at her husband, "after his visits to the Mansion House."

"But my news is political, Maria," expostulated Judge Houston. "And that isn't gossiping."

"Indeed—so you call arguing whether Mistress Brandon will accept Mr. Jer-

vais or not, a political discussion!"

"I never told you that, my dear," the old man smiled gently.

"No—of course you didn't, but some one else's husband told his wife and she told me." With which remark Mrs. Houston turned back to Everett. "You will be delighted with your new friends," pouring the coffee from an enormous silver urn. "To begin with, the place itself is beautiful. It was built by one of the Spanish governors and the romances connected with it are thrilling—but you will hear them all. Natalia will tell them to you."

"There she goes," laughed Judge Houston. "There won't be a thing left for you to find out for yourself, Mr. Everett. Maria, my dear, do leave something to the gentleman's imagination."

"Well, I only thought it wise for Mr. Everett to know something about them," she responded on the defensive. "Don't you think so, Mr. Everett?"

"Indeed I do, Mrs. Houston. It might help me to avoid any embarrassing subjects," he laughed happily, the hospitality and friendliness of this old fashioned couple making him feel more at home in the midst of their good natured banter.

"Embarrassing subjects! There you are quite right, Mr. Everett. For instance, Felix," with a conciliatory look toward her husband, "you know it would not do for him to ask much about the Spaniards, would it? You see, Mr. Everett, the mother of Natalia—that is the girl's name—was a Spaniard. Please don't think I'm gossiping now, but you'll understand I'm telling you this for your own benefit. The Spanish rule ended here about the time we came, so we don't pretend to know what the truth of the matter is. Suffice it to say, however, that Natalia's grandmother seems to have been criticized for her rather unconventional way of living. It was during her lifetime that the house was built, and from what I gather there was no lack of entertainment at all times. Her daughter, a beautiful, shy little creature, as delicate and sensitive as a flower, was fortunately sent to New Orleans to be educated and escaped the surroundings and influence of her mother. Brandon married her soon after her mother died, and as she had inherited this property here, they came back to Natchez to live. She was the most fascinating creature I ever knew, although that was not well—indeed, no one knew her well, and I often heard it said that she died insane shortly after Natalia's birth—some more coffee, Cynthie—but you can't believe everything you hear. I believe she just died as naturally as anyone else. Do have some more Sally Lunn—Cynthie, bring some hot rolls. Tell me, Mr. Everett, is it really true that you have pie for breakfast in New England?"

"I was just wondering what my mother would say to such extravagance as four kinds of hot bread at one meal. And as for pie," Everett laughed, "I'm afraid I'll have to admit I have eaten it for breakfast. Hot rolls are a Sunday attraction at home."

"I suppose we do strike a Northerner as extravagant," Mrs. Houston sighed helplessly, "but when one has so many slaves standing around, they must be kept busy. If I had to cook myself I don't suppose you would have had anything for dinner but baker's bread and fig preserves. You don't have slaves in Maine, either, do you?"

Everett met Judge Houston's eye and smiled.

"No," the old gentleman answered for him, "the Yankees imported them and found them unadapted to their climate, so they sent them down here and sold them to us. Now, I understand, they have decided they do not approve of slavery. Are you all that clever, Mr. Everett," he ended with a good humoured laugh.

"I have not read much on the subject," Everett answered, realizing that beneath the laughter there lay a deep seriousness. "But from what I have heard and from the reports of the Maryland Society, I had gotten the impression that many of the Southerners were in favour of emancipation."

"A great many are—in fact, some have gone so far as to give their slaves freedom. A man who died here last year, by his will, emancipated his slaves—there were nearly one hundred of them—and he also provided for their transportation to Africa with a full supply of agricultural implements and medicine and a year's provisions. It was a very good example he set, and one I hope will be imitated."

"Then you believe in emancipation?"

"I am in favour of emancipation with colonization. That is the only way it is possible. You can't allow slaves to be liberated and remain in the States, for in such a case the effect of an intermediate class between owners and slaves would be disastrous. The negroes must be either sent out of the country or remain slaves. There is no half way ground to be considered."

"From what you say, Judge Houston," Everett said, in the slight pause that followed, "I find myself wondering if you are a slave owner."

"Oh yes, I plead guilty, but in a very small way. We have five slaves, and I venture to say they wouldn't leave us if they could. Do you think so, Maria?"

Before answering, Mrs. Houston called the pleasant faced negro woman to her, "Cynthie, go upstairs," she said, an evident ruse to get the woman out of the room, "and bring me a—pocket handkerchief. I wanted to tell you about her," she continued when they were alone. "I asked her once what she would do if I set her free. Will you believe me?—she cried for a week and begged me every hour of the day please not to do it. You see, Mr. Everett, they feel they are a part of the family—and so they are. We take care of them just like they were children. Of course, we hear of cases where they are badly treated, but it is quite unusual."

"Yes," Judge Houston added, "if people would only stop to consider that it is

to a man's interest to treat his slaves well, in order that they may do their work, probably they would soon see the fallacy of the exaggerated tales that are causing so much ill feeling in the North."

"Now, here you all have been discussing this everlasting slave question," Mrs. Houston said, as they finally rose from the table, "and all the time I have been wondering to myself over a very different matter. Can either of you guess what it is?"

"The wonderings of a woman's mind are quite beyond us, eh, Mr. Everett?" said Judge Houston.

"I shall have to admit my failure this time." Everett smiled at Mrs. Houston.

"Well," she continued, half seriously, "I was trying to calculate how long it will take you to tame Natalia."

Everett flushed slightly and did not attempt to hide the surprise he felt at the remark.

"Ah, there you go with your woman's eternal speculation on some ridiculous topic." Judge Houston frowned in mock disapproval. "Here you take a young fellow, and before he has ever seen the child you put all sorts of ideas into his head about her."

"Nevertheless, I notice the young man is embarrassed," Mrs. Houston continued in evident enjoyment of Everett's increasing confusion. "It appears to me that perhaps he has seen our little girl already. Have you, Mr. Everett?"

Everett glanced at Judge Houston, smiling, then back at the kind old lady who was bent on teasing him.

"Someone pointed out Mistress Brandon and her children to me as they got out of the coach to-day," he answered finally.

"And there was a little girl, the daughter?" Mrs. Houston insisted.

"Yes, I think there was a little girl."

"Hm'm, I knew it. Was she about twelve years old and very pretty, with black hair and grey eyes?"

"Yes—I believe her eyes were grey—since you mention it."

"Since I mention it!" Mrs. Houston laughed easily. "Seems to me you're mighty indifferent about your pupil." Then seriously, "She's a great pet of ours and I want you to be kind to her. She's a handful, everyone says, but Felix and I love her dearly. And indeed, I can't see how anyone keeps from it. Some people find her rather strange at first, and I must admit she is wilful, but after you know her a while you'll understand her. That is what I want you to do if you are to teach her—understand her and sympathize with her and be very good to her. Remember she has neither father nor mother." She laid her hand almost beseechingly, on Everett's arm.

"You may trust me to do that," Everett smiled into her kind eyes. "You see,

she will be my first pupil, and, of course, I shall take pride in making her reflect credit upon me."

"That may be a little difficult. She never would study except what she wanted to, but perhaps you may exert a good influence over her in that direction." She glanced at Everett intently as if reading him and ended, "I'm half a mind to think you will, too."

Everett and Judge Houston strolled through the cool, darkened hall, and back to the front veranda, where large red rocking chairs and palmetto fans were invitingly awaiting them. As they stood for a moment, looking out toward the street, a wagon came into view, piled high with bales of cotton and pulled by six oxen.

"There is some cotton from the Brandon place," Judge Houston said to Everett. "Would you like to see it closer? You can tell it by the marks on the bales."

They walked down to the gate and watched the heavy load pass down the street on its way to the distant country from which Everett had come.

"This will be the greatest country in the world some day," the old gentleman said when they were back on the veranda and had settled themselves in the comfortable chairs. "All we need is more capital, more people and more facilities for transportation. But tell me about yourself now—your plans—and what you hope to do."

"You've probably heard it from many a young fellow before," Everett answered, looking responsively into the face turned with kindly interest toward him. "I have chosen law as my profession. It has always been my desire since the time I found a long illness had left me unfit for any great physical work. My father was a sea captain and could never understand this choice of mine—a queer notion, as he called it. But I'm going on with it and make a success of it, if hard work and hope will do it. I had some little success with oratory at college, but what I need now is the opportunity to read law and prepare to be admitted to the bar. There seemed no good opportunity for me in New England, everything there is so crowded, and the chance to teach in Mrs. Brandon's family seemed the best thing for me to do. It will give me leisure to study, and then, Morgan Talbot tells me her library is very large."

"It is magnificent. Brandon had case after case of books shipped to him from England—those that he could not get from New York. The library got so large that he had to build a special room for it. But to go back to yourself—how much law do you know? I saw this morning in your talk with those fellows that you were able to grapple with the mazes of politics. But the point for you now is to get a solid foundation of details. Do you think you could get in study enough this winter to pass examinations next spring?"

With the minutes slipping by they talked on, sometimes Everett unbosom-

ing himself to the kind old gentleman as he had never done before, sometimes the old man telling him of the needs and greater demands of the bar of the Southwest, pointing out to him lines of study and books that would be more useful to him in the special characteristics of the law in that country.

In his low modulated voice he told the young fellow starting out on the life journey things that were to come back to him many years later. Afterwards Sargent Everett often recalled his words about success when he was feeling its empty sting: "The path of the successful man is not strewn with flowers. Failure and disappointment are the walls that, when once passed, become golden experiences. Success judged by the outside world and felt by the one who has succeeded are two very different things—sometimes, perhaps most often, the success seen by the world is the least of all successes. What one strives for and yearns for and so rarely accomplishes is a thing that others are unaware of—a thing too sacred to be spoken."

Everett sat spell bound under the influence of the Judge's words. In the rise and fall of the voice, an inflection which had in it a delightful bit of provincialism, he found a charm that was persuasive and forceful.

When the town clock, a block away, chimed three, he rose reluctantly with a sigh that spoke frankly his regret at leaving.

"I wish I might spend the remainder of the afternoon with you," he said, his hand clasping the old gentleman's. "But my journey is not quite finished, yet. I shall go out to Mistress Brandon's now and meet her and see if I am acceptable."

"Tell her I approve," Judge Houston laid his hand on Everett's shoulder. "And if I'm not very much mistaken it may have some weight. Tell her we became good friends in one day."

Everett pressed the old gentleman's hand warmly. "Good friends!" he replied, "you are already more than that to me. I feel as if I had known you always—that I had some right to expect all this kindness from you."

The old man's eyes met his affectionately.

"You have—I've told you. It's the resemblance."

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF THE SPANIARDS

An hour later Everett was riding out of the town on his way to Mrs. Brandon's

home. About him on all sides the scene was bathed in the splendour of late afternoon sunlight. A heavy stake-and-rider fence bordered the road, and beyond it stretched the wide, sweeping cotton fields—snow white with their unpicked product. He drew in the reins, resting his horse, while he marvelled at the tall plants, almost as tall as himself, and the strange effect of the spotless cotton against the distant border of forest. Across the fields came to him the sound of voices chanting—sweet with harmony, and looking in the direction from which it came, he saw bright turbaned negro women and stalwart men moving steadily through the rows of plants, picking the cotton and dragging huge baskets after them.

Turning from the high road two miles south of the town, he rode down a narrow roadway on both sides of which giant cottonwood trees towered, and where spreading cypresses, their long branches festooned with grey moss, cast a cooling shade.

At the end of the narrow road a gateway loomed, a large massive piece of iron grill work swung between two columns of brick and cement. Beyond these columns, the fence extended, elaborately designed iron pickets bound together with a tracery of grapes and leaves, before which a hedge of Cherokee roses grew, its thorny branches accentuating the effect of security and aloofness from the world.

Everett stopped before the gate and looked beyond, into the depths of a magnolia grove which seemed a continuance of the wood he had just passed through, so filled was it with the sprawling shadows of the thick foliage and the golden spots of sifting sunlight. He was so lost in his first impressions of the place, its stillness, its old-world charm, its fairylike mystery, that he started abruptly when he saw a little girl sitting at the foot of one of the gate posts, surveying him through gently questioning eyes. Her feet were crossed under her, as she leaned comfortably against the post, and in her lap she held a large, heavy book, one finger still upon the page from which her gaze had wandered.

Everett met her eyes in silence for a moment, looking down at her thin little face, flushed from the rose glow of the setting sun, and feeling in a flash the vividness of her odd beauty. Her brow was very white and delicate and her blue-black glossy hair, parted in the middle and brushed back to where it was braided, made her seem paler than she really was, for her skin was a rich olive. Everett forgot the beautiful colouring, the almost weird thinness of her slight figure, the sweet half questioning mouth—all these were lost sight of when he had seen her eyes. They were so strange in all they represented that he was lost in admiration and wonder—for in them, although childlike still in their innocence—was tenderness, sympathy, wilfulness and humour—all of these, and more striking still, an intentness that kept changing them from grey to black and back again.

She broke the silence that Everett had forgotten about. "Are you the schoolmaster," her voice was high and fresh and liquid, "from Maine?"

Then Everett took off his hat and bowed low, smiling down upon her.

"I'm so—so glad," she sighed, as if the burden of the world had fallen from her shoulders. Then she closed the book with a snap. "I've been waiting here hours to see what you looked like."

Everett laughed outright.

"If I had known you were waiting I should have come sooner. I did not know Mrs. Brandon knew that I had arrived."

"Oh yes—Mr. Jervais told her."

"Then I can see her now?"

She met his look for a second—then glanced down at her book.

"She's riding over the place now, but she told me to tell you to wait for her. You can tie your horse there," indicating a ring imbedded in the gate post, "then we can go to the house."

Sargent followed her through the gate and along the driveway which extended under the magnolia trees. The gloom of the grove was intense, the black green leaves shutting out the sky entirely and making the ground beneath dank, where a pale green moss grew in lieu of a lawn. Through the vista of trees, glowing bright against the eternal twilight of the grove, the house came into their vision, gleaming like some palace in an enchanted wood.

Sargent stopped when they had gone a little further, and looked at the house. The little girl stopped, too, close beside him, and watched his expression intently. From their position only the front of the house was visible, a stretch of plain, cemented columns that rose from a pavement of deep red flags, level with the ground, to the red tiled roof, two stories high. Back of the columns, the lower rooms extended out from the upper floor, in this way forming a balcony to the entire second floor, which was enclosed in an iron balustrade. From this balcony two flights of stone steps, semi-circular in form, and iron-railed, led down to the pavement below, and in the opening formed by these steps was the wide front door. It was an odd conception of architecture and gave the house a strange, foreign aspect, accentuated by the more familiar appearance of the second floor, with its wide windows and dark green shutters.

Sargent had forgotten the little girl beside him, lost in admiration of the strange old house, when he felt a cold hand slipped into his, and looking down, found her glowing eyes gazing timidly up at him.

"You like it?" she questioned quickly.

"It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen!"

She smiled contentedly, her hand still in his.

"It's mine—when I get grown up. If you hadn't liked it—I'd have hated you

just like I did Miss Hampton who was our governess last year."

Sargent felt her hand clench in his and saw her eyes grow dark. Giving a tug at the book she carried, to get it more comfortably under her arm, she started on again.

"Did you hate her so," Sargent said, glancing at the book she held in her hand, "because she made you study such a big book as that?"

"This?—Oh no, I love to read this—only I don't understand it all. I just hated her because she said this was a lonesome old place, and I didn't like for her to say that, for the Spaniards built this house and my mother was Spanish—so am I." Then suddenly, "Are you going to teach me the three R's? Uncle Felix calls it that," smiling again. "Isn't it funny, because I know they don't begin with an R," putting her hand in Sargent's once more. "Won't you please leave out the 'Rithmetic?"

Sargent laughed down at her.

"Arithmetic—of course not. We all have to learn that."

"I'm so—so sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I hate it!"

"Perhaps I may be able to help you like it."

"No," positively, "you won't. It's so stupid and dry. I want you to teach me how to spell, that bothers me so; and I want to learn how to say Shakespeare's plays."

"Shakespeare!" Sargent exclaimed. "How old are you?"

"I'm going on twelve."

"And what do you like best of Master Shakepeare's?"

"I like the story about Orlando and Rosalind. Shall I say some of it for you? Let's go over there by the bench and you can hear me say it right now."

She tripped ahead of Sargent along a path that led from the drive, suddenly going slower when she saw that he could not follow her so rapidly. A little way down the path they came to the edge of the grove, where an iron bench was placed beneath one of the great trees, making an ideal place where one could sit in shady protection and gaze out upon a scene so dramatic in its breadth and majesty.

Far down the sloping hill the river swept along, the low country across the mile-wide current mystically dozing in the golden light of the advancing evening. In the restfulness of the twilight, when all Nature had sunk into a gentleness and mistiness, when the light was softening and objects which had been sharply outlined were imperceptibly growing unreal, it became a scene made up of dreams and fancies.

Sargent sank on the bench, under the influence of the scene and its resem-

blance to the one he had left so far behind him. A doubt of ever seeing the place he called home rushed over him, bringing with it the first deep pang of homesickness. Why had he come so far from home? Was it really for his good?

All the while the little girl was hastily turning the pages of the book, searching for the lines she wanted. At last, finding what she sought, she ran over them, her lips moving inaudibly with the words. Finally her finger marking the lines, she handed the book to Sargent and stood erect before him.

"Now," she said, "will you hear them?" looking at him shyly, for she had been quick to see the wistful look in his eyes.

He met her look, smiling encouragingly, as she clasped her hands behind her and riveted her gaze on the trees for better concentration. Then she spoke the lines in a quick, excited voice:

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Sargent waited until she had finished, then closed the book slowly, repeating the lines after her. She listened intently, her eyes growing deeper as she came nearer to him.

"Say it again, please," she almost whispered, sitting down on the bench beside him and slipping her hand through his arm. "It is so beautiful when you say it. I know I'm going to like you—your voice is so—so sweet!"

Sargent turned toward her and clasped her little hand in his own.

"Who told you to learn those lines?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Uncle Felix. He says they always make him think of this place. Mammy Dicey says Mamma used to call this 'The Garden of Shadows.'"

"The Garden of Shadows," Sargent repeated. "What a beautiful name; but it's rather sad, don't you think?"

"Mammy Dicey says Mamma was always sad."

"And don't you remember her yourself?"

The little head moved from side to side and a wistful expression crept into her eyes. "No—I don't remember her—I was too little, I s'pose. Sometimes, though, when there's nobody in the house, I go and sit in the parlour and look at her picture and play like I'm talking to her. Mammy Dicey says she was beautiful—her picture is."

Sargent looked down at her tenderly. Something in the plaintive notes in her voice appealed to him strangely. Her vivid little face, with the deep expression of her eyes, drew him toward her with the instinctive feeling that in some way they were to be very close together in the years that were to come. The beau-

tiful surroundings, with their old-world charm, and aloofness from the world, seemed a part of the child; unconsciously he felt that she was the expression of all that it had stood for—of all its strange beauty.

"You are like your mother—aren't you?" he said, his look still upon her.

She turned away quickly and looked straight before her. "Father used to say so—that is why he named me 'Natalia'—for her. Now, please don't call me 'Natalia' like so many people do. It's Nataaya—that's the way my mother said it—that's the Spanish pronunciation."

"Very well, then, I shall call you Nataaya," Sargent repeated after her. "You seem to know a great deal about your mother, not to remember her. Does Mrs. Brandon talk to you so much about her?"

Natalia looked up, startled.

"No—she never talks to me about my mother. Aunt Maria—that's Mrs. Houston—she's told me lots about her, but Mammy Dicey tells me most."

"Who is Mammy Dicey?"

"Mammy Dicey's my Mamma's slave. She always lived with Mamma ever since before Mamma was born, and now she belongs to me. She tells me all about the time when Mamma was a little girl just like me," her face lit up wonderfully with her evident love of the subject, "and she tells me all the time about the trips she and Mamma used to take to New Orleans, and the years they spent in the Convent down there, and of the long, long trip they once took to the old country. Mammy says they didn't see anything but water for months and months. I wish so—so much I could take a trip like that with Mammy. Then, sometimes, on cold winter nights when we sit in the kitchen and Mammy can see pictures in the fire, I get her to tell me about the times Mamma used to walk here, in the Garden of Shadows, and cry all the time because Father had gone to fight the Indians. I'll get her to tell you sometime, only you mustn't laugh at me when I cry." She stopped, out of breath with the rush of words.

"Why do you cry, Natalia?" Sargent asked gently, when she had rested a moment in silence.

"Oh, I don't know, except," and the tears were already in her eyes. "I can't help wishing she was living when I get very, very lonesome."

"And is that so often in this lovely place?"

"No—not so much. It's just when I get mad with James and Bushnell, and Mammy's busy, and I'm all by myself—like I was this evening. I s'pose every little girl gets that way when she hasn't got a Mamma. Have you got one?"

Sargent put his arm around her and drew the frail little figure close to him. When she had rested her, chin against his arm, and he could feel the quick beating of her heart, he leaned over and kissed the heavy waves of her hair.

"Yes, I have a mother," he answered, almost in a whisper, "but she is nearly

as far away from me as yours is. Indeed, I believe she is farther—for you have everything here that was your mother's, and that is a great deal."

For a little while Natalia was silent, then she murmured without looking up, "Is she beautiful like mine—and do you love her very much?"

"Yes—she is very pretty, I think," he said in answer to her last question, "and I am like her, too, just as you are like your mother."

"It's lucky for a man, Mammy says—but it's terribly unlucky for a girl." She sat up suddenly and faced Everett. "Do you believe I'm going to be unhappy because I look like Mamma?"

"Of course you'll not be unhappy. To be as pretty as your mother must have been should make you very lucky, I think."

Natalia smiled contentedly, and the colour rushed into her face, a deep claret colour that glowed subdued beneath her smooth skin and faded away into the exquisite slenderness of her throat.

"Tell me about your mamma, please."

Through her question Everett was again looking far away to a place where he knew the ones he loved were gathered, perhaps at that very moment. He could see it so distinctly, that almost unconsciously, he began to talk about it to the little girl beside him, as if it were all there before him.

"My home, Natalia, was way up on a hill where we could look down upon the town and out into the bay where there are so many little islands—one for each day in the year, they say—and way beyond those islands was the great Atlantic Ocean. In front of our house was an apple orchard; did you ever see one? It is the most beautiful thing in the world. And in the spring and summer my mother used to always make me sit beside her out there, and study my lessons, and when I would get tired, she would close the books and tell me stories of great heroes—making them more real to me by telling me they inhabited those islands before us.... When I was a little fellow of ten I was very ill. The doctor said I was going to die, but my mother said I should not! And one night when there was a terrible storm, and the ships could not come into port, she went out on to the cliff where there was nothing but snow and ice, and where the surf dashed up and froze on everything—she went out all by herself and prayed to God to spare my life, and promised Him if I lived she would rear me into a fine man, who would do good in the world and be a great help to people who had forgotten who God was.... My father came home on his ship that night, and when they told him my mother had gone out into the storm, he went out and found her lying unconscious in the snow. When he brought her back into the room where I lay dying, a great change came over me at once. I got well; all except my leg; it kept shrinking so I can never use it again.... So when my father found he couldn't make a sailor of me, like himself, he got angry with me and called me the little cripple. He didn't

know how that hurt me, and once, when my little sister died, and my mother got a letter from him, he thought she said it was I who had died, and he wrote her it was a fortunate thing, as I could never have been an honour to them.... It was then that my mother denied herself that I should go to school and have all the advantages of an education. It was hard on her and on the others—for we were very poor, but she would hear to nothing else but that I should learn all that was in my power.... And the day I left her, Natalia, to come down here, I told her good-bye in the orchard, and as I went down to the ship I could still see her standing there, waving to me. Even when the ship was out to sea, I imagined I could still see her there, and I swore to myself that day that the next time she stood there and looked for me, I should be coming back to her a great man!"

The sun was half gone before the far horizon, the grove of magnolias had grown black in the dusk, and a multitude of birds were fluttering in the protecting foliage, whispering good-nights to each other. A delicious breeze swept up from the bosom of the river, cooling the parched earth, and bringing with it the promise of a refreshing evening.

Finally Everett rose from the bench. "So we should be very good friends, Natalia," he said as she walked beside him, still silent from her sympathetic listening, "for we are both without the one we love best in the world. Will you see now if Mistress Brandon has returned? It is growing late, and I must get back to town to-night."

In the distance the sound of the gate opening and the crunch of hoofs on the driveway made Sargent look toward the house. A woman on horseback was riding up to the door, followed by two men, who rode a little behind her.

"That's Mamma Brandon now," Natalia cried, "and her overseers. She's been going over the plantation with them, getting ready for the cotton picking." She walked a little ahead of Sargent, so that she reached Mrs. Brandon's side just as she dismounted on the block before the door.

"He's come," she cried breathlessly. "The schoolmaster! And I like him so much!"

Mrs. Brandon threw her reins to a negro, and looked quickly at Sargent as he came toward her.

"You are Mr. Everett," she said, extending her gloved hand. "Morgan wrote me that you would probably reach here this month. Will you come inside?"

She turned away and walked into the house, leaving Sargent, who followed closely, with an impression of a tall, fair woman, with steady, cold blue eyes and a determined mouth. In the first moment of greeting he had seen her utter lack of sympathy with the old house. In a flash the thought that had come to him in the garden, returned—the child was the rightful owner.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes," she continued, when they were

within the hall. "I have been overlooking the places this afternoon. After a month's absence it was quite necessary. Natalia, take Mr. Everett into the parlour. I shall be there in a few moments."

In the gloom of the interior of the house Sargent could distinguish very little until his eyes had grown accustomed to the subdued light.

The hall was spacious, with a brick floor over which were thrown squares of carpet, and on the walls, which were of the same cement as the exterior, hung a remarkable collection of portraits. Tier after tier they rose to the ceiling, all of them in massive gilt frames that glistened against the white walls and increased the effect of a ghostly multitude looking down upon the intruder.

Following Natalia into a large salon which opened into this hall, Sargent found himself in a vast room of mirrors, with furniture shrouded in linen covers and a polished mahogany floor that repeated all the furnishings.

When they were alone again, Natalia stood directly before Sargent, her face peering up at him through the misty light.

"I'm going to call James and Bushnell to meet you," she said, "and they're going to be so glad when I tell them you're not one bit like Mr. Jervais said you were." She smiled happily. "He said you were a regular old Yankee schoolmaster—and a crippled one at that! Oh!" she cried, seeing the quick flash of pain in Sargent's face—it was the thrust that always made him flinch—"I didn't mean to hurt you!" Her eyes darkened suddenly and the tears rushed down her checks. "Now you won't like me at all—I'm so—so sorry!" Then she ran weeping out of the room.

So it was that Sargent Everett's long journey from Maine to Mississippi in those old days came to an end. Sitting in his room that night at the tavern, writing home by the light of a single candle, he held his quill poised above the paper, while the faces of the day rushed in procession before him. The wrinkled, weather-beaten face of the steamboat captain; the kind, noble features of the Virginia gentleman; the calm, placid face of the chatelaine of the old Spanish home; and last of all, the haunting grey eyes of the little girl. In each of them he found something that made him realize they would help in the moulding of his future. His first step had been made. What would the unknown bring to him? His head sank on his arms and the words of the far away one rang in his ears, urging him on and on to success.

A light tap sounded on the door.

"Come in," he called out, and the shining face of Jonas appeared in the doorway.

"Boss, I jes' cum ter fin' out ef yer didn' want hit open'd now?"

"No, Jonas," Sargent smiled, glancing at the bottle of champagne placed conspicuously on the table. "I've decided to keep it as a souvenir of my first day in a new country—and of some one whose advice, I verily believe, saved the day!"

BOOK II
THE LAWYER

CHAPTER I
PICTURES IN THE FIRE

Spring had come, the joyous, impatient spring of the South, bringing in one day a new world, full of warmth and splendour. The old house of the Spaniards gleamed once more in the sunshine, long shafts of gold penetrated the shadows of the magnolias and rested with a dazzling brilliance upon the surrounding line of columns. And the garden along the terrace burst into a sudden glory that showed it knew well that the cold winds of the North had died away for many months.

Far down the hillside the great river crept stealthily out of its banks, crawling up and up until the lowlands of the opposite shore became a wide, yellow, seemingly boundless sea.

Then the seared forest began to tremble into a faint green, and everywhere were the chatter of birds and the sounds of awakening life. Weather prophets shook their heads, saying the spring had come too early, that it would mean a bad season for the crops; the plantation overseers were caught napping, and rushed hundreds of slaves into the field to make the ground ready for planting; and along the road toward the town three caravans of Voyageurs had passed already, on their way from New Orleans to St. Louis—all this in the early part of March.

The days, lengthening and full of a lazy warmth, were perfect for a short cessation from the routine of the schoolroom, so that when the young schoolmaster had asked for a week's leave in which he might ride to a day's distant village, for the purpose of passing his examinations before the Judges of the Supreme Court, his request was readily granted. The boys had received the announcement with childish delight. Natalia had said nothing.

The day after the schoolroom was closed, the little girl wandered far down the hillside, and watched the great river, turbulent and angry in its swollen channel. She sat there a long time, not thoroughly contented in the freedom of the holiday, for the last few weeks had been unhappy ones for her. The schoolmaster had been severe and impatient for many days, and he had not taken her with him on his long walks through the woods. Until lately it had been almost the daily custom to go directly after dinner along the crest of the hill quite away from the road, toward the town. Natalia would dance along beside him, flitting away now and then to inspect a hitherto undiscovered grapevine swing or a new birdnest, and then again walking slowly beside him, listening intently while he told her some wonderful story of bygone days. Sometimes when the story was very complicated and the words too big for her to grasp the meaning, she would walk close beside him, one hand in his, her eyes shut tight while she listened only to the music of his voice. Many days they would go quite into the town and stop at Judge Houston's for a half hour, and while Mrs. Houston gave them huge slices of jelly cake, and raisins, and tall goblets of milk, the Judge and the schoolmaster would discuss the new laws of the State. Then it was such fun to come back, in the late afternoon, when the wind was whistling through the trees and the grove about the house was filling with queer shadows, and find everybody gathered about the blazing logs for a while before the study hour.

But all this had ended a month before. The schoolmaster walked no more in the afternoons; he went directly from the dinner table to the library, and shut himself in, not coming out even when the supper bell rang, and many nights when Mammy Dicey carried the little girl up to her room she could see a line of light beneath the library door. It would be there still when she came down hours later, and twice it had been there when she went back to waken the children in the morning. It was this way to the day he left, not one minute wasted, as he drove himself on and on toward his examinations.

Natalia had at first been impatient and complaining of the neglect, then she had become wounded, and at last silent, and what might have been a joyous holiday grew more and more monotonous.

When the seventh day had come she had gone down to the big gate, taking the great cumbersome Shakespeare with her, and, settling herself comfortably against the post, had waited for the schoolmaster's return. In the happiness of seeing him again she had become quite forgiving.

The morning passed and he did not come. The afternoon dragged along until the birds had all fluttered into the grove, and gone to sleep—still, he did not come. Night came on, a question or two was asked, and at last bedtime arrived, with no news.

Mammy Dicey sat beside Natalia's bed a long time that night, singing the

whole repertoire of lullabys that usually closed the dusky little lids, without avail. Natalia lay staring up at the ceiling with wide-open eyes full of doubts and fears. There had come a report the day after the schoolmaster's departure, that Jacob Phelps, a notorious highwayman, had suddenly appeared near the town and robbed the Jackson coach in broad daylight. With the incident, all the memories and experiences of the town folk were awakened, and each one was recounting what he had heard of the man. It added picturesqueness to the tales, that the freebooter was not a member of a gang, but accomplished his daring robberies without the aid of confederates; and in contrast to all the robbers that infested this new country, he killed his victims only when forced to do so in escaping. The tales had reached the children through the servants, and for Natalia there had been no peace during the long days of the schoolmaster's absence.

When Mammy Dicey had blown out the candle and left the room, closing the door tight after her, Natalia jumped out of bed and ran to the window. Raising it, and pushing the shutters far apart, she leaned out so as to get a view of the big gate.

The moon was just rising, and by its cold, white light she could see far down the empty road. She stood looking out, until the night wind chilled her, and she shivered under her thin nightgown. Finally she closed the shutters and crept back to bed, huddling herself beneath the heavy quilt until she stopped trembling. Still she could not sleep for the quick beating of her heart and her intent listening. At last she got up resolutely, tiptoed to the door and went out into the hall, where a single candle always burned at night. For a moment she hesitated at the top of the dark staircase, then crept noiselessly downstairs and through the dining-room until she reached the door that led across an open passage to the kitchen. She gave a quick sigh of relief when she saw a flickering light through the kitchen window, and rushing across the passage, burst into the room and into old Dicey's arms, as she crouched before the fire.

"Fo' de Lawd, honey chile, whut yer doin' a runnin' 'round heah in de middle ob de night!" the old woman cried, gathering the child to her deep bosom and holding her tight. "An' yer footsies all cold an' naked an' nothin' more'n yer nightgown on. Whut's de mattah, honey?"

"Oh, Mammy, why don't he come?" Natalia whispered, her head buried against the old negro.

"He's a comin', sugar, he's all right. Now—put dis shawl 'round yer an' git wahm. I'se gwine ter set up an' wait fer him an' gib him sumthin' ter eat when he gits heah. Ole Miss tole me ter do hit."

"But he said he would only be gone a week, and it's a week now, Mammy—and over. And Mammy, I was so mean to him when he went away. I wouldn't tell him good-bye because he wouldn't take me walking any more, and shut himself

up and studied and studied and studied—all the time. So when he came to tell us good-bye, I told him I did not want to shake hands with him because I hated him and hoped he wouldn't ever come back. And Mammy," the tears were streaming down her face now, "he said maybe he wouldn't come back, maybe something would happen to him. Now I know what he meant—he meant Jacob Phelps might kill him."

"No—he didn't mean dat. Don' yer worry erbout him, honey. Yer don' stedy 'bout nobody but him all de time. Sence dat schoolmas'r come yer done clean fergit yer Mammy Dicey."

Natalia's arms went about the old woman's neck and hugged her tight. "I won't ever forget you, Mammy," she said. "Not for anybody. But I do love him lots—next to you. He's so good to me all the time and I love so to watch his eyes—aren't they soft and sweet? And, Mammy, he always lets me talk to him about Mamma. Then he tells me about his Mamma away up in that cold country—so far away. Don't you love to hear him talk? Even if he does talk in great big words sometimes, I just love to hear him. I don't care if I don't know what he means, it sounds so fine and beautiful, and his voice just flows and flows—like the Bayou in the spring, Mammy—oh! do you reckon Jacob Phelps has got him?"

"Sh'h—honey chile, sh'h. Cose he hain' got him. Now you just snuggle up 'ginst me an' git wahm. Whut yer want Mammy ter sing ter yer? Now—dat's a heap bettah—ain' it?"

Holding the little girl close in her arms, Dicey reached out with one hand and threw a short log upon the fire, then sitting back comfortably again, and rocking to and fro, she began singing in a barely audible whisper an intimate little lullaby, just for themselves:

"Whar, oh whar am de Hebrew chilluns?
Whar, oh whar am de Hebrew chilluns?
Whar, oh whar am de Hebrew chilluns?
Way ober in de Promis' Lan'."

The song was of no avail. Natalia still gazed out of wide open eyes. Then Dicey changed the meter of her melody and began again:

"Whar was Moses when de light went out?
Whar was Moses when de light went out?
Whar was Moses when de light went out?
Settin' in de dark wid his mouf poked out."

Natalia always chuckled over the last words of the song, but that night she only

stirred restlessly and stared up into the old slave's eyes. The flickering glow of the fire fell on Dicey's face, lighting up the countenance which had always been the dearest in the world to the little girl. The other slaves shunned the strange looking old woman, who had not come from San Domingo with them; and her high cheek-bones and the tinge of red beneath her brown skin gave credence to the story that her father was an Indian. Many of them had whispered to Natalia that her old Mammy was a Voodoo, and once, when two slaves had died of smallpox, a "conjure" bag and a tiny black coffin had been found on the doorstep which the others said Dicey had employed to gain a revenge.

But Natalia loved the old woman too deeply to be weaned from her. She and Zebediah and Dicey grew closer as the years sped along, the old hostler remaining faithful to his one partner who had worked side by side with him in the grand old days of Gayosa and the Spanish occupation. To them, Natalia was all that was left out of that glorious past.

The kitchen had always been Dicey's favourite resting place, and at night when the other slaves had finished their work and gone to the quarters, she would pull a little stool up to the hearth and crouch down before the dying embers, gazing intently into the glow and sometimes crooning softly to herself. It seemed to suit her—this great old room which had for a floor the hard, clean-swept earth, was ceiled with roughhewn beams and filled along one side with a wagonwide fireplace. And when not even a candle was left burning, it seemed to suit her even better, for then the four pots hanging from heavy cranes above the fire, the rows of iron ovens placed against the wall, the marble topped bread table, and the immense, copper preserving kettle in a far corner—all these became her eloquent friends of the past, and in their companionship she lived again the stories each held for her.

At the end of the song she glanced into Natalia's sleepless eyes and smiled. Even in her inexperience, the little girl knew that here was a love nearly akin to that of the mother she had never known.

"It's no use, Mammy, I can't go to sleep." Natalia slipped from Dicey's arms to the floor. "Look, it's nearly eleven o'clock. Oh! Mammy!" happily, "maybe he stayed at Uncle Felix's house in town. But he said he would come right back here." She ran to the window and peered out into the moonlight. Everything was deathly still. "Mammy," she said, coming back to Dicey and leaning against her, "can't you look into the fire and see pictures and find out if he is coming back? Clytie told me the other day that you were a Voodoo and could tell what would happen to people—can you?"

The old woman's eyes flashed into such angry brilliance that Natalia stepped back, crying out—"Mammy, what's the matter? I never saw you look that way before."

Dicey's brows wrinkled over her eyes into a sinister expression, while her fingers twisted themselves into strange shapes as she pressed them together in her lap.

"Clytie tole yer dat, did she? Whut else she done tole yer?"

"Nothing else, Mammy. Why are you so mad?"

"'Cause dat nigger's tryin' to put you 'ginst me—I knowed it all de time."

"But no one can do that, Mammy, and I don't mind you being a Voodoo if you'll look in the fire and see if the schoolmaster is coming back. Won't you, please, Mammy?"

"Whut yer wants ter know sich er heap 'bout dat Perfesser fur?" Dicey said, a little subdued from her excitement, and pulling Natalia back to her. "Hit's no use yer stedyin' 'bout him an' lubbin' him, 'cause he's gwine 'way from heah soon's he kin, and he's nebber gwine stedy 'bout you no mo'. Sho' an' he ain', chile, an' hit ain' no use fer yer to be a lubbin him to sich er pint. Sh'h, sugar plum, don' yer cry now," for at her words Natalia's eyes had clouded and the tears were beginning to pour down her cheeks. "I'se jest talkin'—dat's all. Cose he lubs yer—eve'ybody do. Sh'h now, and Mammy'll fin' pictures fer yer in de fire."

She knelt on the hearth and poked the back log until some glowing coals fell from it. Then she leaned forward and raked them into a heap, blowing upon them all the time to keep them alive. Natalia crept up behind her, watching intently her every movement. The room was deathly still, except for the laboured breathing of the old woman blowing life into the cooling embers, and as the moments slipped by, the moon swung opposite the window and sent a streak of ghostly light into the dark kitchen.

Natalia stared into Dicey's face, a new fear of the old woman taking possession of her. She had never seen this expression on her face, a far away look in her eyes as if she were seeing into another world and was frozen lifeless by the vision.

Natalia put one cold, trembling hand on the negro's coarsened one. There was no response to her touch. "What is it, Mammy?" she whispered. "Tell me what you see."

The old woman's body shook convulsively, then she sank upon her haunches and sat still, staring into the ashes. "I sees a long, long time afore me." She began to count automatically until she reached six, then suddenly stopped. "Six years. I sees heaps ob watah and heaps ob trabellin' 'bout. I sees a strange man wid yeller ha'r an' blue eyes. An' dah's er weddin' goin' on, and a bride ooman all dressed out waitin' fer him—an' he ain' comin'. Dah's er dead man, too. Who's he? Who's he? Fo' Gawd, I knows him. An' de bride ooman—Lawdy, honey chile," the old woman's voice rose to a shrill cry. "Honey chile, de bride ooman's you."

Dicey grabbed Natalia to her, her bosom rising and falling rapidly, her breath gasping, her eyes wild with the vision. And while they sat there, each clinging to the other under the strange spell, the loud clanging of a bell burst upon the still night. Both of them rose quickly and ran to the window. Dicey threw the sash up, and the sound of the bell rushed into the room, bringing with it the intensity of the one who was ringing it a mile away.

"Hit's de bell on Massa Puckett's plantashun," Dicey said, after she had listened a few minutes in silence. "Sumthin's done happen. Mebbe his house done ketch fire. We kin go up ter yo' room an' see."

She had picked up Natalia and carried her toward the door, when she stopped again. The sound of a galloping horse out on the highroad came to them distinctly. Another minute and the horse had stopped before the gate and they could hear some one approaching the house.

Dicey lighted a candle and held it to the window. "It's only I, Dicey," Sargent Everett's voice came out of the darkness. "Is every one safe here? Mr. Puckett has been murdered and a crowd of men are out with the bloodhounds. They think it is some of Jacob Phelps' work."

Dicey opened the door, and held the candle high to light him in. "Ole Miss done tole me ter sabe yer some suppah. I knows yer's hungry and tired out. Come in heah and set down."

Sargent entered the room, the candle light gleaming on his dusty clothes and weary features. Before he had gone half way across the room he fell into the nearest chair, from utter exhaustion.

"How's our little girl, Dicey?" were his first words.

Dicey looked up from the tray she was placing on the table, and smiled, shaking her head knowingly.

"I reckon she's all right, now dat you'se back."

All the while Natalia was watching him from the dark corner in which she stood, noting the tired look in his eyes, and the strange new expression of excitement that made his face seem almost unfamiliar. Then suddenly she flew across the room toward him, and pressed both arms tight about his neck, gazing at him with eyes grown brilliantly black.

"I'm so—so glad you've come back!"

"Fo' de Lawd!" cried Dicey, dropping a dish with a clatter. "Ain' you got no manners at all, runnin' round heah fo' a gemman wid nothin' more'n a jaybird on! I sees I'se got ter manage yer! Come heah and git up to yer room dis minit," and as the door closed after them Sargent heard the complaint growing louder

and louder—"No mo' manners dan er jack-rabbit—dan er jack-rabbit!"

CHAPTER II
THE OPENED WOUND

In the afternoon of the next day, when the schoolroom had been closed, Sargent rode into the town. In his pocket he carried a letter which had come to him a few hours before, from Judge Houston.

"My most hearty congratulations," it ran, "I have heard from one of your compagnons de voyage, of your success. Are you ready for your first case? It is waiting for you. Come in this afternoon.

"FELIX HOUSTON."

His first case! Sargent read the delicate, painstaking chirography again and again. Could it be possible that he was to have a chance to plead before the bar, when his examinations were only a few days behind him!

He had received the note as he stood in the door of the little schoolhouse, with the sound in his ears of the children buzzing over their lessons, and as the full realization of its meaning swept over him, he pulled out the loud clanking watch his father had once brought him from the Bermudas, and impatiently counted the time that must elapse before he could know what the letter really meant.

It seemed hours before the time came to leave, and Zebediah stood at the door with a horse saddled and waiting for him.

"You've just come back, and you're going away already!" Natalia said plaintively, following him to the gate, her little hand clasped tight in his.

"But I shall not be gone long, Natalia—only an hour or two. And when I come back, I shall tell you all about the terrible judges who sat on a platform, all in a row, and asked me all sorts of questions about the laws of our country."

"I don't care a picayune about the judges," the little girl complained, "but I do want you to tell me all about old Mr. Puckett, and how Jacob Phelps killed

him. Mammy says Mamma Brandon told her not to tell us about it, but you will, won't you?"

Sargent looked down at her, as she stood with her vivid little face, excited and intense over the subject, looking up at him, her hands clasped tight in a characteristic gesture. It always made him marvel when he saw her so passionately intent over something—for in the darkening grey eyes and warm rich glow beneath her olive skin, a wealth of hereditary influence asserted itself.

"You will tell me when you come back?" she repeated, as Sargent mounted his horse without answering.

"Wouldn't you rather hear about my first case?" he asked, avoiding an answer.

"Your first case?"

"Yes—Judge Houston says he has one for me. So I am going now to find out what it is."

Natalia slipped one hand through the bars of the great gate, and leaned against it, not in the least enthusiastic.

"I don't care much about the case," she began, almost sadly, "if it is going to take you away every day after school, and keep you from reading to me any more or taking me walking. I wouldn't care if you didn't ever have a case if it's going to be this way."

Sargent leaned from his saddle, and lifted the little girl up beside him.

"It isn't going to be that way, Natalia," he said quietly when she was comfortably adjusted and tugging at her skirts. "Nothing in the world is going to separate us—ever. Will you ride with me to the main road?"

As they passed out of the gate, the boughs of the overlapping trees casting queer shadows upon their path, the faint, pungent odour of new leaves making the air fresh and spicy, they were silent a long time, each happy and contented in a very different way.

"Then what Mammy told me last night isn't so?" Natalia broke the long silence.

"What did she tell you?"

"That you would soon be going away, and forgetting all about me."

Sargent shook his head, slowly. From where he sat he could only see the little head with its mass of black hair and two long braids. Suddenly he leaned forward and kissed it in the wide part. "I shall never forget you, Natalia. It will be quite the other way."

"Not even when I go away?"

"Not even then—but that will not be soon."

For a moment Natalia was silent; then, in a whisper, "You mustn't tell it, but—I may go next week. I heard Mamma Brandon reading a letter this week to

Aunt Maria. It was from her kinsfolk in Boston. They want her to send me up there."

"To the Talbots!" Sargent exclaimed. "I know them. Morgan Talbot is my best friend. We were at college together."

"I don't want to go without you," Natalia continued slowly, then with sudden enthusiasm; "Couldn't you go with me? I'll ask Mamma Brandon as soon as I get back home."

They were at the highroad now, and Sargent drew in his rein. "It would be fine," he laughed, "but like many fine things, it's not altogether practical."

"Anyhow, I'm going right back to ask Mamma Brandon if she won't let you go," and as Sargent turned into the main road, he looked back and saw her running toward the house.

When he reached the town, the signs of the awakening season were on all sides. Lawns were being raked clean, gardens were blossoming, women were on the walks and talking to each other over fences, about the new shipment of delaines and dimities and lawns that had just come up from New Orleans. Houses were wide open and the sunlight was gilding and brightening everything. A farmer, standing in his wagon, was selling his last lot of smoked sausage to a crowd gathered about him; and selling it to advantage, for he was telling them there would be no more until next November. Old Mrs. Buckingham was airing her mattress on the front veranda, and her famous begonias had been seen on the steps for at least a week. Verily, spring had come.

The road that passed the old house of the Spaniards led directly into the town, and became its main street. As Sargent rode along it he felt a growing affection for these townsfolk and their habitations, for they had received him, not as a stranger but as an old friend. Already he was beginning to recognize nearly all the faces he saw, for with his frequent visits to the town, his walks with Judge Houston, their churchgoing each Sunday, and the many afternoons he had spent in the brick courthouse, listening to the arguing of cases where flamboyant eloquence and thundering invective usually brought success—all these associations had given him a feeling of becoming one of them.

When he had left his horse at the stable, and turned toward the tavern to get a late newspaper—there had been a boat that day—-he noticed the unusual crowd gathered on the street, particularly in the courthouse yard and before the jail.

"Is there a boat in, or a coach, or an Indian massacre?" he asked,—when he had stopped at the greeting of some friends.

"Haven't you heard?" exclaimed Mr. Pintard, a wealthy planter from an adjoining county.

"You forget I live in the country," Sargent explained, smiling. "But I trust

all this excitement warrants your interest."

"Josiah Puckett was murdered last night and Jacob Phelps has been trapped and brought into town. He's over there in the jail now. We've got him this time."

"Then he was the man who killed Mr. Puckett?" Sargent asked quickly.

"There's no doubt of it. The hounds tracked him to the canebrake on Puckett's place. It's wonderful—the first time he was ever captured in his whole career!"

"And now that we've got him," commented Mr. Suggs, joining the group, "I don't see why he should have any trial. We all know what he's done, and I say there's no excuse for waiting: I say string him up to-night! But!—Judge Houston says not. He says the man must be tried—that we are barbarians no longer. So the trial is to come off next week."

"A trial!" exclaimed Pintard. "What good is a trial without a defence, and who would defend Phelps? I'll wager you could not find a man in the county who would take the case."

"Not so fast, my friend," drawled Mr. Suggs. "Somebody has been found to defend him."

The crowd gathered closer. Suggs always carried startling tidings; it was part of his profession.

"Who?" demanded the half dozen listeners.

"Mr. Lemuel Jervais!" Mr. Suggs pronounced the name quietly, with the enjoyment of one who delighted in throwing bombs.

"Lemuel Jervais! You don't mean it! It's a damned lie! Why, he wouldn't dare! He couldn't afford it!"

Mr. Suggs drew himself to his full height, swelling portentously beneath his linsey waistcoat, and looked each man squarely in the eye.

"Gentlemen," he answered, "if you can not take the word of a gentleman, go in the Mansion House bar and ask Mr. Jervais himself. I just left him there." Then, from a more antagonistic height, "And I'd like to know who the blackguard is who called what I said, 'a damned lie'!"

"Why has Jervais done this!" Sargent exclaimed, ignoring the last remark. "There must be some good reason. Of course, he can explain it."

"Oh yes,—he explains it," Suggs answered, his anger diverted. "He says he's had a streak of bad luck lately, and he's got to pay up some way. Phelps offered him a thousand dollars to clear him."

"He'll never win that thousand," Pintard commented. "He might as well throw up the case now. Clear Phelps in this town, where we all know what he's been doing for ten years! Why, man, it's ridiculous!"

Mr. Suggs leisurely folded his arms and looked reflectively in the direction of the jail.

"On the contrary," he remarked, "it will be very easy for him to clear Phelps. The evidence is only circumstantial. No one saw him commit the murder. Nobody can swear to it. All they know is that he was captured in a canebrake near Puckett's house, on the night of the murder, and it will take a mighty good lawyer to convince the jury that he is the murderer; that is, unless the trial is overruled by sentiment, and it's not likely to be, with Felix Houston as judge. I'll tell you, gentlemen, I don't want the prosecution. It's not a job worth having."

"Somebody's got to do it, though. Attorney Semmes has been sick for a month and can not leave his home. Who'll they get?"

"The Judge will appoint some one to-morrow morning, I understand." Mr. Suggs replied from his inexhaustible store of information. "And let us all pray," he added, meekly folding his hands across his breast, "that it won't be one of us."

Sargent slipped away from the crowd, unnoticed. The possible meaning of Judge Houston's note rushed over him, bringing with it an army of hopes and fears. Could it be that he himself was to represent the State in this trial? The idea stuck in his thoughts with the potency of truth. Under its influence he walked rapidly in the direction of his friend's home, with the question obliterating his surroundings.

He was passing the Mansion House when he heard his name called loudly, and turning, found Jervais staggering toward him, out of the barroom.

"Hello, Everett! Didn't know you could walk so fast." Jervais slapped him on the back and laughed noisily. Sargent took the outstretched hand and then dropped it quickly, in his desire to get away from the man, for Jervais when sober had always been irritating to him, almost insulting in his hauteur; drunk, he was both disgusting and dangerous. They had met frequently during the winter, for it was the regular custom of Jervais to take Sunday dinner with Mrs. Brandon, a fact which Sargent had never been able to understand. Nothing seemed so incongruous to him as the cool, self-possessed, formal chatelaine receiving attention from a man of Jervais's calibre and reputation. The man had never grown congenial, and during the last months their discussions at the dinner table had been so heated that Sargent had chosen that day to spend in long rides, in preference to sitting through a dinner of several hours, opposite a man whose political and social beliefs were so directly opposed to his own. Judge Houston had laughed over the antagonism, telling Sargent it was good training for him to meet such a man and learn to restrain himself. Sargent had answered that restraint, when it was a matter of convictions and creeds, was worthless.

"Haven't seen you since you got in the ring," Jervais continued unsteadily. "How d'you feel? Like you could conquer the world, I suppose! How many years do you think you'll have to wait for a case?—Ten—eh? Say—wait a minute—will you?" as Sargent struggled from his grasp. "Want to tell you something—it's

a secret. Phelps offered me a thousand dollars to clear him. I had to take it—been gambling too much lately. But I tell you, Everett, I don't want the Widow Brandon to hear about it. Now—don't tell her—will you?"

"Of course not, Jervais; I'll not mention it to her. But you had better tell her yourself. Of course she will hear of it from some one. Good-bye, I'm in a hurry."

"Say, Everett," Jervais still clung to his arm. "When are you going to have your first case? Im dead anxious to see you before the bar. A Yankee schoolteacher a lawyer—that'll be *rich*! Say—a crippled one, too—that'll be a joke." He ended with another loud burst of merriment.

For a second Sargent stared into the leering face of the drunken man. Then, trembling in a spasm of rage, his fingers knotted themselves together, and before he was aware of what he was doing, his arm had shot up and delivered a blow full into Jervais' face.

As soon as he had done it, a strange calm swept over him, and he stood as one aloof, looking on the result of his act.

Jervais staggered back a step, wheeled in an attempt to keep his balance, and fell full length upon the pavement.

In a second a crowd was about them, several assisting Jervais to rise.

When he had regained his feet, Sargent made a step toward him—"Is he hurt?" he asked very quietly.

"No—don't you know you can't hurt a drunken man?"

Then Jervais made a lunge toward him, but was held back by two men who were supporting him. His face was distorted into the trembling features of rage, flushed a purple crimson, and from his eyes shot out the fury of unchained hatred. Sargent involuntarily looked away, sickened.

"You damned cripple!—to insult me in the street!" Jervais shouted in his fury. "You can't fight like a man with a man. You'd claim you were not able, I suppose! But I demand satisfaction! I'll have it, too. There's one way to settle this thing—d'you hear? A way to settle this for good!"

"Very well—we'll settle it whenever you wish." Sargent wheeled quickly and walked from the crowd.

Half a block away he found himself suddenly standing before some one who barred the way. When he had felt both his arms in a tight grip, and heard the sound of a familiar, hearty laugh, he looked up and recognized Captain Mentdrop.

For a moment his excitement and surprise kept back a greeting, so that the old Captain's face lost its geniality and the twinkle in his eyes became frank disappointment. "So you've forgotten me, have you?" he said, with an odd little ring in his voice.

"No—no, Captain!" Sargent struggled to force the words. "Of course I have not forgotten you, but I don't want to talk to you here. Can't we get away some-

where?"

The old fellow's keen eyes swept Sargent's face, reading there the signs of the recent struggle.

"What's up, youngster?" He bent a little forward. "What's a troublin' you? Your face is as red as a beet, and you've got a mighty bad glare in your eyes. Come on up to my room here in the Mansion House. I was resting very comfortable-like up there, till I saw some sort of a scuffle going on out here." Then with a quick intuition, he searched Sargent's face again. "It ain't possible you were mixed up in it!"

They went up the tavern steps and altered the Captain's room. When the old fellow had closed the door after them, he turned back to Sargent, who had sunk into a chair near the window, and watched the young fellow, his lips twitching slightly and his eyes crisply twinkling with the humour he was struggling to keep back.

"You weren't mixed up in it, youngster, were you?" he repeated, with his lips twitching again.

Sargent met his look squarely. "Yes, I was in it. A street fight! I knocked Lemuel Jervais down!"

"You! Lemuel Jervais—Oh!" And the Captain could restrain himself no longer. He dropped into a chair, the whole of his great frame shaking with loud gusts of laughter, while the tears gushed forth and rolled down his furrowed cheeks. "On my honour—it's too good to believe," he cried breathlessly. "You and Lem Jervais in a street fight. And when you were on that boat with me I thought you were as harmless as a kitten. Gee Whillikens!" and he let out a long whistle, "but you are a promising youngster—after all. Easy, now. Don't blaze your eyes at me that way. *I* wasn't the cause of it. When you get cooled down a-plenty, tell me about it. Ugh, but you are huffy about it!" as Sargent remained impervious to his humour. "You know what I do when I get that upset? I just lock myself up in my cabin where nobody can get to me and I can get to nobody, and I cuss everybody and everything that I can get my mind on—you ought to hear me! I can cuss like a beauty when I get warmed up to my subject, and will you believe me, sir, when I come out I'm as cool as a cucumber. Honest Injun, I am—just like a May morning. Want to try it? I'll give you the room to yourself. Well—if you won't, maybe telling me about it will help you let off a little steam. Now—how d' it start?"

Sargent raised his head at the last question, and looked into the twinkling grey eyes before him. When he spoke, his voice was sharp and unsteady.

"He was drunk and laughed at me—laughed at my deformity! He said it would be a joke for me to plead any case before the bar. I, a Yankee schoolteacher—a crippled one at that!"

The Captain was out of his chair and before Sargent in a second. The twinkle had gone out of his eyes. They were steely now.

"The damned scoundrel! And you?"

"I knocked him down."

"Before the whole crowd? Good! Then?"

"He challenged me."

The old fellow's face brightened.

"Better still! When'll it be?"

"I don't know yet."

"Am I the first you've talked to?"

"Yes."

"Good! Good! I'll help you. I'll be your second."

The old fellow rubbed his hands together and the gleam came back into his eyes, while his furrowed face became tinged with a faint glow that shone youthful beneath the coarsened, weather-worn skin.

Sargent stared at him blankly.

"You," he exclaimed, seemingly without comprehension.

"Yes, I—that is," and the Captain glanced at him with a tinge of resentment, "unless you prefer some one else."

Sargent grasped his hands silently.

"That's right; you let me take charge of this thing, boy. I'll do it up in shipshape." He let his hand drop with rough affection on Sargent's shoulder. "It's mighty lucky I'm going to be here for two weeks. My boilers are out of fix and I'm tied up repairs. Let me know when you get the challenge and I'll help you fix the whole thing. I know all about how these things are done. Now, don't go back on me, and think you ought to ask a younger fellow, for if anything should happen to you and I had to take your place, there ain't a living soul dependent on me."

Sargent rose without a word. Then, turning suddenly, he went out of the room and down the steps, followed by the old fellow, who still held his arm in a firm grasp. Stopping when they had reached the pavement, the Captain glanced once more at the young fellow's face, his twinkling eyes beaming affectionately from their thousand encircling wrinkles.

"Who'd 'a' thought when we parted on the boat that day, that we'd meet in a mix-up like this? I kind a' felt all along that you were going to make your name. I can size up a promising youngster every time. Just to think of it!" and he ended with a slap on Sargent's shoulder. "Good-bye, and don't forget," he lowered his voice confidentially, "I'm going to be your second. D'you hear? Even if you

didn't ask me. It's all of my own choosing."

CHAPTER III
A DEMAND OF HONOUR

The balmy twilight had softened into night as Sargent walked away from the tavern, and in the sudden privacy of the darkness the diverting influence of the old Captain's personality faded, and all the details of his encounter with Jervais returned to him with an added intensity.

Again, as he felt the moment he struck Jervais, there came to him a sensation of burning alive under the insult—the insult that he could not repudiate. The blood rushed to his head and pounded like a great firing of artillery, and when he had crossed the street from the tavern, and struck into a deserted thoroughfare, he leaned against a fence to keep from falling, for the mental agony had brought with it a keen sense of physical weakness. Why was this curse of physical deformity to follow him always! Was it some punishment of God's that was to be eternal? The saner forces of his nature, the gentle influences of his early training, the memories which had so far kept him pure and noble, receded under this sudden unloosening of the resentment against his infirmity which he had always forced himself to subdue. With this unchaining of all restraint, he became for the moment another creature. Barbaric instincts came to life, and he felt the thrill of a discoverer at finding such characteristics in his possession.

Then, out of the swirling ensemble, came one thought that quickly chained everything else into submission—a determination to meet Jervais in the trial of Phelps, to oppose him, to defeat him, to bring him to an inexorable failure before the Court, to make his fall so great that he would be robbed even of any desire for future honours: That would be his revenge. Afterward, he would not care what happened in the duel; nothing would matter after he had fully tasted the sweetness of his revenge. So completely had he sunk under the obsession of this new line of thought that when he entered Judge Houston's unlighted library a few minutes later, the metamorphosis showed in every line of his features.

He spoke no word of greeting, only grasped the extended hand and looked into the kind eyes of the old gentleman with fixed intensity.

"Was the case you meant, the prosecution of Phelps?"

Judge Houston stepped back from him, surprised into a short silence by the

wild expression in Sargent's eyes.

"Yes—how did you guess it?"

"Thank God!"

The words escaped Sargent in a sob that was the concentrated expression of his suffering. He sank into a familiar chair beside the table, and let his head drop into his hands.

The old man looked at him in silence, surprise, sympathy and fear glowing in his clear blue eyes. Finally he walked over to Sargent and rested his hand on the young fellow's shoulder.

"What is it, boy? What is troubling you so?"

"It is only the relief your words have given me. My only fear was that I might be mistaken."

The Judge's brow was wrinkled a long time as he puzzled over the words.

"Were you so anxious to have the case?" he asked. "You know, I was half afraid you might not want it."

Sargent lifted his face and met the kind eyes. "Yes, I want it! I'm going to make it the case of my life! It will be my first, but I'm going to make it the greatest one of my career. If I ever go down in history as a big man, this case will be the great one of them all!"

The old man was still bewildered. He moved away slowly and pushing his chair up opposite Sargent, sat down and faced him, frankly studying his face, watching the swift changes playing across it, noting the strange, new determination that was already hardening the gentle lines about his mouth. He felt his own heart suddenly contract with a sharp sense of disappointment, for he had hoped to keep this boy, by means of his influence and help, fresh and young in the battle of life; but he saw now that something had forestalled him; something had already come with a blighting sting.

He had been quick to read the sensitive, imaginative, capable nature of Sargent the first time they had clasped hands. He had seen the wonderful possibilities that would develop under the right influences—the remarkable capacity for right and wrong, whichever it would be that would tip the scales; and in that moment that the resemblance to his own son had struck him, he had felt all the denied love of a father stir within him and give itself to the boy. Afterwards, he had gone further in his advances than ever before in his long life; he had given him the freedom of his library, directing him in the use of books, even preparing him for the legal examination with his own questions, which he made more difficult than necessary. All the while he had felt the intellectual joy of watching a brilliant mind expanding and grasping new subjects; of looking far back into the shadowy past through the rich imagination of a youthful mind. And with the father love that bound him to Sargent, was blended a sense of pride that the youth

should grow along by his side, becoming under his tutelage the actual expression of all the unrealized ideals of his own life.

But something had jarred the perfect sympathy; some enemy was already tugging at the cords that bound them.

In the circle of lamplight lay a weather-worn, leather bound book. It had been brought from Virginia on the long pilgrimage to the South, and had always been a friend and a book of comfort. Instinctively the old man's hand went out and touched it.

"It will be a difficult case," Sargent heard him saying, as if more to himself than to any listener. "Yes—it is almost hopeless. You can not possibly win it. I only wanted you to have the experience. It will get you well started before the public."

"Why do you say it is hopeless?"

"There is so little evidence. You can not convict a man without proofs."

"Is there absolutely nothing?"

"Oh, yes," the old man answered, patiently. "There are a few circumstances. We can go into that later. There is plenty of time. What I want to know now is," and he dropped his voice into a lower tone, and looked at Sargent tenderly, "what is troubling you? Don't you care to tell me?" he ended, with a frank note of pleading in his voice.

Sargent met his look unflinchingly. "I have never kept anything from you," he began. "Why should I now, when you have done so much for me! Only," and he hesitated, with the certainty that what he was going to say would perhaps alter their friendship for ever. A feeling of restraint made him silent, and with a leap his thoughts went back to the other man, the Captain, the one who had weathered the storms of a pioneer's life, and even in his old age was still a boy. He found himself longing for the comradeship and joviality of the one who saw only a desirable notoriety in fighting a duel; and yet, in the kaleidoscopic varying of thought, he knew that in a saner moment he would seek only the one now before him, for advice. The Captain represented to him the expression of untempered passion, and at this moment that was the one thing that his nature demanded.

In this light the calmness of Judge Houston became to him cold criticism, before which he quailed.

Words that might in some way palliate his action rushed to his lips, finding excuses that a moment before, in the absorption of his anger, he would have despised.

"You believe," he said at last, in a more controlled voice, "that there sometimes come in a man's life circumstances that rob him of the faculty of reasoning? Perhaps one incident that blots out everything that has gone before, leaving in its place only one absorbing determination. You believe that, don't you?"

Judge Houston bowed his head silently.

"You believe too that there are things in life that a man must resent—must resent even by going against all the laws of God and man—that unless he does resent them the rest of his life must be without self-respect and without honours. Then, if a man does not fight, life is rendered valueless to him, both in his own eyes and those of the community, and existence becomes a burden! At times like these one must choose between two evils. I have chosen the least of the two."

"A duel!" The old man rose from his chair, and paced the floor, his hands clasped behind him. "A duel? With whom?"

His lips were twitching slightly, and his hands—old, worn hands, which the years had left drawn and stretched into a thousand creases, and the sight of which, clasping and unclasping in his nervousness, smote Sargent with a keen, knifelike pain, through the knowledge that he was causing the old gentleman to suffer for his sake. He put out his hand impulsively, and grasped the other's when he passed close to him.

"Don't blame me—forgive me," he said. "Don't make it any harder than it is already. I believe in my heart you would have done the same."

"Tell me, my boy." The Judge's voice was full of sympathy.

The torrent of words came at last, and as he told his story Sargent found a relief that left him weak and exhausted. The strain was reaching its limit.

"Ah! you don't blame me," he ended brokenly. "I knew you would not!"

With his words, a reflection of the anger of his own eyes had sprung alive in the old man's. Judge Houston stood before Sargent, his hands gripping the shoulders of the young fellow with an intensity of sympathy.

"Don't say any more," he said in a low voice that trembled slightly. "I understand. I will stand with you."

"You!" Sargent moved away quickly, and stood staring at him. "You!" And then his lips trembled. The end of his strength came, and he threw himself across the sofa, his face in his hands, his whole body shaking convulsively. "It's more than I deserve," he said. "That all this should have come to me in one day—this hatred, and Captain Mentdrop's friendship—and your—love. It is too much to understand."

The old gentleman stood a moment beside the table, his hand again on the leather bound volume. As a shaft of light penetrated through the open door, it rested on him a moment, concentrating in the beautiful gentle eyes, and shining forth, in a deeper, fuller glory.

He went slowly to the sofa and sat down beside Sargent, his hand resting with its peacegiving power upon the bowed head.

In a long silence that followed, his lips were still, but within was a constantly repeated prayer, "God give me the power to lead him right. Give me this

power—if nothing else." Then aloud, as the voice of his wife called to them from the dining-room. "It is nothing that I am doing for you—only what I would have done for my son—and yoy have come to take his place."

CHAPTER IV
HIS FIRST CASE

So the schoolhouse was closed again on the following Monday, and Sargent rode into the town to plead his first case before the bar.

In the open square of the town, set far back in a grove of trees, stood the brick courthouse, considered a large building in those days. In its Hall of Justice was a plastered ceiling on which an architect from the old world had fashioned a circle of hands, each with its forefinger pointing directly down upon the heads of those who sat in judgment.

Home-seekers, coming there in an attempt to settle hopelessly involved land suits: destitute, silent Indians, squatting on the door steps awaiting the decision of some land agent; slaves brought in shiploads from the Bermudas; even wealthy planters looked upon this Hall of Justice with a certain awe. The plastered hands were ominous and unavoidable; always when one looked at them they were pointing so directly at one that it had grown into a saying that when a man was brought before the judges he was "beneath the pointing fingers."

About the courthouse that day was gathered an unusual crowd, for at such a season of the year, when the fields must be ploughed and cotton planted, court was never very largely attended.

Down a long line of hitching posts was almost every conceivable vehicle, including a huge prairie schooner filled with a curious crowd from the Black River country. Whole families, parents, children, slaves, and favourite dogs were picnicking about the square—all had come many miles to hear the trial of a man who had made safety a very uncertain thing for the last five years.

Sargent threaded his way among them, unknown, yet feeling a greater responsibility resting upon him as he saw this evidence of the people's interest. They were looking to him to remove this murderer from their midst. As he went into the courthouse, he met Judge Houston. The old gentleman extended his hand, and for a second smiled encouragingly into the strained eyes of the young lawyer.

"You've been overdoing it, Sargent," he said quietly. "You should have rested. Too much reading of law paralyzes the brain."

Sargent met his look earnestly, without the smile that was always so ready upon his lips.

"I couldn't sleep, and I had to do something. I believe I've read every murder case on record."

"And have you discovered a method by which you can win this one?"

Sargent's eyes glowed brilliantly as he answered. "Your doubt of me is the greatest factor in forcing me on. I don't know how I shall do it, but—I'm going to make that jury render a verdict of guilty."

The old gentleman's brows drew together, and he shook his head slowly, letting his hand rest affectionately on Sargent's shoulder.

"I only hope you will succeed, Sargent—as much for the people's sake as for your own. If justice is not meted out to Phelps by law, I fear it will come to him through the hatred of the people. Go now, boy—do your best. And remember, I have failed many and many a time, others are failing continually, and no one really succeeds until failure has been his tutor. Good-bye! Meet me when the day's session is over."

All through that first day, which was given over to the hearing of evidence, Sargent had grown more and more under the conviction that if he were to win the case it would come from some inspiration which had not yet been given to him. Not that he had for a moment given up hope, for each time such a thought flashed into his mind, it was followed by the thundering necessity for success. And when Phelps was brought into the room and he could look for the first time into the face of the man whose freedom he was attempting to take from him, Sargent forgot everything else in studying the highwayman's features. In them he had suddenly realized an aid to his success.

All through the cross-examination of the witnesses he was thinking of it, even to the intense moment when the two scraps of paper were displayed: one a gun wadding found in the house of the murdered man and the other in the pocket of Jacob Phelps. The two pieces were from a paper of the same date, and though not fitting into each other were considered the strongest evidence against the prisoner. Besides that, only the proximity of the canebrake where Phelps was captured, and a long, detailed report of his former daring robberies were all that he had been able to procure.

The weak point of the evidence was that not an instance of murder could be charged to Phelps. There had always been a doubt of his guilt—and in this Jervais showed his strength. Each of his questions led in labyrinthine windings to the

end that nothing had been proved on the prisoner. Indeed, those who swore they recognized him were eventually misled into the belief that they were swearing to an uncertainty.

Finally the recess hour came, and in the afternoon, after all the evidence had been taken, the court adjourned until the next day, when the speeches for the two sides should be made.

Sargent waited for Judge Houston outside the courthouse. He had walked to one side of the grounds where he would not meet the crowd of familiar faces, and be forced to discuss the case, for already he had been quick to feel the disappointment that had settled over them after all the evidence had been heard. Their silence and lowered voices showed their fears, and passing a group hurriedly at the recess hour, he had heard a doubt expressed at Judge Houston's wisdom in appointing him to represent the State. Many little incidents of the day were remembered by him long afterwards, which, in the concentration of all his energies at the time, he had not even been aware of. All he wanted at that moment was material with which to impress the jury—material which was lacking he realized with a sickening dread.

As he stood under the trees and faced the court-house, its brick walls glowing in the late sun, once more the prisoner's face rose before him, photographing itself indelibly upon his mind. Each feature stood out enlarged and vivid; black eyes, bold and fearless and insolent, with the surrounding whites almost entirely red from swollen veins; a low forehead from which black, wiry hair grew out, straight and stiff; a long, aquiline nose with wide nostrils in which showed a heavy growth of hair; heavy lips, the lower one protruding doggedly, yet both suggesting a certain generosity in their amplitude; the chin and side of the face covered with a short beard which reached far up the cheeks to where pock marks glowed deep and white against a swarthy complexion. It was a face characteristic of daring and wild deeds, yet in some lines about the eyes, inscrutable and haunting, there was something unconfessed.

All through the channels of Sargent's imagination, set in motion by this face, insistently colouring every conclusion reached, was the hidden characteristic about the man's eyes which signified something which he felt certain would help him in some way if he could find out what it meant. In a swift passion of futility he pushed out his hands to ward off the first signal of defeat that was steadily creeping over him. He covered his eyes to keep out the likeness of Phelps' face as it glowered down upon him from the court-house wall. Was it possible that he had failed? Had he been too self-confident? Was it only hatred and a desire for vengeance which had made up the ingredients of his confidence? At the end of each question stood the face of Jervais, and the duel—after that, another question. Finally, through the lengthening shadows, he strolled back to the broad steps and

waited Judge Houston's coming.

They walked home in the twilight, the old man's arm linked in Sargent's, their heads bent forward in thoughtful silence.

"Did you look at him? Did you see his face?" Sargent asked as they turned the corner and approached the house.

"Whose face?" Judge Houston looked up quickly.

"The man's—Jacob Phelps."

"Yes—why?"

"Did you see anything in it but cruelty—malignity—daring?"

"No—there was nothing else."

"Oh, but you are mistaken. There is something else."

"What?"

"I don't know. I'd give half my life to find out. I must find out to-night—I will!"

Mrs. Houston was standing at the gate to welcome them, Natalia on her pony before the block, both of them silent in their impatience to hear the outcome of the first day.

"You all are bothered! I can see that right now. And such glum faces—look at them, Natalia," Mrs. Houston said cheerfully, as the two men came up to them. "I declare you all look as if Phelps was prosecuting you, instead of the reverse! And I have gone to lots of trouble to get up a good supper for you—lye-hominy, some nice, fresh roasted yams, and waffles! And here you both look like you wouldn't eat a mouthful, and Natalia says she won't stay either!" Mrs. Houston sighed in much distress. "I wish sometimes there was no such thing as law. It upsets my dinner hour and my plans, and is disastrous in lots of ways."

"So you'd rather have your dinner on time," laughed Judge Houston, "than all the highwaymen in the country in jail!" He walked across the sidewalk to speak to Natalia, leaving Sargent and his wife together.

"Is it so bad?" she asked quickly, her face searching Sargent's anxiously. "Are you worried about the outcome?"

"I know I shall win!" Sargent's eyes blazed again, "but I don't know yet how I shall do it. If I should fail now—"

"Of course you will not. Don't let that enter your thoughts. Can't Felix help you?"

"Not now," Sargent answered, his features still drawn and tense. "It's all with me now, and I'm glad of it."

The gentle old lady looked at the youth before her, so earnest and flushed, her eyes clouding at the possible disappointment awaiting him. She had seen all these hopes and desires so often before, in the days long passed when she and her young husband had started on their long pilgrimage. Then, looking beyond

him, her eyes dwelt on Natalia pensively. When she spoke again her face was brimming with cheerfulness.

"On your way home," she said softly, "be very good to her. Forget all this worry and this abstraction and talk to her. It will do you good. Do you realize the place you have taken in the child's life? It has made me wonder if it was good for her or not. Sometimes," she ended, reflectively, "I wonder what you have done to gain her love so—and yet, I think I know."

Sargent glanced to where Natalia was leaning from her saddle and talking intently with Judge Houston. For the first time that day the tenseness of his face relaxed, and the memory of the courtroom and all it meant slipped from him.

"I believe I gained her love," he answered slowly, "by first loving her. Don't you think that is the only real way to gain another's love?"

"Yes—there are very few who fail to respond to being loved. It is so flattering," she smiled lightly. "But Natalia needed you just when you came. You know how out of sympathy she and Mrs. Brandon are?"

"That is not to be wondered at. Could you possibly find two more opposite natures? One—cool, calculating, and always just; the other—intense, wilful, passionate. Look at her now! She's more like some little fairy who has been lost from other fairies than anything else in the world. And how old she is at times! I feel that I am talking to some one a great deal older than I am. Tell me, Mrs. Houston," Sargent leaned nearer on the gate and his voice sank to a whisper, "now that she is going away, how can I make her remember me? If she were to go away and forget me—"

"She will not do that, my dear boy." She pressed his hand gently. "She's at the impressionable age, and she loves you with all her little, pent-up nature. She will not forget."

Sargent met her glance warmly. "You see, it is so different with me, from most men. My sensitiveness, my wretched infirmity, seems to make everything so much more serious to me. And when any one gets hold of my affections, I feel a tremendous need for them always. That is the way with Natalia—it was her sweet dependence, her yearning for sympathy, her quaint charm that have bound me tocher for ever. Of course she is only a child now," he hesitated suddenly, as if half unwilling to express his real feelings, "but if I could have the hope that she would come back to me some day—a woman loving me as she does now—anything would be worth enduring—for that!"

"If you all are going to talk all the evening, I'm going home," Natalia cried, from her pony. "And I told Zebby I'd be home surely by six o'clock."

Sargent hurriedly mounted his horse, which had been brought to the gate, and waved a farewell to Mrs. Houston. "Good-bye," she called to them, waving her handkerchief as they rode off. "I'm going to hear you make your maiden

speech to-morrow. Good luck to you. Good-bye, Natalia."

It was almost dark when Sargent and Natalia left the town behind them, and through the dark forest bordering the cotton fields, a feathery crescent moon floated up and greeted them. The balmy spring breeze blew in their faces, and in the Western sky still lingered the faint glow of sunset. The cabins were sending up thin lines of white smoke, the delicious odour of fried bacon was in the air, and the sound of some one chopping wood in the distance gave a homely touch of comfort to the scene. Completing the peaceful holiness of the spring twilight came the harmonies of the slaves, singing as they went home from the day's work.

They rode along in silence. Natalia, dangling her little bonnet from its green ribbons, looked up at Sargent intently, but his eyes did not answer hers. They were bent on some distant object that she knew she could never see, and sighing slightly, she resigned herself to waiting for him to become aware of her presence. In her childlike adoration, there was sufficient happiness in being near him.

When the gate loomed before them through the vista of trees, Natalia guided her pony closer to Sargent, until he was forced to notice her.

"Aunt Maria said you were terribly bothered," she said, when he looked down at her out of his long abstraction. "Is that what makes you so different?" she ended plaintively.

"Yes—that's it, Natalia," Sargent answered, his brows knitted close together. "It seems to have ruined my whole outlook. I can't think of anything else. All the way home I could see nothing but that man's face. I believe I'm beginning to lose hope, too. Would you be sorry if Mr. Jervais won the case from me?"

Natalia looked up at him, drawing the pony to a sudden standstill in her amazement.

"Mr. Jervais can't do that! You wouldn't let him! I hate him anyhow!" She clenched her little hand. "Please don't let him win."

"Suppose I can not help myself? Suppose he has all the evidence on his side? What can I do then?"

"Well—" she said slowly, as if attempting to arrive at some conclusion. "Well—isn't Phelps a murderer?"

"Every one *thinks* so. But I can not prove it."

"Do *you* think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then," with an impatient toss of the head, "it's just as easy as can be. Make him say it is so."

Sargent threw back his head and laughed heartily for the first time in many days. And all the while Natalia stared at him with an expression that spoke

eloquently surprise and wounded pride.

"Well, you needn't laugh so much about it!" she exclaimed, as Sargent's amusement seemed to increase. "You could make him tell you if you had a mind to. Mammy says you have a silver tongue, and when people have that, they can make other people tell everything they know. I don't care though, if you don't make him tell," she cried, the tears coming into her eyes as Sargent continued laughing. They were at the gate now, and as he lifted her from the pony, she struggled out of his arms and flew toward the house. "I don't care a picayune if you don't ever win a case!" she called back to him from the veranda, and then slammed the door tight after her.

Sargent walked slowly toward his room. The smile had gone from his face now, and in its place was an odd, quickening expression.

"Make him tell you!" he repeated Natalia's words as he unlocked the door of his room. "Make him tell you!" he repeated, as he blew out his candle, hours later. "Make him tell you!" he repeated all through that long, sleepless night.

CHAPTER V
MAGNETISM

The two men faced each other, the lawyer at one end of the long table, the prisoner barely ten feet away, in his chair before the jury. The moment was tense. Everything had been finished, even Jervais' eloquent speech to the jury, in which he had cautioned the twelve men not to let sentiment lead them to a decision, but to be guided only by the evidence and what had absolutely been proved. And now remained only the speech of the prosecution, on which rested the hopes of every one in the courtroom.

Even the jury had grown restless under the continued want of facts in the case. Their attitude toward the prisoner was but a reflection of the sentiment of the townspeople—they feared the man; his presence was a menace always to be faced; they wanted to be freed from his disturbing proximity; and they wanted to feel that long trips to neighbouring villages would be without the danger of this highwayman. In short they wanted him dead.

But what they had heard was not convicting. It was impossible, so far, to render a verdict of guilty, on what had been shown.

During the silence that followed Jervais' speech, Sargent rose from his

chair, and stepped forward. A wave of disappointment rushed over the courtroom, for the people had hoped to the last that their district attorney would be able to leave his bed and come to the rescue, convicting the prisoner through the eloquence they had known for years. But everything seemed in favour of the prisoner, every one admitted that Jervais had made the finest speech of his career, and now that their great attorney had been substituted by a youth who had not even made his first speech before the bar, Phelps' chances for acquittal were depressingly certain.

What could this young lawyer do? This limping, Yankee schoolteacher who had come South to make a living? What could he do but complete the fiasco of the trial? A titter was heard at one end of the courtroom, followed by an outright laugh, and then, suddenly, silence fell again as a counter wave of interest fell over the audience. Something in the position of the two men—the lawyer and the prisoner—had claimed their attention.

Sargent, in rising, had not faced the jury, but stood perfectly silent and rigid, his gaze riveted upon the prisoner. In his eyes was no sign of fear, but a calm watchfulness of some expected danger. The prisoner returned the look, his blood-shot eyes keen and cat-like in the intensity of the passion boiling back of them. His coarse, unkempt hair hung in masses over his forehead, his rough skin and uneven beard and crouching posture but intensified his expression of brutality and vicious force.

The two seemed born to be antagonistic: the absolute want of visible sympathy made the contrast impressive.

Sargent put aside his cane and steadied himself with one hand upon the table; the other he held half poised, as if in the act of defence, for that morning a strange story had been whispered about, and during Jervais' speech it had reached him. He had been told that Phelps was desperate enough to attack him even in the courtroom.

Then, with his gaze still searching the blood-shot eyes of the prisoner, he began his speech. It took the intent crowd of listeners several minutes to adjust themselves to what was happening; then they found that the young lawyer was not talking to them, nor to the Judge, nor even to the jury. His words were directed only to the man before him.

In a low, clear voice, heard in every corner of the courtroom, he was describing to the prisoner, in pitiless detail, the crime committed; painting vividly the scene of the murder, the aged, respected planter lying dead on the floor of his room, a pool of blood about him, his belongings scattered everywhere, his valuables all gone. He told of the man's life, his charity, his good influence upon his neighbours. He described him at home, at his evening meal, surrounded by a happy and dependant family; his awakening in the night to find himself in the

grip of a brutal antagonist—and at last, his feeble death struggle with an unseen foe.

The words came from his lips cold, crisp, clear cut, without feeling, yet so forcibly were they chosen, so short and cogent, that they fell upon the ears of his listeners like the beat of a huge hammer upon marble.

The scene rose before the listeners with a vividness that the real one would have lacked, for the wonderful voice of the young lawyer had set fire to their imaginations, and each man saw through his eyes. Every sentence jarred like an electric shock. There was no attempt at eloquence. Where was the need of it with such a subject? And while Sargent was unconsciously inflaming the passions of the crowd back of him, he continued to gaze straight into the blood-shot eyes of the prisoner with all the pent-up vital force within him. If he could only see the faintest sign of acknowledged guilt! That was the thing for which he was searching. It had not yet come.

For a moment his eyes wavered, and as if looking for some new inspiration, he glanced through the open windows to where the leaves of the trees were rustling in the breeze. He had found the prisoner impervious to his words. It was as if he had not been talking, so far as any change in the stolid features showed. There must be some other method necessary to touch the face of iron before him. But he had not reached the limit of his resources yet—no, not by half.

He turned back and faced the prisoner, as fresh and calm as if all the turbulence of a few moments ago had not come from his lips.

Now his eyes held no longer the look of scorn and antagonism. They were tender, appealing and sad. His voice softened and grew warm in its tones, and from him emanated that irresistible gentleness that, we are told, in after years drew even his enemies to him. He was using the utmost force of his magnetism to draw a confession from the man before him.

He began speaking again, telling of the family of the man who had been murdered, dwelling with a deep sympathy upon the young, fatherless children, who had to take up the burden of life without the guidance of their parent. Then, almost in a whisper, and with deep reverence, he spoke of the bereaved wife, a widow and a mother, a feeble woman, no longer young, left alone to care for the children, separated from her life partner and left to finish her days unprotected. He drew a telling picture of his own mother, of every man's mother, in a like situation.

There were tears in the eyes of the audience as they listened, there were tears in the eyes of the lawyer, and suddenly, as his words ended in a faint whisper, the blood-shot eyes of the prisoner shifted uneasily and were hidden for a moment by the falling lids.

A quiver passed over Sargent's slender figure. He lowered his right hand

from the position of defence, and placing it beside the other, rested heavily against the table. A sensation of utter weariness crept over him. He could not recall having felt so exhausted ever before. It was the first time that he had used the full force of his magnetism, of which until that day he had been in ignorance. For a second, overcome by the new fatigue, he wondered if his power would last. The first signal of the confession was held in the drooping lids of the prisoner. Could he bring the rest?

Once more he took up the thread of his speech. Phelps met his gaze no longer, even the crouching position of one ready to spring relaxed, and he sank back into his chair and gazed steadily at his hands. Sargent leaned forward in his intensity, his words coming more rapidly. He was now dwelling on the laws of his country, on the need of these laws, of the rights of man which must be recognized and obeyed, of the Christianity of civilization, and of the punishment of God. His voice grew steadily louder as he urged the murderer to repent before he should reach the great tribunal of God, where repentance would be too late.

Still he could gain no answer from the man's downcast eyes. Within him a voice grew louder and more insistent. He felt the words leaving him in a stream of compelling force. Louder and louder, in the dead silence of the room they grew into thunderbolts that seemed to shake the building. On and on he went, a great light glowing from the depths of his eyes, until by the compelling force of his invectives, the irresistible power of his magnetism, the prisoner sprang from his chair and faced him.

For an instant they stood with only the table separating them, the accused man towering above the lawyer in a spasm of rage. Then, sweeping over his coarsened features came an expression of utter despair and misery, his eyes grew lustreless and dead, and drawing from his shirt a concealed dirk, he threw it from him and lowered his face upon his outstretched hands.

No word was spoken, but so completely did the agony of the man's face express his confession, that a shiver ran over the audience.

In the silence which followed Sargent stood with folded arms, amid the naked passions of the courtroom. A few minutes later, when he realized that they were still waiting for him to speak, he turned towards the jury and said slowly:

"Gentlemen, there is the murderer. Do with him as your conscience tells you."

He thought it was several hours afterwards, when in fact it was only ten minutes, that he became aware of his surroundings. He had sunk on the bench after addressing the jury, and before him had begun to swim all the fancies employed in his speech, and in a futile attempt to gather and separate them, as he had done before, he found himself tumbling from a great height, which his fast

ebbing vital force made irresistible.

Then suddenly, in the midst of the turbulence, he felt the encouraging warmth of a friend's hand, and looking up, saw Judge Houston's broad back passing on towards the jury room.

Jacob Phelps lay forward on the table, his face buried in his outstretched hands. Beyond him stood Jervais, facing the hushed courtroom, with a countenance livid with fury.

Turning to see the cause of such an expression, Sargent looked for the first time into the sea of faces, pale and still, yet gazing at him with glowing eyes that told him their admiration and wonder. He understood their silence, and thrilled under the depths of feeling that kept them speechless. In that moment he knew that the commencement of his career was a triumph.

And while he stood with every nerve in his body tingling responsively to his blind joy, the jury re-entered the room and took their seats, and Judge Houston's voice rang out loud and sonorous.

"Jacob Phelps! Stand up!"

Phelps lifted his bowed head, his eyes roving furtively over the crowd of staring faces. Moving slightly, with the expression of one who is dazed into semi-consciousness, he stared back into the sea of faces—not one expression of kindness, of sympathy, of friendship for him was in that entire throng. Then, with the dull look of one who has relinquished all hope, he wheeled and faced the judge.

"Jacob Phelps, you have been judged, and convicted of murder—the highest crime known to the laws of the State of Mississippi. Have you anything to say, or any reason to give why the sentence of the law should not be pronounced upon you?"

In the breathless stillness there came a pause. Phelps did not answer. Again the judge's voice filled the courtroom.

"Then nothing now remains but the performance of my painful duty. The sentence of the law and the judgment of the Court is that you be taken hence to the jail of Adams County, and there safely confined until Thursday, the twentieth day of June, 1833, when between the hours of ten o'clock in the morning and noon, you be taken into the jail yard; and there, by the Sheriff of this County, you be hanged by the neck until you are dead—and may the Lord have mercy

upon your soul!"

CHAPTER VI
TO BE HANGED BY THE NECK UNTIL DEAD

"Everett, you're a wonder, man." "Pick him up there, Suggs." "Now, all at once! Lift him up!" "Now, all together, we'll sing, 'See the conquering hero comes!'" "Where are we going? Oh, to the Mansion House, of course. I'm going to set 'em up until everybody has his fill." "Never heard a speech until I heard Everett's to-day."

Before he knew what had happened, Sargent had been surrounded as he came out of the courtroom, and hoisted to the shoulders of an admiring crowd that was waiting for him.

The people had gone wild in their enthusiasm over what he had done for them. On that day he found himself a public man, at the mercy of the whims of the public, and their whim at that moment was to find an outlet for their admiration.

They took his cane away from him, some one grabbed his broad felt hat and replaced it with a chimney pot that was not unbecoming by any means, and then they carried him on their shoulders to the bar of the Mansion House, and placing him on the counter, made him listen to their speeches of congratulations while the waiters plied every one present with more drinks than any one's capacity admitted.

Captain Mentdrop gave an eloquent peroration, in which he stated that he was the first one to introduce the Honourable Sargent Everett to the townspeople, who from thenceforth would give only honour and praise to his name. He would have continued interminably if it had not been that others were as anxious to claim that honour as the Captain. And for two hours the speech-making and jollification lasted, until every one grew hilarious over the motion that Sargent be sent as their representative to the next Legislature.

When the excitement had reached its height, and a crowd had gone out on the street to erect a bonfire—no matter if it were broad daylight—Sargent saw his chance to get away and slipped quietly out the back door of the tavern into a deserted street.

Walking as rapidly as his halting gait would permit, he traversed the streets where he would hardly meet any one, and came at last to the bluff that looked

down over the river. Pushing his way through a tangle of undergrowth, he reached a place far enough from the town to be secure from interruption. Here he threw himself full length upon the ground, breathing hard from the unusual physical exertion. He was utterly exhausted, and covering his eyes with his hands he lay perfectly motionless.

When he looked up again a scarlet sun was sinking into the banks of dull grey clouds, and illumining weirdly the scene of river and distant flat country.

Ah! it was a relief to get away from the crowd of gaping faces, even if they spoke praise and admiration. And beyond that, he was glad that the courthouse, with all the associations which had in one moment become horrible to him, could not be seen from where he sat.

For a long time he remained perfectly still, gazing out upon the scene before him, seeing in it only dreariness and despair accentuated by the encroaching shadows; and all the time, as if to keep out some haunting sound, he pressed both hands over his ears.

And the change had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. Only a little while before, flushed with the pride of his first success, the blood surging happily through his veins, he had waited with the others for the verdict, and as the words rang out across the hushed courtroom, "To be hanged by the neck until you are dead!" they fell upon his overstrained nerves like an electric shock. Something within him snapped, and in the next moment he found himself looking into the miserable, hopeless eyes of the prisoner as they led him from the room.

After that Sargent felt the buoyancy and joy and triumph slip completely away from him. He was aware of nothing but the sound of those words, he heard them whispered over the courtroom, he heard them in the congratulations of his friends, he heard nothing else during the speech-making at the tavern, and now he knew that they had followed him to his retreat on the bluff, for he saw them written in lurid letters across the scarlet sunset.

At first in the chaotic whirling of his thoughts, he could not comprehend the strange effect upon him; he could see no reason for the sinister obsession. He had gotten what he had been concentrating all his energies upon for the past week. Why should the outcome overwhelm him in this unlooked for manner! He puzzled over it, attempting to separate the last expression of the prisoner's face and the meaning of the words. They were too analogous to bear separation, and gradually, gaining force with its development, came to Sargent the terrifying realization that without him the sentence would not have been pronounced. A kindred thought followed—more fearful than the first—in which he saw himself the murderer, not the prisoner who had committed the deed to escape detection, but he, a lawyer under the sanction of the laws of God and man committing the same deed in the name of justice and righteousness. And so the world would

think of him; but how different he knew it was. Righteousness and justice had not once entered his thoughts; only hatred and revenge. Hatred and revenge! He had said them aloud to himself at night, to keep them from slipping out of his mind for even one second. And now he was to be paid for this deed with money, blood-money, as the prisoner had been rewarded with the same.

Where was the difference? Was not each a taking of life? Was not any man whose life was taken by another, murdered? Could there be any need in the world great enough to abrogate that command of God's—"Thou shalt not kill!"

He rose from the ground, and walked recklessly on into the woods that crowned the bluff. The sunset was gone now, and only a misty twilight hung through the vista of trees. A refreshing breeze from the north brushed against his flushed face and brought a tingle to his feverish senses. With the exhilaration came an added sharpness to his perceptions.

Argue as he would, he could not make himself realize that it was an ethical view of the case that he was taking. He saw himself at the outset of his career, with this man's blood upon his hands, and instinctively, with the insight that comes in a crisis of revulsion, he knew that no matter how long he lived, he would never be able to approve of capital punishment. The personal application was what riveted the chains of his conviction. The simple statement that without his speech the prisoner would have been free, answered eloquently all doubts and questions. It was he alone, who was to bring this man to death; it was useless to evade the responsibility.

"To be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

In a moment of terrifying excitement he spoke the words aloud, to gain a better effect of their significance, and with the sound of his own voice, the words received a more intimate meaning. Deeper under their weight he sank, until it was by a supreme effort that he checked himself in his mad striding, and turned back toward the town. There was some one there, who could surely show him a new aspect of the case, in which he could realize that the responsibility did not rest upon him alone. A new thought, a suggestion, a word of sympathetic understanding would mean so much to him—but all that praise, that enthusiastic admiration so lavishly bestowed upon him because he had made a speech that would rob a man of his life! He could not bear to think of hearing it again.

When he descended the hill the lights were glowing from the many windows of the town, as if a reflection of the star-lit night. There were not many doors open, for the spring night had suddenly grown cool, and the barred portals seemed to Sargent to look down upon him with an aloofness and withdrawal that expressed the attitude of the thinking world toward him. If it were not the sentiment of that day, it would be when people came to know and to judge him from the hidden motives.

The streets were dark, and as he made his way along no sound broke the stillness save the regular tap of his cane upon the plank walk. With resolute force and averted face he passed the courthouse, another block beyond he passed the jail in which the prisoner was awaiting his death, and finally, with the relaxation that comes when one realizes a haven has at last been reached, he got to the open door of Judge Houston's home, and looking through the hall and seeing the family at supper, he slipped quietly into library, and sat down.

The soft glow from two candles on the mantel was pleasant to his tired eyes; there was just light enough in the room for him to see the things that had become familiar and dear to him. His eyes lingered longest on the table where a row of books—law books of reference—always stood in a prim, neat row. In front of them, more intimately handled and never in the same place, thereby showing the love and use given to them, lay the three books from which the old gentleman received his greatest pleasure—Shakespeare, "Some Fruits of Solitude," and that old, leather bound book, worn and frayed at the corners.

In the centre of the table lay the thick portfolio of pigskin, beside it several newly cut quills, and to one side, laid by for the evening, rested the gold snuff-box.

Sargent's glance lingered affectionately upon each article, reluctantly falling at last upon the two notes addressed to himself, which were placed conspicuously on the table. One he knew by its heavily embossed envelope, its green seal, and the lustre of the ink with which it was addressed. Tearing it open indifferently, he started up in surprise, not expecting so sudden a culmination of the difficulty. Jervais had requested him to meet him at daybreak of the next day—if it were convenient. "Of course it is convenient," he murmured half aloud, "only," and his thoughts raced back to the problem of that day.

He turned to the other message, a coarse piece of paper folded over twice and addressed to him in a barely legible script. He unfolded this with a keener interest than the other, and leaning forward so the candle light would aid him in deciphering the words, he read:

"Will you come to see me? I want to tell you something. JACOB PHELPS."

He held the paper a long time in his hands, fingering it after his eyes no longer read the words, and gradually, over his tortured senses, drifted a feeling of peace and hope and joy. At last, under the full realization of the opportunity that had come to him, he settled back in his chair and closed his eyes.

In this attitude Judge Houston found him when he entered the library. The old man did not extend his hand, nor for a few moments did he say anything,

having learned to read the young face before him like an open book, and knowing that any words except those spoken by Sargent himself would be irrelevant at that moment. Instead, he took down a long German pipe with a china bowl, from the mantel shelf, and filling it with tobacco, seated himself comfortably in a chair and crossed his legs; silent, all the while.

Finally Sargent opened his eyes and looked at the old man without speaking. At last the words came, trembling slightly from his intensity.

"Did you ever convict a man for murder?"

The corners of the old man's mouth twitched; he was so certain that would be the question. In answer he only nodded.

"And was the man hanged?"

He nodded again.

Sargent's voice rose to a higher pitch and broke harshly.

"How could you let it be done, and have any peace afterwards?"

The old man laid his pipe aside and came toward the table, sitting down opposite Sargent.

"I found out that I was in the right. That the man should have been hanged—that it was my duty to see that punishment was inflicted upon him. Anything else would have been an evasion of my duty,—a greater sin than I at first imagined the other was. I know what you are feeling at this moment. Every man who has a conscience and a reverence for God and has chosen criminal law for his profession goes through your experience. There are so many sides to the situation—I doubt if you have thought of but one."

Sargent moved impatiently in his chair. His fingers were thumping nervously on the table all the time.

"Tell me the other side—I can see only one."

The old man leaned forward and met his eyes intently.

"What do you see?"

"'Thou shalt not kill.'"

Felix Houston leaned back in his chair and putting out his hand, drew the old Bible toward him. Placing it on his knees, he turned the pages with the familiarity of one who knew what was written on every one. At last he held down a page, and ran his fingers across it, smoothing out the crumpled, folded edge. "Listen," he said, raising his eyes to Sargent's for a moment. "There are other commands in here, too. Read here—Genesis—'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' and in Exodus," the pages turned quickly, "'He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death,' and Leviticus, 'Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,' and later, in the words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew, 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' Is not that enough?" He laid down the book, and met Sargent's glance again. "You see now

there are reasons for man making laws with which the life of a murderer can be taken. It is the command of God. It is His law given to us for self-protection."

Sargent shook his head wearily.

"Vengeance is mine," he quoted slowly, in response. "With that, I see no reason for this law of man's. Why should we judge? Why should we decide that a man has no right to live? 'Thou shalt not kill,' is the word spoken by God. There is no evasion of it—I can see only that one interpretation. It is final to me in its brevity. It embraces everything. If Phelps is hanged, it will be the same as if I had killed him myself, alone and unaided. The law back of it means nothing to me. If he is hanged I will be a murderer."

Sargent crouched back in his chair as if to escape the physical punishment his thoughts inflicted upon him. The disappointment caused from the old man's failure to bring him any comfort intensified the despair into which he had sunk.

"Think a moment, Sargent," Judge Houston said, attempting a new line of persuasion. "Think of the good you have done the people by removing such a danger from them. That should be palliation enough to relieve you of any responsibility. Their gratitude to you is wonderful! Do you know, they want to show it in some lasting form; there is already a movement on foot to send you to the Legislature, and if you accept it, I know you will be elected. Boy! you don't realize that your success has been made. Cheer up! Open your eyes to your opportunities. There are not many who make the start you have." Judge Houston grew more and more enthusiastic as he continued. "I had no idea that you could win that case. I only appointed you to give you the experience. But you have shown your genius. That speech has made your start a triumph."

Sargent watched his enthusiasm coldly. A gulf of misunderstanding seemed to be widening between him and his old friend to-night—a gulf in which their sympathy of the past months was counted as nothing. Of all the people in the world Felix Houston was the one Sargent had expected to understand him in this trial. His disappointment grew almost unbearable when he heard praise also coming from his friend's lips.

"A triumph," he murmured sadly. "What is a triumph when its gain means the sacrifice of a man's life?"

"Have you thought of the lives you have probably saved by removing this dangerous man from the country? That should help you a little."

"Was he so harmful? Had he killed any one before? There seemed no proof of it."

"Did you not prove that he had killed one man? Is that not enough?"

"I did not prove anything—legally."

Felix Houston's brows drew together slowly. It was a signal of the end of his patience.

"What did you do then, Sargent?"

"I played a trick on him—the meanest, lowest, most dastardly trick one man ever played on another. There wasn't any law in it. I set myself to work on the man's sympathies; I studied his face all that first day in the courtroom, hunting for the vulnerable point in which to attack him. All that day I could see nothing else but his face, yet I could not find what it was that was there, that I did not recognize. And when I rode home that evening with Natalia, I was telling her about the case, and how hopeless it seemed, and what do you suppose she told me to do? The very thing that I did—make the man confess, himself! She said that I could do that if I wanted to. All that night I lay awake, thinking and thinking of how I could persuade the man to tell his secret. I kept repeating it to myself all through the long hours that I would make him tell, seeing his face before me, always with that inscrutable expression that meant that there was a vulnerable point. I must find it, I kept on saying. I must find it! Then I thought out my speech, realizing as I went over it, that if I went into every detail of the murder, that somewhere in the recital I would find the spot in the man's nature. I found it—you know when. He has a mother. I made him think of her! After the first admission of my power I knew I had the man in my hands. It was all very easy after that. But it was not law, you must admit that. It was playing upon sentiments that are sacred to every human being. I took that advantage of him while he was held before me—forced to listen. He couldn't escape my words. I forced them into his brain. I drove all the vital force that was in me into that man's conscience, and made him speak out. He could not help it—he was powerless. But that is not law, I say. I have no right to send him to the gallows on such a confession. You should have seen that—you will now, I know. It rests with you to help me make my reparation. I used this man to further the gratification of revenge. I would not have gone into the case with such vehemence if the defeat of Jervais had not been back of it. Oh, you do see, then! The sin of it, don't you? But it is true—every word of it. I am keeping back nothing from you. You have told me that you loved me almost as much as you did your son, and you know that I have returned that feeling, aye, more than I ever loved the man who created me only continually to wound me! Will you prove to me that your love is as great as you say? Will you grant me one request that will mean everything to me?"

With his growing excitement, Sargent rose from the chair and placed both hands on Judge Houston's. The old man met his wild, beseeching look calmly. He knew now that he was brought face to face with a situation that might end disastrously, but he did not shirk it. He was calmer than he had ever been in his life.

"I will grant you any request—if it is right, and in my power."

Sargent took a long breath, though not yet one of relief. When he spoke,

the words came in a whisper, as if he feared an eavesdropper.

"Release Jacob Phelps!"

For twenty seconds the old copper faced clock on the mantel ticked off the time loudly in the silent room. Then Felix Houston spoke.

"It is not in my power, and even if it were, I would not set at liberty a man whose depredations and robberies have hung over this country for ten years. You have asked me too much, Sargent. Go home and think this matter over, and when you are calmer, more yourself, you will see the exaggerated view you are taking. In the morning you will see everything differently. Your responsibility in the case will have passed from you entirely, and you will see it through the eyes of a sane man—you are hardly that, now."

"In the morning may be too late to think of anything," Sargent answered hurriedly, handing him Jervais' challenge.

Judge Houston read it at a glance and handed it back to him.

"Is that the note that was sent here? I left it on the table."

"Yes. May your man take my answer?"

"Of course. When?"

And without answering, Sargent wrote a few lines at the table, and folding the paper carefully and sealing it, handed it to the slave who was already waiting at the door.

When the man was gone and they were alone again, Sargent stretched out his hands and grasped Judge Houston's.

"Won't you grant me that request?" he said, an expression of pitiful yearning in his eyes. "It may be my last. I should not mind dying if I knew the man were free," he added tentatively.

"Anything else in the world, Sargent," the old man answered brokenly. "Anything else I would do for you."

"There is nothing else that matters," Sargent answered dryly, turning away and reaching for his hat.

"You will come for me in the morning—at what time?"

Judge Houston rested against the table, watching Sargent's every movement intently.

"At four o'clock. The sun rises at five now. I will make all arrangements with the ferry man to take us over to the Louisiana side." He stopped abruptly and looked at the old man standing as firm and as steady as a piece of granite. "Somehow I feel the incongruity of you going with me more forcibly now than ever. Won't it tell against you? Won't it cause some loss of dignity to your position? You said you had always disapproved of duels. It is too much that you are giving up for me. It may be that I shall pass out of your life to-morrow, and for the few months that we have been together—it seems too much. I know I've

disappointed you—some day perhaps you'll understand my reasons. Somehow, though, I couldn't help it—I must be deformed in mind as in body!"

The old gentleman made a step toward him, and steadied Sargent's trembling figure with his firm arms.

"When you hear what I have done to-night," he continued, brokenly evading the keen blue eyes bent upon him, "I believe you will understand."

Felix Houston drew Sargent closer to him. His firm arm was about the young fellow's shoulders, and he was reading his face intently for some meaning to the last words.

"Sargent, boy—look at me—-what do you mean?"

Suddenly Sargent straightened himself and answered the other's look firmly.

"I don't know yet. I haven't quite decided. I shall be back here at four o'clock."

CHAPTER VII
ONE MEANS OF ESCAPE

Outside the night shone clear and brilliant. Sargent stopped when he had passed out into the street, and looked up through the canopy of leaves to where a stretch of heavens glowed with the impenetrable purple of the night. Across the infinitude of space a brilliant star suddenly shot, leaving a trail of white fire in its wake. He stood there a few minutes, his face uplifted to the calm beauty of the sky, his lips moving in prayer.

When he began walking again a strange quiet had settled over all his features and in his eyes burned the light of determination.

He walked rapidly, for though the moon had not yet risen, the night was brilliant with the beautiful, translucent light of the stars. The dwellings were dark, not a light glowed in a window; the town had sunk into deep slumber.

He stopped at the tavern long enough to write a few words to Captain Mentdrop about the duel, and once more hurried out into the night.

He passed the courthouse again. This time he did not quail, or pass it with averted eyes, but looked at it with the expression of one who gives thanks to something which has shown him the right path, be it ever so hard and narrow to traverse.

Walking on, he stood at last before the small jail. It was a one story brick building in which the sunken bars across the windows shone sombrely in the clarity of the night. Beyond its suggestion of imprisonment, there was a deeper and more lasting effect of utter dreariness and despair, for the building stood on a plot of ground in which neither a tree nor a shrub grew.

Without a moment of hesitation Sargent went up the path to the door, and lifted the heavy knocker. Its report rang out on the quiet night like some death signal, reverberating within, seemingly an hundred times. Then came the heavy steps of the keeper, the sound of huge bolts sliding out of fastenings, the clang of a chain, and at last Sargent stood within the dimly lit corridor.

"Jacob Phelps sent for me. Is it possible for me to see him now?" he said rapidly, striving in vain to hide his anxiety.

The jailer held his lantern close to Sargent's face, and inspected him slowly.

"Have you an order from the sheriff?" he asked.

"No."

"It's against rules. I can't let you in."

"I know it is irregular, but this is my only chance to see him. I am going away early in the morning. I only want to speak a few words with him. My name is Sargent Everett—"

"The lawyer that made the speech to-day!" the jailer exclaimed. "Well, sir, it's an honour to know you. I never heard tell of a speech like the one you made, sir. No wonder Phelps wanted to see you."

Sargent turned away quickly to hide the look of suffering on his face. Was he never to hear the end of that speech! Would it go down to the grave with him! Suddenly he remembered his words to Judge Houston—"It will be the speech of my life." Ah! verily it was so!

"Will you let me see him?" he asked again.

"Well—" the fellow debated. "I reckon it'll be all right since it's you, Mr. Everett. But it's against rules, you know."

He led the way down the corridor, Sargent following him closely. At the far end, the jailer turned toward him, eying his slight figure and halting gait deprecatingly.

"Shall I leave the door open and wait for you out here? He's a mighty tough customer—at least he was up to to-day. He's been as quiet as a lamb since they brought him back from the courthouse. I don't know if you'll be safe in there with him, for he's lots bigger than you. He might take a notion to hurt you."

Sargent moved to the door impatiently. "I do not fear him, and you need not wait at the door. Bar it on the outside, and do not come until I call for you. Now—let me in."

The jailer put his hand on the bolts—then hesitated.

"Here—I have it. Put this pistol in your pocket—so—and you can keep him at a safe distance. Don't let him see it unless he comes at you—it's as much as my place is worth. There you are—now!"

The bolt slid back, the chain fell to the floor, and Sargent passed through the opened door.

The room was small, its whitewashed walls giving out a dank odour. A narrow bunk, a table and chair were the only furnishings. One window, covered with bars, let in the light of the brilliant sky dotted with innumerable stars. At the table, scribbling on some coarse paper in the feeble glow of a candle, sat the prisoner—Jacob Phelps.

He looked up as Sargent entered; then, as if slowly recognizing him, he rose from the table and stood looking at him with the dull expression which had come into his eyes during the trial.

"So you've come, have you? I kinder thought you would."

Sargent met his glance steadily. "You said you wanted to see me."

Suddenly Phelps moved to the door and tried the bolt. It was barred securely. Then he moved back quickly and stood close to Sargent, catching hold of both his arms.

"D'you know they've locked you in here with me?" He began laughing easily to himself. "You can't get out, any more'n I can. You're in my power now like I was in yours this morning." His fingers sank into Sargent's flesh with a grip of iron, his eyes suddenly grew brilliant, his breath came hard and hot in the young fellow's face. "Suppose I'd kill you now! Wouldn't it be fair? You've had your chance! This is mine! You baby—I could wring your neck as easy as a chicken's." He stopped abruptly and stared into Sargent's face searchingly.

The silence deepened. Sargent's eyes met the other's unflinchingly. The pain of Phelps' grip came as a great relief to his mental agony.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself? Why shouldn't I do it?"

"It is your right," came Sargent's low answer.

Phelps' fingers loosened their hold.

"Humph! So you're not afeard of me!"

"No—not now—after to-day."

"'Cause you convicted me you think I'm harmless—eh?"

"No—because I found the good in you."

Again Phelps stared at him hard while the light died gradually out of his eyes. His hands slipped down Sargent's arms slowly until one stopped suddenly on the pistol the jailer had thrust into his pocket. In a second he had both arms about Sargent, and had grabbed the pistol in his hand.

"So you's not afeard of me, eh, you damn liar. Yet you carry this!" holding up the pistol for inspection in the candle light. "Six chambers and all of 'em

loaded," he ended, breaking the gun back into place.

"It is not mine. The jailer put it in my pocket as I entered here. I never carried one in my life."

Phelps looked at him doubtfully. "Well—I believe you," he said thoughtfully. "But I'm glad you brought it. It's a damn good thing you did!"

Sargent started. "What do you mean?"

"Never you mind—I'll tell you later." He laid the pistol well out of Sargent's reach and came back before him, folding his arms, and looking down on him with a new expression—a look that seemed to express a certain contentment. "D'you know why I sent for you? I wanted to thank you."

Sargent's lip quivered. "For sentencing you?"

"No—for opening my eyes."

Sargent looked up and saw the huge man of fifty years standing before him, suddenly timid, with his great, roughened hand outstretched.

"You ain't afeard to take it—is you? It's jest the hand of a man who's goin' to die soon. It can't do you no harm and it'll do me a mighty lot of good."

Sargent made a step forward, and grasped the waiting hand.

"Can you ever forgive me for taking your life?" he murmured unsteadily, a spasm of suffering contracting his features.

For a moment the ruffian looked down at him, puzzled, then gave a quick, coarse laugh.

"Is that what's hurting you? Well—it ain't hurting you half as bad as it's hurting me—nohow. You've done me heaps of good—youngster." He still held Sargent's hand in his iron grip, "and some day you're goin' to be a big man. I could tell that by the sound in your voice when you was speaking to-day. That's what got under my skin. It's jest as sweet as a woman's and then again it's as hard as the devil's. Damn if I wouldn't like to hear you make another speech!" He laughed grimly. "But look here," with a quick movement and a glance at the pistol. "I sent for you to tell you somethin'. Sit down thar in that chair. I'm goin' to stand up—tired of sittin' down anyway."

The huge man swung one leg over the end of the table, and looked down into the face of the lawyer with eyes softened by an expression of bygone tenderness—the look Sargent had been searching for so long. It thrilled him now as he saw it so clearly.

"As I said—you're goin' to be a big man some day, and you wants to begin right now. You don't want to hurt people, sonny—I can see that in your face."

Sargent's lips opened to answer, but no words came. It was when he nodded that the big man continued. "So make up your mind right now that you ain't goin' to send any more men to the gallows. Send 'em to prison for life—that's all right—that gives 'em a chance to show people if there's anything good in 'em. But when

you kills 'em you cuts off all their chances of doin' better. Ain't I right?"

Again Sargent nodded silently.

"Now, take me; I never knowed until to-day that I could have lived the right sort of life like any other man. I say I never even thought it till you told me. And you jest went and opened it up to me in sich a way that I couldn't help seein' whar I could have done a whole heap better. You kept makin' me wish I had one chance to show I could do what was right,—and now it's come—it's come." He swung his leg from the table and walked to the window. "They say that spot thar is where they're goin' to string me up. But they ain't—they're goin' to be mightily disappointed. Jacob Phelps ain't goin' to have his neck broke by no rope. D'you hear that? Is you listenin' to me?"

Sargent rose in amazement. One step, and he was beside Phelps. "How did you know?" he gasped. "No one could have suspected it. I only decided a few minutes before I came here."

"Decided what?" Phelps asked, staring at him.

"To help you. I don't know yet how we can manage it."

Phelps looked at him quietly for a few minutes. Then he turned away silently, and went to the bunk, sitting down on it, and letting his head fall into his hands.

"So you think I'm doin' right," he murmured, his face still lowered. "I'm kinder glad you do."

"Of course it is right. It's the only thing. I don't think I could look the world in the face again if you were to be hanged." He moved over to the bunk, and sat down beside Phelps. The candle had burned low, and the wick, spluttering in the melted tallow, left the room in a fitful gloom.

"I never killed any man unless I had to," Phelps continued slowly. "I didn't mean to kill old Puckett that night. He jest held on so tight I had to git away somehow." He ended with a deep groan.

In the long silence the candle gave a last flicker and went out. Except for a narrow square of light from the window, half obscured by the heavy, ominous looking bars, the room was now in total darkness.

Finally Phelps stretched out his arms and rising, went back to the table. "But I reckon it's all regrettin' to no use now," he murmured, picking up the piece of paper on which he had written, and folding it carefully. "I wants you to send this to my old mother. She lives up in South Ca'lina. I've wrote her name on here. I wants you to send this with it, too." He pushed his hand into his woollen shirt, and pulled out a leather pocketbook. "In here's receipts for all my money in a New 'leans bank. I want she should get all of it. I've been sendin' her money all along, but I never let her know whar I was." He leaned across the table, closer to Sargent till he could see his face more distinctly. "I don't want her to know

what happened to me." His voice sank to a whisper. "Can't you jest tell her I died, or something? That's jest what made me give in to you to-day—you telling 'bout Puckett's wife left all alone with nobody to take care of her when she was gettin' old and feeble. It put me to thinkin' 'bout my old ma, all by herself. I didn't care after that what you folks did with me. I felt, somehow, like nothin' made no difference any more. When I thought 'bout the way I had run away from that poor old soul and left her all by herself, somethin' inside me went all to smash. I didn't have a drop of fightin' blood left in me.... You see that's what you done for one man, youngster. 'Tain't agoin' to hurt ye any, neither.... Now don't stay here no longer. Jest go along home. Here's my hand. Forget all 'bout me, and don't never blame yourself. It had to be some day and—after all—it won't be the gallows." He walked around the table and handed the package to Sargent.

"I don't understand," Sargent exclaimed, not moving from his seat on the bunk. "Why give me the package now? The other matter," he lowered his voice, "is so much more important. How are you going to manage it? I must know, so as to help you."

Phelps looked down at him, his lips moving into a kindly smile. "It's easy enough. I don't mind; as soon as you're gone I'll do it. Trust me to know the easiest way. I'm a sure shot, and I'm not the one to fail on myself."

Sargent stared up at him, bewildered. The package slipped out of his hand to the floor. As he struggled to his feet, he found himself trembling violently with the sudden realization of what Phelps meant to do. He stood perfectly still for a second, attempting to decide upon his own course. There was only a moment or two in which to act, and every second Phelps was watching him intently. His power of the courtroom was nothing now—the force of words was gone. His lips were tight drawn; even the mere act of speaking was an impossibility.

The pistol lying on the table shone with a metallic glint. Suddenly he knew that he must get it away from Phelps at any cost. Gathering all his forces, he made a dash toward it. When his fingers had closed upon it, he felt Phelps' iron grip upon his arms.

"Give it up! You fool!" cried the outlaw. "D'you think I'm goin' to change my mind because you do!"

They struggled across the dark room, Sargent edging toward the door, an inch at a time. When he had almost reached it, dragging, writhing, twisting himself in Phelps' grip, he felt his strength suddenly leave him.

"Wait—Phelps—wait," he gasped. "I did not mean—this—I meant—"

"Let go—let go—and stop—your—talking! Let go, I say! You won't? Well—take that!"

Sargent felt himself spinning through the darkness. As his head struck the heavy bar of the window he heard a crashing sound, as if the walls of the jail

were falling together, then a brilliant flash—afterwards, dead, black silence.

A few minutes later, he opened his eyes. There was a bright light in the cell, and several men were moving about excitedly. The whole place was filled with the stifling odour of powder. On the floor, a foot away from him, lay the stiffening body of Jacob Phelps.

CHAPTER VIII
THE CAPTAIN'S JOKE

The old town clock was chiming two when Sargent finally passed the last cabin, and turned from the highway into the private road to the house. He had passed through the last hours dazed and only half understanding what was taking place about him. His return to consciousness, the horrible sight of Phelps' face mangled beyond recognition, the excitement and the questions of the crowd which had so quickly assembled, and his subsequent statement of the affair to the Sheriff—all these details were gone through much like some dream in which everything is half obscured and acted in without one's real volition.

Friends' greetings and hand-clasps he had received without one word, even when the physician had bound up his wound, an ugly gash on the head, caused by his fall against the bars, he had merely asked if he were free now to go his way.

The deathly stillness of the country, the wide gloom of the heavens, dotted with a dazzling brilliance of stars, the vague, motionless forests across the deserted fields, made the night seem to him a fit setting for the weird, strange spell into which he had sunk.

When he stood before the big gate and saw the house gleaming in the night brilliance, he started as if brought suddenly before something he had not expected. A light shone from the parlour window, an unprecedented thing at such an hour, yet it did not strike him as unusual.

Tying his horse at the gate, for it would be only two hours before he must return, he walked draggingly towards his room. There too was a light and a figure standing in the doorway.

"Thank gracious, youse done cum, Massa Sargent," Dicey exclaimed, running towards him. "Whar in de name ob de good Lawd has yer bin? Ole Miss and Lil Miss an' ev'ybody else done gone all ter pieces 'bout sumthin'. Ise bin

smellin' er mouse but I cyant ketch him. Now—Massa Sargent, whut's er causin' all dis heah fuss?"

Sargent moved past the old woman, into his room. "I cannot talk now, Dicey," he said, going directly to a large armoire and unlocking it. "To-morrow—all of you will know."

"But ole Miss wants ter see yer to-night. She bin er pacin' up an' down, up an' down dat parloh flo' all night—a waitin' fer yer. Eber sence Massa Jervais wuz heah she ain' seem hab no peace ob min'! She done tole me ter watch fer yer and bring yer straight ter her—so cum 'long, right dis minit."

Sargent stared at her silently.

"You say Mr. Jervais has been here this evening."

"Yaas, suh, bout two hours."

"Then he told her!" Sargent exclaimed.

"Mos' eberything, I reckon. But cum on ober dar, fer I wants ter git ter bed 'fo daybreak, sho'."

Sargent followed Dicey across the yard, into the dimly lit hall, where the wall of portraits swam before him like the faces of the multitude he had faced that day. Knocking at the parlour door, Dicey announced him, and then disappeared into the shadows of the hall.

Mrs. Brandon was standing beneath the massive bronze chandelier, her face paler than Sargent had ever seen it, her whole expression and poise bereft of the cold assurance which had seemed the outward expression of the woman's character.

Sargent closed the door after him, and stood facing her, both of them silent a few moments.

"Is it true?" Mrs. Brandon finally demanded, her words coming colder and crisper than ever before.

"You mean—that Mr. Jervais has challenged me, Mistress Brandon? If so—he has and I have accepted. It is to be in a very few hours."

Her eyes blazed at Sargent, full of a violent hatred that led him to read for a certainty the love she bore Jervais. Even in that moment of his gloom and her anger, the incongruity of the love of this woman for Jervais struck a distracting note in his thoughts.

"Are you determined to meet him, Mr. Everett?"

"I am, Mistress Brandon."

"Do you realize that it will cause you to lose your position in my family? Of course such an unheard-of thing as a school-master fighting a duel, is sufficient to annul our contract."

"I supposed this would be the case. I cannot blame you. You are quite right."

She came a step nearer Sargent. Her lips pressed hard against each other

as she evidently forced herself to speak.

"If you will forego this duel, I shall reconsider the matter. I would retain you as the children's tutor."

"Thank you, Mistress Brandon, there is no help for it now. I go to it as my one chance of—" he broke off abruptly and turned towards the door.

"Wait,—I am not through," she cried, her voice breaking shrilly, "I can not have this duel—don't you understand—it must not take place. What will keep you from it? Certainly there is something!"

Sargent met her eyes calmly. He could see now a weakening, a tremulousness beneath her hauteur which in another moment might break the indomitable spirit entirely. Suddenly he took her hand in his, very gently.

"There is nothing for you to fear, Mistress Brandon. Believe me when I tell you that my fire shall be thrown away. Mr. Jervais will be as safe this time to-morrow as he is now. You have been very just and hospitable to me while I was a member of your household. I thank you for it, and ask you in parting to grant me only one request."

She had drawn away from him with the allaying of her fears. There was no doubt of his sincerity. But with the feeling of safety, her pride rushed over her again, and in the chagrin of having betrayed herself, she became more coldly abducent than before.

"What is your request?" came her answer, full of predicated denial.

"To see Natalia before I leave."

Mrs. Brandon lifted her eyes in surprise.

"To-night? Now? Surely you know that would be impossible!"

"It would be for the last time," Sargent answered tentatively.

"Pardon me—but I can not think of it. Perhaps I might consent before she goes—"

"After to-night it will be too late."

For answer Mrs. Brandon lifted the candlestick and passed out into the hall.

In his plain room, the walls of whitewashed logs, and the spotless floor covered with rag rugs, he pulled out the worn little hair trunk which had come on the long journey from Maine with him. There was not very much that he had to put in it, and when he had filled the tray, piling one end with his much used books, he paused a moment, holding the last one in his hand and gazing a long time at the fly leaf. It recalled vividly that day—so far off now—when he and his mother had packed the same little trunk, and she had given him the book as her last gift, to be taken with him wherever he went. Her words were there before him on the page now. He read them over and over again:

"My son, neglect not to peruse these sacred writings with interest, that you may obtain that virtue which will guide you through life's thorny path, fit you for an usefulness in life, peace in death, and happiness in the spirit land."

He touched his lips to the book, afterwards wrapping it carefully, and writing Natalia's name across the paper. Not now, but some day far off, she would understand what it had represented to him.

Then sitting down before the table and putting the two candles close together, he poured out the whole of his tortured soul, his disappointment, the worldly success which was to him so damning a bitterness, his utter hopelessness—all this he wrote to his mother in a letter which was never to reach her.

A subdued rustling in the trees roused him with the certainty that the time had come for him to be on his way. Blowing out the candles and locking the door of the little room that had sheltered him for many months, for the last time, he went through the grove to the gate. There he paused and let his eyes rest for a moment on the old mansion of the Spaniards.

The fragile, crescent moon was already lowering towards the distant lowlands, and in its vague light the house was softly outlined among the magnolias. Even then, as he had often felt before when looking at this scene in the stillness of the night, Sargent felt a strange spell of mystery and fatefulness creep over him. There was something ghostly in the white house accentuated by the gloom of the grove and the inclosing hedge of Cherokee roses, so filled with white dream flowers.

Against his will his thoughts drifted into fancies of Natalia's future. He could see her going away to distant lands, beautiful and wealthy and courted, and coming back perhaps to spend the happiness of her life in this perfect setting. And, as always with his thoughts, the subject of them became visible before him. He saw the beautiful, vivid little face looking at him with the dependence and yearning for sympathy which had first riveted the chains of his love. He saw the thin, delicate features, the oval contour, the unusual softness of skin, almost olive about the eyes and very white and fair on the temples, and the black lashes and the velvety shadows beneath the eyes, that gave that world-old expression when she smiled.

While he gazed before him, dwelling on each memory of the little girl he was leaving for ever, he saw her eyes grow slowly bloodshot, then almost imperceptibly her skin seemed to deaden and the ghastly red of clotted blood obliterated the likeness, leaving in its place the mangled face of Jacob Phelps. Digging the spurs into his horse, Sargent tore down the road towards the town, at a break-

neck speed.

Judge Houston was waiting at his door, calm and very pale. Together he and Sargent walked to the tavern, without speaking a word beyond the greetings. It was still quite dark, and as they neared the hostelry the windows of the club room shone bright, and from within came the sounds of noisy merriment.

"Will you tell Captain Mentdrop I am here, Judge?" Sargent said, when they stood outside the door. "I should rather not go in there." He shuddered at the thought of more congratulations about the yesterday.

Standing outside alone, he heard a loud burst of laughter—Jervais', then the Captain's; afterwards a silence as the two parties came out at the same time, Captain Mentdrop and Jervais leading the way, walking arm in arm.

"Hello, Sargent, you're there, are you—and Judge Houston,—my compliments, sir."

Jervais passed without a word to his friends who followed him out, and then both parties took carriages, already waiting for them, and drove down the long hill to the river.

"Well, sir, I've had a night of it 'pon my word, I have," cried the Captain, seemingly in the best of spirits. "Will you believe it, Sargent, I've been sitting in there with Lem Jervais since ten o'clock last night!"

Sargent listened listlessly. "Is he so entertaining?" he asked without interest.

The Captain looked at Judge Houston and dropped a sly wink.

"Immensely so! And when Suggs came in and told us about your scuffle with Phelps—well, you'd 'a' learned something if you'd heard what he said!"

Judge Houston had started at the mention of Phelps. In a moment his hand was on Sargent's.

"What about Phelps, Sargent? Did you go to see him?"

Sargent met his glance beseechingly.

"Not now—Judge. After this is over, get Captain to tell you about it. Please—not now!"

In the chill numbness of the hour before daybreak they took their places in a skiff, and shot out on to the wide surface of the river. The white mist obliterated the opposite bank, and when they had drifted a mile below the town a narrow strip of sand bar suddenly appeared out of the dark, and a moment later the boat was grounded upon the sand.

Close behind them came the other skiff, and both parties immediately walked across the clean white bar, to two wide-spreading willows which marked the spot of the then famous duelling ground.

When the two groups had formed themselves and the formal greetings gone through, Judge Houston left Sargent's side, and going to Jervais, led him a

little way from the others. A very few words passed between them, when Judge Houston turned away sadly and went back to his place.

"I told you so," said the Captain, raising his great shoulders contemptuously. "When a challenge has been sent and accepted, it's a man's duty to go through it without any more words. This reconciliation business is all stuff—until you've got through fighting."

Judge Houston met the Captain's restless eyes calmly.

"Don't you think everything should be done to save a man's life?" he asked quietly.

"Not one bit of it!" The Captain's hands met in a resounding clasp. "That scoundrel," pointing to Jervais, "would be a heap better dead, and as for saving his life, it would be better if all parties took a hand at getting rid of him. This world would be a heap better with so many less of that sort. If I was a praying man, I'd a said a bit of prayer for Sargent to kill him."

"Yet you came out of the tavern a while ago, arm in arm with him!" Judge Houston answered coldly. "Are your sentiments quite sincere, Captain Mentdrop?"

The Captain looked into the face of the older man, much as a big dog looks condescendingly upon another; then he slipped his arm through Judge Houston's and led him away from Sargent. When he was out of hearing, he put his mouth close to his companion's ear.

"Take a peep at Jervais," he whispered. "Don't you see he's all to pieces—couldn't hit the side of a house if he tried a week. *That's* what I've been doing with him all night. Loading him up! Loading him up, sir! And not with buckshot either—with whiskey, mind you. D'you think I was going to let that youngster stand up here and get killed by that scoundrel? Well, I reckon not!"

Judge Houston's face paled. He gripped the Captain's arm with a trembling hand. "Does Sargent know this?"

"No—of course not. Say, Judge, what d'you take me for, anyhow?"

"He must know it! You must tell him!"

"I? I'll be damned if I do!"

"Then I will."

"No, you won't either. Now, look here, Judge Houston, this is my affair; and if you interfere, your age and position won't make a blame bit of difference in what I might do to you. I'm bent and determined to save that youngster, and all your pious conscience and principles and fol-de-rol beliefs ain't going to keep me from it. You see what I mean, don't you? So don't fret me, any more!"

Without a moment's delay, the Captain turned towards Jervais' party with the magnificent bravado which was always at his command and called out:

"Shall we toss for the word, gentlemen?"

For a second a gold coin gleamed in the air and fell at the Captain's feet.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he bowed, with a flourish, "the honour is mine."

Then opening a large valise, he took out four pistols and handed them to Jervais' second, who handed them to Jervais. The selection was made.

At that moment the Captain saw Judge Houston make a step towards Sargent. Quick as a flash his voice rang out—

"Are you ready, gentlemen? There is the sun."

It was too late for the warning. Judge Houston dropped back as Sargent and Jervais stepped out on the clear stretch of sand. Turning back to back, each walked ten strides in the opposite direction, then turned again and faced each other. Sargent threw his cane from him, and looked into Jervais' scowling face, a few yards away from him. In his opponent's restless eyes, in his twitching lips and slightly trembling hands, he understood, without being told, what the Captain had done for him.

On the light breeze that raced before the dawn, the Captain's voice came firm and loud.

"Gentlemen! Are you ready? Fire! One—"

Jervais fired.

"Two!"

Sargent's pistol was raised and as his fingers clasped the trigger, in the knowledge that he must fire he aimed far to the right of Jervais, then, with an uncontrollable movement, found himself pointing directly at his opponent as the shot rang out.

"Three!"

When the whiff of smoke had cleared, both men were standing looking at each other. For a second they stood still, then the seconds rushed between and the duel was over.

"Great Lord!" cried the Captain, letting out his choicest string of oaths. "Here I've been wasting a whole night expecting to see something. And what d' I get? Two men standing up and looking at each other over a whiff of smoke." Throwing a contemptuous look at Jervais' companions, he grabbed Sargent about the shoulders and, squeezing him hard, led him a good distance from the others. Then it was that the young lawyer, passing through the valley of shadows, and just beginning to see hope for the future, looked up at the old, wrinkled face bending close beside him, and found the sparkling grey eyes overflowing with merriment.

"Sonny," he said, giving Sargent a hearty squeeze and attempting to hold his laughter no longer. "You needn't been so serious about this thing. There wasn't

a damn bullet in a one of them pistols!"

CHAPTER IX
A PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

That night, when the boys had gone to sleep, Dicey came to the side of Natalia's bed, and sat down, holding the little girl's hand close to her tear-stained face. They were to be separated the next day, for the first time in their companionship of twelve years. The morrow's boat was to take Natalia on her long journey to the North.

"Mammy, he is not coming out here any more," Natalia said, her wide open eyes staring into the old slave's face.

"No,—honey-chile,—he ain' comin' heah no mo'."

"And I won't see him to-morrow before I go?"

"No, sugar—ole Miss ain' gwine let him speak ter yer. She done said dat pintedly, so dar ain' no use stedyin' 'bout hit no mo'."

Natalia glanced at the clock, its face shining bright in the light of a solitary candle. The hands were at nine.

"Mammy," she crept over to the side of the bed where Dicey's ear was most convenient. "Mammy, you love me very, very much—don't you?"

Dicey scented danger. In a moment her ears were keen.

"Sho' I does, honey-chile, you knows dat."

"And you would do anything I asked you, wouldn't you, Mammy?"

"Mebbe so—whut yer wants now?"

Natalia sat up and clasped her hands about her knees.

"I want to go to see him to-night, Mammy. Will you take me?"

Dicey leaned over the bed and pulled the quilt tight about the little figure.

"Lay down, honey," she said soothingly, "and go ter sleep. All dis heah 'citement bout goin' way done addled yer. Co'se yer cyant go see Massa Sargent ternight. Who ebber heerd tell ob sich a thing? Go ter sleep now—I'se gwine sing ter yer bout Moses—"

"I don't want to hear about Moses, Mammy." Natalia threw off the quilt and sprang out of bed. "I want to see him, Mammy, before he goes. I want to tell him good-bye. Please take me."

Dicey shook her head knowingly, and stood up.

"Come on back to bed, honey, yer gwine ketch yer death ob col' standin' dar in de night ar. Co'se yer cyant go out ter-night."

Natalia tossed the hair out of her eyes and faced Dicey angrily.

"If you won't take me, I'll get Zebby to. I know he'll do it."

"I knows whut I'se gwine do." Dicey walked to the door and turned the key in the lock, removed it and placed it in her apron pocket. "Now you'se got ter be managed. I'se gwine put yer in dat bed and you'se got ter stay dar." She ended by turning towards Natalia and stopping suddenly.

It was the first time the child had ever been thwarted by the old slave, and seeing the wrath on her face that she had never seen there before, she at first trembled a little, and then suddenly flared into a passionate anger. It was then that Dicey stopped and stared at her.

"Don't you come near me, Mammy. Don't you try to put me in bed. I won't go—I won't—I won't." She stamped her foot in rage. "And you'll be very sorry you did me this way when I go away and leave you—you'll be mighty sorry!"

Then came the storm of tears and Dicey had her in her soothing embrace once more.

"You won't have to tell anybody, Mammy," came the words between sobs. "Not a soul will know. You get Zebby to hook up the chaise and take me into town. We can go to Aunt Maria's and she'll tell us where he is. You see we could do it! Oh, you will, Mammy, you will—won't you?"

Natalia was skipping about the floor in wild delight, for already she had seen the glimmer of consent in Dicey's eyes.

"Sh-h! Sh-h! Keep still," the old woman whispered. "You'll wake 'em all up. Jes' yer stay right heah tell I see ef I kin fin' Zebby."

So it was that a half hour later they were jogging along the highway towards the town, the starlight so brilliant that the lanterns were not needed.

"Oh! look, Mammy, there's a shooting star!" cried Natalia.

"Humph! I ain' studyin' bout no shootin' stahs. I'm mighty worr'd bout whut ole Miss gwine say when she kotch up wid me," grunted Dicey. "Ef she done tek er notion she sell me, leaf's not."

"But she can't, Mammy, because you belong to me. You and Zebby both."

When they had reached Judge Houston's house, the front door was wide open, and the sound of many voices, and the sight of many lights within, made Natalia hesitate; then she made Dicey go in and ask for Mrs. Houston.

In a moment the old lady was standing in the doorway, talking to Dicey, and then hurrying down the steps.

"Natalia! What in the world are you doing here?" she exclaimed.

"I've come to tell him good-bye. Is he in there?"

"He—who?"

"The schoolmaster."

Mrs. Houston put out her arms and gathered the little girl to her, carrying her into the yard.

"Yes—he's here—you little rascal," half crying, half laughing at Natalia's anxious expression. "They are having a big meeting to-night—a whole lot of the townspeople who want Sargent to run for the Legislature."

Natalia drew back in disappointment, her lips trembling.

"Then I can't see him—and I did so want to tell him good-bye!"

"You wait a moment—go over there in the summer house and I'll see if he cannot come out here for a little while."

Mrs. Houston entered the house, and pausing before the dining room door, she waited a moment to attract some one's attention. About the long mahogany table were seated twenty men. At one end sat Judge Houston, at the other Sargent Everett. Between them were great heaps of papers, filled with the proposed platform they were formulating, and at that moment an old gentleman was standing and voicing his ideas on the subject. In the midst of his speech, he caught Mrs. Houston's eye, and stopped abruptly.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," she said as they all rose with one accord, "but a lady has just called, and insists upon seeing one of you."

A general laugh and some uncertain flushes passed over the assembly.

"She would not give his name," Mrs. Houston continued, smiling with a deep enjoyment upon the most confused faces, "but she referred to him as the 'schoolmaster.' Do any of you answer to that name?"

Sargent was beside her in a moment.

"Is it Natalia?" he exclaimed softly.

"Yes. She is in the summer house."

Sargent found her sitting on the coping of the fish pond, staring down at the gold fish showing distinctly in the strangely brilliant starlight.

"I am going away to-morrow and you did not even tell me good-bye, when you ran away from us!" she said, her dark eyes staring up at Sargent reproachfully.

"But I could not, Natalia, everything was crowding upon me so—the duel—the—"

"The duel!" she exclaimed.

"Sh-h-h! Don't talk so loud about it. The Judge does not want Mrs. Houston to know." Sargent picked her up in his arms and carried her to a bench on the far side of the summer house. She was very warm and throbbing as he held her close to him, and even beneath the folds of the cashmere shawl he could feel her excited little heart beating.

"Now—tell me about it," she whispered, when he sat down, still holding her.

"Tell me about the duel—was it a real one?"

"Yes, I suppose so." Sargent could not keep from smiling.

"How beautiful! I wish I had seen it! Who was it with?"

"Mr. Jervais."

"Oh—goody! Did you kill him?"

"No—neither of us was hurt."

She sighed disappointedly, and went silent, her head nestling in the hollow of his shoulder.

"Do you have to hurry back to those old lawyers?"

Sargent shook his head.

"No. They've told me all there was to tell."

Natalia smiled up at him, her silent, sweet little smile. She did not make any motion to move or say anything, but lay against him contentedly gazing up at the sky.

"I've seen three shooting stars to-night—Oh! look! There's the fourth!" she exclaimed, lifting her face to follow the flashing light. "And the heavens—aren't they beautiful to-night? I wonder what it means. I never saw the stars so bright before."

Again a short silence fell between them,—the quiet that unconsciously comes to people when they feel a long separation is near; when the short time left them should be crowded with words, and yet, a time when words seem so worthless.

Sargent looked down into the pensive little face so close to his own. In the night glow the two long braids of hair shone very soft and glossy. His hand sunk into them unconsciously and its delicacy and softness he found delicious to the touch.

"What makes your hair so beautiful?" he said impulsively, his hand still upon it.

"Oh, my! is it?" Natalia sighed. "It ought to be, though, for Mammy brushes it so—so long every morning and every night. Sometimes I wish I didn't have any, until she tells me I'd be ugly without it. And she says people won't love me when I'm grown up if I'm not pretty. Do you believe that?" with sudden intensity.

"No." Sargent laughed easily. "That's a bad theory of Mammy Dicey's. I'll have to tell her she's mistaken."

"And she says that a pretty child makes an ugly grown up person. Do you believe that?"

"Sometimes it may prove true,—but I know of one where it is not going to be the case."

Natalia's eyes beamed, and she edged up closer to Sargent, looking searchingly into his face.

"Do you believe I'm going to be pretty when I am grown up?"

Sargent looked down at her a long time before he answered lightly, "Why, of course. You are going to be the most beautiful woman in the world."

Natalia slid off his knee and stood facing him, both of her hands clasped in his.

"I'm so—so glad. Because now I'm going away," she hurried on, "and I'm going to be gone a long time, for I'm going to Boston and I'm going to Europe, and later on Mamma Brandon says I can make the Grand Tour, and when I come back—all grown up and educated and a real young lady and beautiful—you will remember me—won't you? Mammy says gentlemen never forget very beautiful ladies."

Sargent drew her radiant face, all flushed and intense, close to his.

"I'm going to remind you of this some day, Natalia, don't forget. So you are coming back grown up and you are going to let me still love you like I do now?"

"I don't want you to love me like you do now," with a toss of her head.

"No? Why?" and Sargent puzzled over her meaning.

"I want you to love me like I see young gentlemen loving young ladies. Sending them pretty nosegays and going to church with them Sundays and taking them to balls. That's the way I want you to do!"

Sargent's face contracted with sudden pain. He knew so well that he could never fill the role that Natalia had already planned for her lover.

"Nosegays, church going, dances," he repeated after her. "Well," with a sigh, "I might do the first two, anyhow." Then seriously, "Natalia, I want you to remember this." For a moment he stopped and looked directly into her eyes. "You are a child now but you will soon be a woman—a beautiful young lady, as you say. You are going far away from me and it is only natural that you should forget all about me; but don't forget this—I shall always love you, more and more as the years go along. Don't forget that—nor this—that the greatest joy in my life will be to be of some help to you some day, to save you some suffering, to help you to some great happiness. I am starting out to-night on my life work; the path has come to me through suffering, the deepest suffering and despair, but the road is very clear to me now. I see my mission and my work!" He stopped suddenly, his eyes glowing with the radiance of his new found happiness. Then turning slowly back to the little girl, he put his arms about her and lifted her from the ground.

"You couldn't remember all that, dear little Natalia, could you?" He smiled on her yearningly. "But you can remember that when I look down that beautiful road of life I shall always see you standing at the end—the embodiment of all its happiness."

Then he kissed her and carried her quickly toward the gate, Dicey meeting them on the walk.

"Jedgment day! ef hit ain' time you wuz er comin'. Keepin' yer ole mammy up all hours—waitin' fer yer to tell de Perfesser gemman good-bye. Come on heah, honey-chile, and let's jog erlong home. Good-bye, Massa Sargent. We sho' is gwine miss yer out ter de big house. Good night, Massa."

Sargent leaned on the gate, and listened until the sound of the chaise had died away. Then brushing his hands across his eyes and squaring his shoulders resolutely, he walked back to the house and into the room in which the first move of his great political career was being originated.

BOOK III
THE LOVER

CHAPTER I
AFTER SEVEN YEARS

It was the proudest moment in Captain Mentdrop's long career. He was bringing his new boat, the *Southern Belle*, up the river from New Orleans on her maiden trip. The stories of this new boat had preceded her, arousing the curiosity of the country people until every one was enthusiastically impatient to see for himself this boat with a cabin so wide that eight horses could stand abreast in it; with wonderful stalactites of white and gold that hung from the ceiling, and swayed with the motion of the boat; and real kerosene lamps all along the sides of the dining saloon; and a water cooler at one end that was made of solid silver and held twenty gallons of iced water,—indeed, there had never been anything on the Mississippi River to equal this floating palace.

The Captain had let no opportunity pass, by which he could make this initial journey of his new boat one of glory and importance. He paced the deck night and day, too excited to take a moment's rest. With his hands shoved deep into his pockets and a mammoth Havana between his lips—the pipe had disappeared with so much prosperity—he beamed down upon the crowds gathered along the shore, always landing when the number of sightseers justified the loss of time; and welcomed them on board with a hospitality that was made lavish by a corps of Creole cooks and a brass band.

To add to the interest of the voyage there were several brides and grooms

who had chosen this trip for the wedding journey, as was the fashion of that day; and a party from Boston that had come down by sea to New Orleans.

"Gee Whillikens!" laughed the Captain, when the stage planks had been drawn up and a plantation landing left behind. "It does my old, dried-up heart good to see all these folks so tickled over this boat. It's giving 'em more downright satisfaction than anything they've seen or done for a mighty long time. I tell you I'm glad I had a chance to show 'em what was a sho' enough boat—a boat what is a boat! Now, sir, you're from Boston, so I've been told, and I wants you to tell me, honest injun now—did you ever see anything like this boat of mine, up yonder?" He turned abruptly toward his companion, his twinkling eyes searching the face before him.

"No, Captain, I must confess I never saw anything like your boat in my part of the country; but then, we only have ships and sea-going vessels, and even on the Hudson the boats are not half as large as this."

Captain Mentdrop turned back, evidently relieved. "I'm powerful glad to hear it from one who's been up thar and knows. Are you down in these parts for long?"

"No, not very long. In fact, Captain, to be perfectly frank with you, I've come down here to be married."

The old Captain turned and inspected his companion more closely. Leaning easily against the railing, one arm thrust carelessly into an embroidered waistcoat, a suit of dark green broadcloth ornamented with large pearl buttons, and a bell crowned beaver, each detail of his costume proclaiming him a man of fashion—the stranger made a strikingly handsome picture. Apart from his well-chosen clothes, his handsome face—fair, with honest blue eyes and bright, blond hair—impressed one with a certain freshness and charm. He was a man evidently used to the niceties and refinements of life, one to whom difficulties and hardships had never come.

"So you've come way down here to get you a bride, have you?" the Captain commented, evidently satisfied with his inspection. "Something of a long trip, it strikes me. She must be a powerful exception to her kind, to draw a young blood all over this much travelling to get her."

The stranger laughed good-humouredly, his face beaming with a boyishness that was winning. "She is an exception!" he answered, "and sufficiently fascinating to make one travel any distance to win her; but, in my case, I am not going to find her—she is already with me. She has been spending several years with my family in Boston, and when we decided to be married, she wanted to come down here to have the wedding in the old home of her ancestors."

"And you come all this way—just to be married!" the Captain commented with a shrug. "But I reckon when a feller gets way off yonder, he kinder has a

hankering after old places he used to know. I reckon that was the way with your gal—just had to come back and see it once more!"

The stranger was silent a moment, viewing with evident interest the stretch of wooded hills crowned by a rambling town, which was becoming visible.

"Yes, I suppose you are right," he said, reflectively. "It was the memories of her home and all the associations of childhood which had become dear to her—now that she knows how delightful they were. But after six or seven years it seems she would have forgotten all about it—particularly as she was a little girl when she left."

The Captain shook his head, knowingly. "There you're wrong, young man. It takes a youngster to remember things. I'll wager, sir, she can tell you every one of the changes that's taken place since she left here. And if you're going to Natchez, and I believe you said you were,—well, sir, she'll find enough changes there. Whew! but it makes me feel kinder like it's time for me to be turning in my checks when I look around the old town and see the difference."

With a shake of his rugged frame, he went nearer the railing to better scan the shore. Already they could see the line of carriages and the brilliant colours of the crowd assembled to meet the boat. Some smaller craft had left the town landing and gone forward to salute the new boat, waving colours and blowing their whistles with royal welcome.

"All of them seem to know you, Captain," the stranger remarked, when the Captain had called greetings to some men in a small boat.

"Yes, siree, they know me! Well, they ought to. I've been plying up and down here among 'em for many a year, and I know pretty nearly every blamed man between St. Louis and New 'leans; and every house, too," he added, his eyes resting humourously upon an old two story building very near the shore. "Yes, sir, nearly every one of these places has something to say to me about what's gone afore. You see that shanty? Well, sir, that used to be the biggest gambling den in the whole of this country. The fellows were run out of town and they built this place just outside the limits, and once, when I was a-takin' a crowd of gentlemen down here from St. Louis on a round trip, we stopped off at the town for a day, and will you believe me, sir, every blamed one of them gentlemen went and got drunk and got mixed up wit them gamblers, and when they come back to the boat damned if they had a cent—not a one of 'em. That lot of scoundrels had just fleeced 'em. Well, sir, I just made up my mind that I wasn't goin' to put up with such tom-foolery, even if them town folks was bluffed out by the gang, and I set to work to think how I could get back the money my passengers had dropped. So I lets my boat drift down from the landing till I gets afore that very shanty there, sir; then I stops her and hollers for somebody to come out and talk to me—but they had no intention of comin' out in broad daylight. Finally I lets

off a load of buckshot against one of them windows, and that brought one of the damn rascals to the door. Says I, 'I want the money you stole from my passengers, you dirty scoundrel!' Says he—'Why don't you come off that dugout and get it?' and slams the door. 'Well,' says I to myself, 'I reckon I'll show him a thing or two!' So I makes two niggers swim ashore with a coil of rope and tells 'em to run clear round the house with it and bring both ends back to the boat. You see that made a circle of the buildin', with me a-holdin' both ends. I gets the line fastened tight, and then calls down to the engineer to back off easy-like—just enough to make the rope taut. Then I stops. Says I, callin' ashore—'I've got the deadwood on you now. Will you come to time?' But they wasn't a-thinkin' that way, so I backs off a little more, and then the old shanty begins to creak. Just a little more and the whole damn house would a-tumbled over. It brought 'em to life, though! The whole gang jumped out of the windows and doors and everywhere, and one of 'em called out that he'd give me the money back if I'd hold up. Well, sir," he nodded toward the building, "you see she's still a-standin' there."

The stranger joined the Captain in his hearty, infectious laughter. "It's a great old country you have down here," he commented a few minutes later. "The more I hear of it, the more I wonder how in the world Sargent Everett ever made his way, in such surroundings."

Captain Mentdrop wheeled suddenly, his wrinkled old features showing a new interest.

"D'you know Sargent Everett?"

"I should think I did! We went to college together."

The old Captain extended his hand. "Let's shake," he said. "I think more of that youngster than anybody else in the world. If you're his friend, I'm yours."

"I'm very glad to hear it. Do you know," the stranger answered, meeting the Captain's look with a keener interest, "I haven't seen him since we parted at college. I hardly think that I would know him now—and particularly since he has grown so famous."

"Famous! Well, I reckon! Why, sir, you ought to have been here a month ago when he come back from a speech-makin' trip. It would 'a' done your heart good to see how the people turned out to give him a welcome. They had a torch-light procession that night and fired a cannon, and had an all 'round jollification! I was sure proud for him. It showed up plainer that day how everybody felt about him. That was a grand speech he made at Jackson! Did you hear anything about it, up in your country?"

"No. But I hope I'll have an opportunity to hear him speak while I'm down here. You have heard him often, I suppose?"

"Not half as often as I'd like to," the old Captain answered. "I heard him make his first speech, and 'pon my word, it's a wonder—the way he gets under

your skin and makes you feel what he's a-sayin'. It ain't so much his words you hear when you're listening to him—it's more the sound of his voice and the look of his face. He jest takes all a feller's idees away from him and makes him think jest like he does. But I reckon you won't get a chance to hear him if you're only here for a week or two." The old fellow gave a gesture of disappointment. "He's running for Congress now. I'm kinder sorry, too, cause I ain't much on politics—I can't look at things but one way myself, and that's straight at 'em, and politicians seem to me to spend all their time a-beatin' 'round the bush. But I reckon Sargent'll show 'em a new way. He knows how—you can bet your bottom dollar on that!"

"I should like for Natalia to hear you talk about him. I believe I'll go find her," the young man said, turning away with the decision. "He used to be her tutor when she lived down here."

"It ain't no use," the Captain raised a detaining hand. "It won't do her a bit of good to hear about him. He don't give a snap of his fingers about the lady folks. I heard some of 'em call him a woman-hater—of course that ain't so," he added, laughing easily to himself, "but jest because he don't spend his time a-flyin' 'round with 'em, they're bound to resent it."

"And he has never married," the other added.

"Married! Well, I reckon not! He lives all by himself in a mighty fine house that he's built up there on the hill, and if you want to be entertained in real style, you must take a meal with him, for he's got the finest cook in the town. But as for women—" Captain Mentdrop lowered his voice confidentially and drew closer to the stranger. "You know it kinder worries me, but I can't make it out. Some say he's jest timid, and absorbed in his work, and then we all know he's mighty touchy about his bad leg, but for the sakes of me, I don't see why he thinks limpin' makes him objectionable to the ladies. I heard one gal say she thought it made him lots more picture-like, and made her think of Lord Byron, and you know he was a lady-killer, right!"

"And he is wealthy, too, I understand."

"Well, I reckon! He made dead oodles of money out of a lawsuit that him and Judge Houston had together. See that ridge south of the town?" He waved his hand in the direction. "There was a whole lot of property there, that was left to a number of heirs, and it seems the whole crowd could never be got together to sign the deeds, so half of 'em signed for the other half and sold the property, and when the other half turned up you can see what the mix-up was. Well, sir, Sargent and old man Houston took the case for the heirs that hadn't signed, with the arrangement that they was to get half. And they did. That put the youngster way up in the pictures. He had money to burn, but I never seen him do any of them blamed tricks you hear tell about down here. He never lit a cigar with a ten

dollar bill like I've seen some dern fools do. He's got too much sense. Do you know, I believe he's got more learnin' crammed in his head than any other man I ever seen."

"He was that way at Bowdoin College. The rest of his class did not have a chance."

"And I'm mightily afeard it's goin' to be the death of him yet. He overdoes things. And after every big case, you can hear tell about the crazy things he does. Of course I know how 'tis, for he once told me that when he got through a case and making a big speech, he couldn't rest one minute—that everything was flyin' round in his head like fire, and it takes him a day or two to get quieted down again. It went mighty hard with him at first, he took things so serious-like, and I just found out one day that the thing he needed worst in the world, was to take every blamed situation in life with a pinch of humour. Well, sir," the old fellow slapped his sides and let out a gust of laughter, "I soon found out he had it in him and didn't know it. Since then he's been makin' people laugh till the tears roll down their cheeks; and then, by Jingo, before he's through they're cryin' sure enough. I thought I'd split my sides the other night, when a feller was tellin' about his experience with him in a country tavern, away off in the backwoods."

The Captain spread his legs apart and rammed his hands deep into his pockets. When a fresh Havana was between his lips he was completely at his ease. "Seems like Sargent had a big case down there, wherever it was," he continued, "and after it was all over, he had to spend the night in a room with another feller—the tavern was so crowded. Well, sir, in the middle of the night, it seems that his bed-feller was mightily put out by a gallaniper peckin' at him. He raised such a racket about it that Sargent told him to shut up and let him go to sleep—that the thing wouldn't bite him if it wan't for his good. Mighty poor comfort to the other feller, I says. Anyhow the feller got up and caught it, and showed it to Sargent. Then, bless you, both of 'em got up and argued whether it was good or bad for gallanipers to be in the world. Nothin' would suit Sargent but that they settle the question by law. So they went all over the tavern at three o'clock in the mornin', mind you, and waked up everybody until they got twelve men to come to their room, and sit like a jury while they argued the case. It must 'a' been rich!" The old fellow stopped, overcome by laughter, while the tears rolled down his cheeks. "Can't you see 'em? Twelve sleepy men, all sittin' in a row in their night-shirts, while two lunatic lawyers went into vigorous harangues. It must 'a' been side-splittin'. They say Sargent placed a table before the jury, put the gallaniper under a tumbler on the table, and made everybody take a look at it. Then his companion began the prosecution, while he spoke in defence. They tell me that by that time the whole tavern had adjourned to that room, and they kept up the argument till broad daylight."

"So Sargent has developed a talent for humour?" laughed the newcomer.

"Humour—well, I reckon! He's got a-plenty of it. In fact, and this is strictly between you and me—it's his humour that makes him so popular. That's what brings him close to the people; and if he didn't have it, he'd be too far away and above all the rest of us common, ordinary folks." The old fellow's face softened suddenly. "Sometimes when I've talked to him a while," he continued in a quiet voice, "I go back to my boat and stay out on her all by myself at night, wondering if just knowing him hasn't done me a powerful lot o' good." The Captain's eyes grew almost wistful, even the steely twinkle growing gentle and kindly. "Jest to show you," he went on, "I told him I was goin' to leave him every cent I had, and d'you know, he said not to do that—that he had enough, and there was a world of people that needed it. So, together, we've fixed it to go to an orphan asylum in New 'leans. That's the first man it's been my luck to meet that ever refused to take a red cent. Whoa! there."

In a second the whole aspect of the Captain changed, as he strode forward to the front of the deck and called out directions for the landing of the boat.

In the interest of his discussion the boat had gone many feet beyond the landing, and in the chagrin of his preoccupation, the old fellow made the air about him resound with a splendid outburst of oaths.

"It jest goes to prove," he said to himself, when the ropes had been swung over the piles and the boat was settling easily against the wharf. "It jest goes to prove that I'm gettin' old and played out—standin' up here a-talkin' about a blamed lawyer, and lettin' my boat slide clean past the landin'. Shucks!"

CHAPTER II
THE VOICE OF THE PAST

Judge Houston was in the crowd that day that lined the wharf, impatient to board the new boat. No one was in more gala attire than he, with a fresh ribbon on his queue, wearing a suit of fine blue linen, so stiffly starched that the tails of his long coat stood far out on each side of him, and in his lapel, to give a finishing touch to his Colonial appearance, Mrs. Houston had placed, with characteristic precision, a pink japonica.

It was a great day to both of them, and often, as the boat drew nearer, the old gentleman would smile sweetly toward his wife, who was waiting by his side.

Seven years had passed over them lightly, the touches of age showing more like caresses than cares; leaving snow-white hair instead of flecked grey; touching their features with many fine lines, so full of character and accomplishment, that, as they came, one wondered over all they meant. Only, perhaps, in the stoop of the shoulders, in the sometimes trembling hand, and the heavy stick upon which he always rested, did the old gentleman's friends see the encroachments of age. It was only in that, however, for his eyes were as clear and blue as they had always been, shedding about him even more sympathy and benignity. His wife, the one who had stood beside him from the first days of their pioneer voyage, had grown along with him into the realm of approaching shadows, not lagging behind nor rushing before, but beside him hand in hand as they had always been.

A little distance from the wharf, seated in a high-swung chariot of modish trappings, sat Lemuel Jervais and his wife.

Mrs. Jervais watched the approaching boat with mingled pride and apprehension. Her thoughts were travelling backward over the years that had passed since she had sent the little girl so far away. They had never loved each other; Mrs. Jervais seeing in Natalia too many of the characteristics of her husband's first wife, to be drawn to the child, and Natalia realizing this and shrinking from it. "But she had done her duty," Mrs. Jervais sighed contentedly as she viewed the approaching boat. "She had seen that the plantations brought Natalia an income that left no wish unsatisfied. But now," she mused, "Natalia was no longer a child, she was coming back a woman, and a woman who seemed to have suddenly become imbued with the memories of her childhood and a desire to visit her old home again."

For several years Natalia's letters had dwindled, until recently they had become merely notes of thanks in reference to the management of the estate and a few lines about her plans. Then, quite without warning, a letter had come to Mrs. Jervais from her, in which she had told of her approaching marriage, and of her wish to return to her home for that occasion. "Probably you will think it strange," the letter read, "when I tell you I want to be married in my old home. It does seem a long journey to make for such a short visit, especially as Morgan and I shall make Boston our home; but in thinking about the dear, old place that has come down to me from my Spanish ancestors, the idea has taken possession of me that I would like my marriage to be solemnized amid those surroundings. Uncle Felix would call it quixotic in me, I know, and at the same time, understand; I feel sure that you appreciate my sentiment in regard to the old place, too, and that will explain better than words what I am going to ask of you.

"I want you to help me in arranging the wedding. You wrote that the house had been closed ever since your marriage to Mr. Jervais, so do not go to much trouble in fixing it up. Left to my own wishes, the wedding would be simple,

but Morgan insists that it be elaborate, as it will be my only wedding—he hopes. Perhaps it is only right that I should ask all our old friends, indeed, I want them about me at that time. It is a time in a girl's life when such things count most, and I feel that it will start me out on my new life happier for carrying away as many dear memories as possible; so ask every one we used to know.

"Of course I need not mention that I want you and Mr. Jervais to be the hosts for me, and stay at the old home until the wedding—after that I shall not keep you, for it is my idea to spend our honeymoon there, Morgan and I alone in the sweet old place. I am writing Aunt Maria also, and I know she will be glad to help you all she can. Be sure to insist upon her making the wedding cake—one of those wonderful, tall affairs which I remember so well. In reading over what I have written, I can not help wondering if I have asked too much of you; but then, you must remember, there is no one else except the boys, and they are much too interested in college even to go down there with me. I could go on indefinitely with plans—but I shall wait until we meet, to tell you everything."

The letter had caused no end of consternation in the town. Mrs. Jervais had driven, the day it came, to Mrs. Houston, finding the old lady holding a similar letter in her lap and weeping copiously over the news it contained. Together they had driven out to the old house and opened it once more to the golden warmth of the June sun. A corps of slaves was brought from the cotton fields, back to their former quarters, and in so short a time it seemed like magic, the old home of the Spaniards shone resplendent again. The garden was put in trim shape and the broad drive to the gate was cleared of the weeds that had so long grown in neglected luxuriance.

Invitations were sent out broadcast, and for many days garrets were being ransacked, and old brocades and laces that had lain idle for a generation or more were again brought to life to do duty for such a grand occasion. It was an exceptional time for the gossips and when the report spread over the town that all the refreshments were coming from a distance, and that it was actually a fact that the fiddlers were to be brought up from New Orleans, the whole place thrilled with expectancy.

At last the day of the arrival came. As the boat eased itself against the wharf and the great ropes were thrown ashore and made fast, Judge Houston stepped forward and shaded his eyes with his hand. At last his face lighted up with a smile as he saw the face of the little girl peering out of the crowd of passengers. She was just as he had remembered her—yet strangely different, too. There were the same beautiful grey eyes, grown darker with the years, still full of a sympathy that had deepened through the wide outlook of travel and experience; there was still the delicate oval of the face; the rich, creamy complexion, as smooth and flawless as in childhood; the hair, if possible, blacker, and worn parted and brought back

over the ears and coiled low on the neck. The sprite-like look of the child still clung to her, for even in the voluminous folds of her fashionable frock, her figure showed fragile and lithe and gracefully poised; and as she walked down the stage plank, her face bent forward intently searching for a familiar face, the old man knew that the little girl had come back dearer to them than ever before.

Natalia rushed into his arms, when she had seen him, her eyes searching his face and lingering on every feature as the memories crowded about her thick and overflowing. Neither of them had said a word.

"Natalia! Natalia!" the old gentleman finally spoke, holding her a little way from him. "I believe you are the same little girl. Changed? Not one bit!"

"Yes, Uncle Felix," Natalia answered, smiling through tear-dimmed eyes, "the same little girl—but changed—a great deal. Oh!" and she broke away to embrace Mrs. Houston. "And Morgan, where are you? This is Uncle Felix and Aunt Maria; and this is Millicent Talbot, Aunt Maria—and Morgan's brother, Joel. Aren't we a large family party? And where are the Jervais? Oh, I see them coming."

Mrs. Jervais came forward with outstretched arms. Evidently the past was bringing her and Natalia closer than they had ever expected. Then came Lemuel Jervais a portly man of forty, handsome and more affably haughty than ever.

"And there's the old carriage! How good of you to bring it out!" Natalia cried, with a grateful glance at Mrs. Jervais. "And bless my heart—if it isn't old Zebby on the box! Zebby! Zebby!" she called aloud, pushing her way through the crowd and running towards the carriage. "Zebby! Zebby! Isn't it wonderful? Hasn't it been a long time?" She clasped both his hands as the old negro almost fell from the box to reach her. "And Mammy Dicey, Zebby where is she? Why didn't she come to meet me? The mean old thing! I wouldn't treat *her* this way."

Zebediah's face fell at the mention of Dicey's name, and he made a great fuss at opening the carriage door.

There were three carriages to carry them, and Mrs. Jervais insisted that Natalia should ride in her new smart one, but Natalia had already urged Judge Houston and his wife and Morgan into the old one Zebediah commanded, into which she quickly followed.

"Now, Zebby," she cried breathlessly, sinking back into the seat. "Drive very, very slowly, and let me see everything."

So they started up the hill, the other carriages following and a procession of wagons which were to bring the trunks and all the wonderful wedding delicacies that had come on the same boat.

Natalia was exclaiming, laughing, and often tears were standing in her eyes, as they drove along. Pointing out familiar old buildings to Talbot and asking Mrs. Houston and the Judge a thousand questions, they passed through the town

where many curious glances were cast towards the bride.

Not until the town was left behind and the river was showing now and then through the rifts in the trees, did Natalia grow calmer. Where the road to the house met the highway, she suddenly called to Zebediah to stop.

"I want to get out and walk to the house, Aunt Maria," she explained. "It will come back to me gradually then; I don't want to hurry or miss anything. Come with me, Morgan?" Talbot helped her out and in a few moments they stood alone in the road, the other carriages having passed on. "I love this place very, very dearly, Morgan," Natalia said, slipping her hand through his arm and walking slowly. "It is where my father and mother were very happy. It is where I was the most unhappy—and the happiest of little girls, and now—it is where my perfect happiness will come to me. I have felt all through my life that this old place would mean everything to me, one day—that all that was worth while would happen to me here. And it will," she ended, smiling up at him, "for we are to spend our honeymoon here."

Morgan Talbot looked before him intently, curious to see what manner of place it was that held his sweetheart's love so deeply. And as he looked through the dense shade of the trees to the wide open gate and beyond to the gleaming columns, he felt the charm of the old world surroundings creep over him. Turning finally towards Natalia and meeting her look, anxious for his approval, he saw with a sudden flash of insight, that the girl before him—intense, passionate, and oddly beautiful—was the culmination of the old house and all that had gone before.

"It is beautiful, Natalia," he said softly, drawing her closer to him. "It is more than you told me."

"And you will love it with me, Morgan?"

"I shall love it because it is a part of you."

They were directly before the iron gate now. Everything was very still in the glowing warmth of the sunshine. Natalia leaned against the gate, and drank in the view like a thirsty traveller. It spoke eloquently of the coming in and going out of the many who had gone before her, and of her own days, too; and as she gazed at it, little incidents of her childhood—long forgotten but safely stored away, came forward and made their bows and claimed her attention. The scene suddenly became peopled to her. Everything was significant. The depths of the magnolia grove were filled with mysterious ghosts of the past, and the red tiles of the roof, gleaming just above the dark line of the trees, called to her with the cry of familiar voices. The present slipped entirely from her under the rush of the pent-up memories crowding about on all sides.

"Shall we walk on now?"

The voice of her lover startled her. She looked up at him and smiled

vaguely.

"Isn't it beautiful, Morgan? I wish you could see it as I do. Everything means so much to me that it can never mean for you. It makes me sad, dear, that you did not know it with me."

Talbot laughed down into her intense eyes. "It is happiness enough for me to know you now—why bother about what has gone before?"

Natalia did not answer for a moment. "Perhaps you do not understand, Morgan, or perhaps the old characteristics of my childhood are coming back to me. Do you know, they used to call me 'peculiar'? I wasn't like other children."

"I know—you were so much more beautiful."

"That reminds me," Natalia laughed, with a sudden change of mood, "of how dreadfully afraid I was that I would not be good-looking when I grew up. There was only one person who really comforted me about it, and he always insisted that my claim to a goodly appearance would not disappear with age."

"That was a man who knew the standards of beauty. I should like to meet him. What was his name?"

"You will laugh when I tell you. It was Sargent Everett."

"Dear old Sargent!" Talbot exclaimed, his face lighting up with pleasure. "I wonder if he got my letter. The Captain on the boat is a great friend of Sargent's. He told me a great deal about him, but he said he was not here now. Wouldn't it be unfortunate if he were not at our wedding? Did you ask any one if he would be here?"

"No—I didn't ask," Natalia answered slowly. "It's very odd—I haven't thought of him for a long time; not since you said you were going to write him about our wedding. Did you receive an answer?"

"No—I did not have time. I didn't expect one until I saw him here."

"I wonder if he has forgotten me," Natalia murmured, sinking on the bench near the gate, and motioning Talbot to the seat beside her. "Let's sit down here for a while. You don't mind my dreaming aloud to you, do you?"

His arm slipped about her until her head rested against his shoulder, and her eyes closed for a moment as if she had suddenly grown weary.

"No, indeed, dear, dream all you want, and tell me about your old school days with Sargent. Aren't you proud that your tutor has become so celebrated?"

"I knew he would be, some day, for even when I knew him he was a wonderful speaker. I never heard him make but one speech—it was beautiful and awful—all in one. I cried for weeks afterwards whenever I thought of it. And now, Morgan, I am going to make you terribly jealous. I'm going to tell you something that will surprise you very much."

She looked up at him, her eyes narrowing with the quaint habit of childhood.

"You are not my first love."

She straightened up and faced him, finally breaking into her soft, merry laugh. "I was desperately in love with Sargent Everett once."

"Seven years ago," Talbot answered lightly. "I can hear about it calmly—*now*."

"But it was very serious," Natalia insisted. "I really was in earnest, and after he left our house and fought a duel, he became a real hero to me. It was terrible when we had to part. I just made up my mind to die. But you see—I didn't," sighing happily. "And the night before I went away I made my old Mammy take me to him so I could say good-bye. I made him swear not to forget me, for I was coming back a beautiful woman some day and would expect him to marry me. You can imagine how terribly smitten I was!"

"And at twelve! Did he promise?"

"Indeed he did, and said I could not come back more beautiful than I was at that moment. Then I kissed him, Morgan, and he said I must send for him, even if it were to the ends of the earth, if I ever needed him. So we plighted our troth and parted. It was all just like a fairy book, and it seems hundreds of years ago. We used to walk right along here together. You see his mother was a long way off, up in Maine, and mine was gone for ever, and that drew us very close together. Seriously, Morgan, I loved him very dearly. The day I went away I sent him a miniature of myself, all in a locket with a chain, and told Mammy to tell him to keep it before him always. It was only when I became so occupied in school, and growing up, that I finally forgot all about him. Then, since I've known you, the past seems to have counted for very little with me—until to-day." Her words ended softly, and for a moment silence fell between them.

"I believe I shall get jealous if you go on talking much more about old Sargent." Talbot leaned over and looked into her face, smiling. "Really, did you think that you loved Sargent? I can't get used to the idea," he laughed. "And to think of Sargent Everett being in love with anybody! He was always too deep in books when I knew him. It would be very easy to realize that people would love him—all of us did at school. But somehow, I always felt that people did not mean much to him."

At his words, Natalia drew herself away in mock hauteur. "Am I to infer, sir, that you understand why I should have loved him, but not how he could have loved me?"

Morgan drew her hands into his, laughing all the time. "Yes, Natalia, I'll wager if it came to a point, that you were very much more in love with him than he was with you."

"Perhaps you are right, Morgan," Natalia answered his laugh happily. "But I did love him—I assure you."

"And it makes me wonder all the more that you fell in love with me after loving Sargent. We are not a bit alike. But then I suppose you are variable—indeed I know you are. But it's to be hoped that you will not be any more. It's a wonderful thing—how people do change their loves, isn't it?"

Natalia's eyes narrowed for a moment as she looked beyond the gate.

"Don't try to analyze love," she replied. "I tried once and it did no good. I always came back to the point that I loved you and nothing else mattered. How did I fall in love with you?" She repeated the words after him, taking hold of his hand and counting his fingers as she narrated her reasons. "Well—first, it must have been your frank admiration that touched me—I am always very sensitive to admiration. Then, you look upon life with so bright an eye, so smilingly, that it makes me feel safe and contented to know that my own too sensitive nature will bloom under your brightness. It's the contrast, Morgan, that's it. You give me what I have not. You meet a demand of my nature. It is that which makes the perfect love."

Talbot looked at her a moment, his face grown serious and almost sad. "It is not my own happiness that I ever think of—there is only one thing that could ruin that for me—losing you," he said, Natalia's hand still clasped in his own. "But when I think of the great difference between us, I wonder if it is possible for me to make you happy. I love gaiety and the world, and people, and deep down in your heart, I don't believe you do. And I can't help thinking that you do many things for my sake, isn't it so?"

Natalia shook her head slowly, and smiled. "No, I'm not doing a thing for you, Morgan, that doesn't give me pleasure. Don't try to find flaws in our love, or search for some hidden reason for unhappiness. It's too perfect as it is, and I love you better, Morgan dear, when you are not attempting an analytical state of mind." She laughed at him gayly. "You're the old-fashioned lover who brings nosegays to his lady-love, and writes her billet-doux, and is always telling her how beautiful she is—that is why I love you so, Morgan. That has always been my ideal of a lover since I was a little girl. Be that way always, please. Now shall we walk on towards the house? Oh, look, the magnolias have put on their wedding garments to do us honour. They are in full bloom!"

They passed through the gate and into the shadow of the grove where the trees were filled with gorgeous white velvety blossoms, and where in the dream shadows they lingered awhile.

They came finally upon the others grouped in the shade of the deep veranda, where Lemuel Jervais was playing the part of host by mixing them his famous sangaree, and Mrs. Houston was insisting that every one should have at least three slices of her equally famous jelly cake.

Morgan and Natalia looked at them from the protection of a column until

Millicent Talbot spied them. "Well—you'd better hurry or you'll miss the party," she called to them. "We thought you were lost. I was sure Natalia had forgotten the way."

"No, I was only dreaming aloud to Morgan, over the old days. He was very kind and listened, for all the world as if he were not bored. I'll not do it often, though, for fear it might get monotonous. You don't know how beautiful everything looks," Natalia continued, putting her arm about Mrs. Jervais' waist. "How good of you to do it all for me." Suddenly she stopped and looked about the group, then made a step towards the open hall door. "Do you know," she said, with a catch in her voice, that showed her fear, "I have let all this time go by, and haven't seen Mammy Dicey yet. Poor old soul—is she very feeble? Where *is* she? I know she is anxiously waiting for me."

For a few minutes silence fell upon every one, while Natalia searched each face for an answer. At last when her eyes began to fill with tears over the certainty that she was never to see her old nurse again, Mrs. Houston rose, and casting a swift glance at Mrs. Jervais, led Natalia a little way from the others. When they had reached the front door, quite beyond hearing of the others, Natalia stopped and faced Mrs. Houston.

"Is she dead?" she exclaimed in a low voice. "I shall never forgive myself for not writing to her more. Poor old Mammy!"

"No, she is not dead," Mrs. Houston answered, hesitating a moment over the information, "but she is not here any more."

Natalia's brows wrinkled in bewilderment. "Not here! But she belonged to me! Surely she is not hired to any one?"

"You are mistaken, Natalia. She did not belong to you, as we all thought. She was included in the property your father left his wife. Felix looked up the matter and found it that way. When you were sent away—"

"Yes?" Natalia asked, breathlessly.

"Mrs. Jervais sold her. You know she never liked her, and as soon as the opportunity was propitious I suppose she thought it would be better for them to separate. Of course she never had an idea you would care one way or the other."

Natalia lifted her head suddenly, while the colour mounted to her cheeks; her eyes flashed and her lips trembled in quick anger. "She did belong to me! I know it! My father told me so when he was dying. It was a trick she played to get Mammy away from me."

Mrs. Houston stared into the passionate face before her, startled as the resemblance to the little girl of earlier days became so vivid. If Natalia had only stamped her foot, as of old, the likeness would have been identical.

"My dear child," the old lady expostulated in a lowered voice. "Please don't take it that way. I'm sure you misjudge her. Even if it is true, don't say anything

now,—not until after the wedding. She has really done a great deal for you."

Natalia leaned forward and kissed the old lady. "Of course I'll behave, dear Aunt Maria," her voice controlled, but tears still in her eyes. "But I loved Mammy so. To have anything happen to her, or for her to suffer hurts me like it would myself." Then eagerly, "But I can buy her back. Do you know who owns her?"

Mrs. Houston looked away, smiling vaguely. "Some one who has found her too valuable to part with, I'm thinking."

"Who?" Natalia murmured, her eagerness disappearing in her greater disappointment.

The keen old lady watched the vivid face before her, searching it with a sudden earnestness when she answered, "Sargent Everett owns her now."

CHAPTER III
MAMMY DICEY'S STORY

Natalia stood on the front veranda after dinner, leaving the others gathered about the table, the men sipping their Madeira, and discussing the admission of the Lone Star State to the Union, and the wonderful new invention of the magnetic telegraph; while the ladies pulled their rocking chairs close together and went into the minutest details of the wedding.

Morgan had risen with Natalia, following her out of the room, but she had sent him back, pleading as an excuse that she wished to be alone to live over once more in memory the incidents of her childhood. So many things had lain dormant through the years almost forgotten in the rush and interest of the life about her, that she felt dazed into a mood of introspection when she found herself once more in the surroundings of the long ago.

She sighed aloud when Morgan had gone back into the house, and leaning against one of the massive columns of the porch, felt a sensation of relief stealing over her at finding herself alone. In the flood of re-awakened memories there had come to her a feeling that Morgan was not a part of them, could never be, and with this realization she knew that in some way the bond of sympathy between them had, for the moment, widened. He could never feel with her all the place represented; even with years and years in the narration of little incidents, he would still not see it as she did, know what it meant to her, nor find in each surrounding the stories that cried aloud to her. It was the moment in her love

when she realized for the first time that two people can never be *wholly* one—that a vast gulf of early years and childhood and dreams would always separate them, no matter how great became the love of their maturer years.

So sensitive was she to his moods and preferences, that she had understood as they lingered before the gate and looked into the grove of magnolias, that the charm of the spot and the happiness of a honeymoon spent in it would be hers so much more fully than his. For a little while this realization had brought her unhappiness, and a wish to be alone; after her dreams she knew that she would go back to her lover more contented than ever before.

She strolled away from the house, and passing on into the cool shadows of the grove, came at last to the brow of the hill. Here she sat down and leaned against a tree, letting herself drift back across the bridge of years.

In a moment of restlessness she let down her hair and unconsciously began braiding it in the two long plaits of her childhood. Suddenly she found herself laughing with the care-free merriment of a little girl. It was the same old world, after all; seven years had made no difference, everything was exactly as she had left it.

Resting her hands back of her head, her fingers touching the cool bark of the tree with a luxurious sensation, she gazed out through half closed lashes upon the broad, golden river and the misty lowlands beyond, floating in the haze of the languid June day.

Everything now was as yesterday. She was feeling it all over again, going over every little incident. The little log school-house recalled so vividly a dreadful example in fractions, and as she worried over it again, she found herself listening for the low, beautiful voice making it plain to her. On and on she drifted until she felt once more the presence of the schoolmaster and her old adoration of him.

Suddenly in the swirling of her memories she halted. That love of the little girl made her open her eyes wide. It had been ideal, beautiful, innocent. Would there be anything in her life like it again? Was that which had taken its place, equal? Could anything take its place? Again the utter devotion of it came back to her; the beginning of it in her self-anger for wounding him the day she had called him the cripple. Ah! now she could understand how she had hurt him! Their first long talk together where she sat now; his kind, deep, hazel eyes, changing Protean-like, as he listened to her while she recounted stories Dicey had told her of her mother; his patience and kindness through the long school hours; the night she waited for his return, and the fear that Phelps had waylaid him; that first case when his voice had thundered in her ears and made her shudder; and at last,—the pain of parting with him!

She sat up quickly and stared about her. Why had she forgotten all this? Why had it not been in her thoughts for so many years? And he—had he for-

gotten also? Gradually she rose to her feet with the childish impulse of seeking Dicey, who would answer so satisfactorily all her questions. Then came the clashing of reality against dreams, and unconsciously the tears rushed into her eyes for what had gone from her for ever.

But the old yearning for her nurse remained, and with a sudden determination, she walked quickly through the grove, skirting the house and garden so as not to be interrupted, and made her way to the slaves' quarters.

The door of Dicey's room stood open. On the steps before it sat two negro women shelling beans into large pans. Natalia passed on quickly, a sharp pain in her heart for the empty room which used to be so crowded with happy moments.

When she came to the barn she smiled again, for there was old Zebediah, washing the carriage that had brought them from the boat, as familiar and complacent as if there were no such thing as seven years to pass by.

"Why didn't you tell me, Zebby?" she exclaimed, without explanation. "Why didn't you tell me at the boat?"

The old negro lifted his head in dismay.

"Wha' yer talkin' 'bout, lil Miss?"

"About Mammy, Zebby. They tell me she belongs to Mr. Everett now."

"Yas'm, she sho' do. I done seen her day befo' yistiddy."

"Did she know I was coming?"

"Not tell I done tole her."

"What did she say, Zebby?"

Zebediah's hand went up to his head, scratching thoughtfully.

"She didn said nuthin', lil Miss. She jest th'od her apron ober her face and went ter moanin'."

Natalia's lips suddenly trembled.

"Take me there, Zebby—now! I want to see her. I can't wait. Saddle the horse and go with me."

But Zebediah did not respond to her enthusiasm. He stood staring at her as if he had not comprehended her words.

"Yer cyant go ter dat house, lil Miss. Dar ain' nobody libs dar 'ceptin' Marse Everett. Dar ain' no lady fo'ks in de house."

"I don't care, Zebby," Natalia laughed. "I'm not going to see him. I'm going to see Mammy Dicey. I'll be back in a minute, so hurry and get the horses ready."

She ran up the steps on the back porch, and to her room, scattering the mass of clothes which had just been unpacked, until she found the riding habit she was looking for. Very quietly, without meeting any one, she went back to the barn where Zebediah stood holding the horses, and showing his row of fine white teeth in a smile of admiration and pleasure.

"Yer ain't er bit lak grown up fo'ks, lil Miss. Yer jest de lil gal dat went 'way

frum heah long time ergo."

"I'm just the same little girl, Zebby," Natalia smiled back at him, putting her foot into his broad palm, "until you help me to mount—and then," as she settled herself in the saddle, "you'll find I've gained a pound or two."

The afternoon had advanced until the rays of sun were slanting through the trees, and as they rode along the old road, Natalia gave the horse the reins, while she drank in the beauty of the woods and open fields, and looked for landmarks that brought back with them incidents and stories. Once, she stopped before the place where the Puckett house formerly stood—now only a crumbling chimney remaining, surrounded by a grove of China trees: and again, along the brow of a hill, where there was another view of the river as it swept into a broad bend and disappeared in the fertile delta. Finally the town lay before them in its setting of beautiful trees.

"I don't know where he lives, Zebby," Natalia said, drawing in the reins, and looking back to Zebediah. "You see, I am a stranger, after all."

"Dar's de house," Zebediah answered, pointing towards a dwelling which stood close to the road, in the suburbs of the town.

"That house!" Natalia exclaimed. "I passed it this morning, and Mammy did not even wave to me."

"I seen her, dough. She wuz down on de landin' an' lookin' at yer. I knowed she be fer seein' yer somehow."

"Why didn't you tell me, Zebby?"

The old negro again went silent.

"I tell yer, lil Miss,—Dicey she so perculiar. I dunno ef she wants me ter tell yer or not; den agin I never knows if yer wuz feelin' like Ole Miss did or no. I jest keep mah mouf shet for dem reasons."

"Shame on you, Zebby! Do you think that I would ever forget any one who was as good to me as you and Mammy were? Now, hold my horse. I want to go in by myself."

Natalia paused before the gate, and stood a moment irresolutely before entering. The thought that she might be doing something a little rash, never came to her until that moment; then in her great desire to see her old nurse, all considerations left her, and she went up the walk and rang the bell. The reverberation echoed down the hall as she waited, and it was not until she had rung several times that she heard some one coming. Then the door opened, and Dicey stood facing her.

Zebediah, watching intently from the road, saw Natalia suddenly enveloped in the old negro woman's arms, and drawn into the house and the door closed after them.

Dicey had not uttered a sound when she found Natalia at the door; only

her arms opened and she pressed the girl to her bosom, their tears mingling as the old slave covered her face and hands with kisses.

"Honey-chile, honey-chile, honey-chile!"

Natalia's head rested on the old familiar bosom, with the comforting feeling of dependence and trust which she had not known since she had last nestled there. When she looked up again she found herself sitting on the stair steps, her head leaning against Dicey's knee and the well known voice ringing in her ears.

"Yer hasn't fergotten me, has yer, honey-chile? I knowed yer hadn't."

Natalia's eyes answered for her eloquently.

"Your hair has turned white, Mammy," she said, when she had dried her tears; "and you are so—so fat, Mammy—and Mammy, you don't belong to me any longer," the last with a look of reproach.

"She didn' want me no longer when yer went away," Dicey answered, her dark eyes glistening suddenly with an expression of malignant anger. Natalia saw the wrinkling of the brows that she had dreaded when a child, for it never came except when Dicey's deep anger was kindled; and even now she felt a reflection of her childish dread at the familiar signal.

"She put me up fer sale lak as ef I wuz any udder nigger! She put me up in de slabe-market fer anybody—fer anybody to buy! Dar wuz'n no use fer her doin' me dat way. She could ha' sold me at home. But she wouldn'. She hated me—she wanted ter make me out cheap—dat wuz it. She didn' want me and she didn' ker who it wuz got me!"

Natalia put her hand gently over the old woman's lips.

"Sh-h! Don't say that about her, Mammy. It could not have been that bad."

"But it wuz, I tell yer! Now I kin hate her 'cause I don' berlong ter her no longer. No good'll cum ter her!"

The words rang out in the deserted hall forebodingly. A ray of sunlight penetrated the coloured fan light above the door, dwelling for a moment with a strange significance, illumining the old negro's snow-white hair, her heavily lined features, her reddish brown skin and weird eyes.

"I did not know all this, Mammy," Natalia answered in a low voice. "I did not know. If I had it would have been different."

"Cose yer didn' know—yer done jes' fergit all 'bout Dicey—nebber think 'bout things down heah a bit, did yer, honey? I knowed dat wuz hit—hit wuz nateral enough. Yer wuzn't nuthin' but er lil gal when yer lef me."

"But you never sent me a letter, Mammy. You never got any one to answer mine for you."

Again the old woman's features contracted.

"She nebber gib me no letters frum yer. I nebber knowed whar yer wuz."

"You never got my letters?"

Dicey shook her head violently. Natalia looked at her a long time during the silence that followed, still holding her hand tight in her own.

"And to think that Sargent Everett should have bought you, Mammy," she said finally. "If it had to be—I'm glad he was the one."

"De Lawd'll sho' bless him fer hit," the old slave answered. "Ef hit hadn' been fer him I'd 'a' kilt mase'f. Hit would 'a' been easy enough."

Natalia pressed the long-coarsened fingers as they clung to hers.

"Tell me about it, Mammy; tell me everything. Let's make up for those long years of separation. How long was it after I left you, that it happened?"

"Jes' 'bout six months, honey. I'se mos' fergit now—hit seem so long ago; and I wuz feelin' so down-in-de-mouf and glum when you done gone, I didn't take no notice ob de time. Hit wuz one day in de summer time dat Ole Miss cum out ter mah room, an' say she want ter speak ter me. I knows hit wuz goin' powerful ha'd wid me cause I could tell by de looks in her eyes. She say she wouldn' hab no mo' use fer me sence yer gone away, and de boys would be goin' soon—and dat she done made up her min' ter sell me. 'But yer cayn't, Ole Miss,' says I, 'yer cyant sell me 'cause I doan belong ter yer—I belongs ter lil Miss. Marse Brandon say so fo' he died.' Den she turn red an' white, all in a sudden, and says dat he mont 'a' say dat, but he done made no sich statemen' in his will, and dat she wuz goin' ter sell me neberdeless. 'Yer knows he said dat,' says I to her, 'an' ef lil Miss wuz heah yer wouldn' dar do hit.' Den she get powerful mad and tole me ter git mah things togedder and be reddy ter go ter de Co't house de nex' mawnin'. Den I jes' gib way an' cry, cause I neber b'liebe I'd be put up wid all dem udder niggers an' sole lak dem. But she didn' listen ter me no mo', and went away.... Zebby drive me ter town de nex' mawnin' an' Ole Miss han' me ober ter de trader-man, and didn' say no wo'd ter me when she leabe. Dar wuz a big crowd ob people dar ter see de slabes—two hundred ter be sole dat day and a lot ob plantation fo'ks done cum ter town ter buy."

Suddenly Dicey stopped, and stared before her silently, her hands clasping Natalia's until she winced from the pain.

"Den mah time cum," she resumed, her voice lowered, and long pauses between the sentences. "De trader-man read out a whole lot ob things she done writ bout me, sayin' I wuz er fust class cook an' could sew and a whole lot ob things I could do—I done seen em sell slabes befo' dis, but I nebber 'spected ter be one ob dem dat wuz sole—nebber! Nebber! I wouldn' look up when dey read all 'bout me 'til I heerd somebody say five hundred dollars fer me. Seem lak ter me I knowed de voice—hit wuz Jedge Houston. Den anudder one bid seben hundred dollars an' anudder one say er thousan'.... Sumthin' tell me ter look up when dey call out er thousan', an' I see Marse Everett a-standin' under er tree 'cross de street, an' I look at him so ha'd dat he finerlly see me and start ter runnin'

whar I wuz. 'Dicey, what do dis mean?' says he ter me. 'Yer cyant be sole. Yer belongs ter Miss Natalia.' 'I knows I does,' says I, and begin ter cry out loud. I couldn' he'p it when he done look at me so kin' and gentle-lak.... Den I heerd him tell de trader-man dar wuz some mistake, but de man said Missus Brandon owned me and wuz sellin' me. I cried all de mo' when I seen him turn away hopeless lak, 'cause I think he wuz goin' away an' leabe me ter dem people. Den de trader-man begin callin' out louder and louder—'One thousan' dollars—one thousan' dollars' tell I feel like hollerin' myself, fer I wuz nigh crazy, an' den when he wuz 'bout ter turn me ober ter er stranger man Marse Everett come up an' says sumthin' ter him and he yell out 'Twelve hundred.' Den de udder man say 'Thirteen hundred!' Den Marse Everett fourteen hundred, den fourteen hundred fifty an' den dar wuz er long silence.... Den I heerd Marse Everett say in er easy low voice—'Fifteen hundred' jes' easy and quiet, lak he kin, and den, Bless de Lawd! I seen de udder man go away.... De trader-man and Marse Everett talk er long time after dat and den Marse Everett cum ter me and say, 'Cum with me, Dicey, everything's all right now. Hit's done took de las' cent I had ter buy yer, Dicey, but she lubbed yer, and I'm goin' ter keep yer fer her tell she cum back.' Den I jes' went down on mah knees and kiss his hands and say, 'Yer won't hab no regrets, Marse Sargent, I'll serbe yer tell I die, and she'll make it up ter yer—one ob dese days.'"

The hall was filling with shadows. The sunshine through the fan light had died away, yet the two did not move.

"And then, Mammy," Natalia whispered.

"Den he tuk me ter Jedge Houston's house and lef me dar wid dem an' I done stay dar two years tell he begin ter look up in de worl'. Yer know him and de Jedge done win er suit for er heap ob property an' dat's whar he fust got his money. After dat he built dis house and he been libin' heah eber sence. I keeps de house fer him and does de cookin'—an' all de time we's both been bidin' our time an' waitin' fer yer ter cum back."

"Waiting for me!" Natalia exclaimed, drawing away quickly.

Dicey bowed her head in answer.

"He done tole me once dat when yer tole him good-bye dat night, yer tole him he mus'n' lub no oder woman tell yer cum back—all grown up. So yer sees, he's been keepin' his wo'd all de time, an' once, he showed me de picture you sent him. De same lil picture de artis'-man tuk so long ter paint ob yer, fo' yer pa died. An' when I seen hit, I jes' cry and cry and cry, cause hit set me a thinkin' 'bout ole times when yer ma and me wuz lil gals togedder—cause de picture's jes' lak her."

"But, Mammy, he doesn't still think I meant what I said then, does he? I was only a child when I said that. Surely he has forgotten by this time."

"Fergit! Lawd bless yer, honey, he don' fergit nuthin' 'bout yer. He used ter talk ebery day 'bout yer tell lately—"

Natalia waited silently for the old woman to continue, her hands clasping and unclasping in her lap.

"Tell lately when we heerd yer wuz a-comm' home ter git married. Sence den he hain't sed nothin' much. I tole him hit wuzn't so, dat yer sho' wouldn' marry nobody but him."

Natalia winced under the last words; then broke abruptly into a laugh.

"But I am going to be married, Mammy. I'm going to be married next week, and then I'm going away again for good, and you are going with me. I'm going to buy you back from Mr. Everett, and take you with me."

Dicey looked at her hard, moving her head from side to side.

"No, honey-chile." she said slowly. "I cyant leabe him now—even fer yer."

"Yes, you can, Mammy, dear," and Natalia leaned her head on the old woman's bosom. "That is one of the principal things I came back for—to get you. I want to be a little girl again and get you to tell me stories about mamma, and go to sleep at night holding your hand—just like I used to do, Mammy. Oh, if we could only stay *little* always," she sighed wistfully. "If the world would only stop moving and let us stay just the same all the time—we could be so—*so* happy. But here I am—a woman now, and you, Mammy, you are an old woman, with your white hair and your wrinkles—but I love you, all the same—more than any one in the world except—"

"'Cept who?"

"Except my sweetheart."

Dicey's eyes flashed.

"Dat curly-headed, pretty man in de green coat, dat was settin' in frunt ob yer in de ca'iage?"

"Yes, that was he. But 'pretty' is not the word that describes him, Mammy. 'Handsome' suits him better."

For a second Dicey deigned no answer.

"Wait tell yer sees Marse Sargent—den yer'll see whut er han'some gemman is, sho' 'nough."

"You are entirely too faithful to him, Mammy Dicey," Natalia laughed. "He has stolen your love from me."

"An' wait tell yer hears him speak in public. De people goes wild ober him. Las' week dey fired off cannons when he cum home frum Jackson, and dat night dey built bon-fires all ober de town ter do him honour, an' when he begin ter speak in de Co't-house squar' and eberybody went ter heah him, yer could er heerd er pin drap, eberything wuz so quiet. An' when de words cum dey soun' so beautiful an' sweet dey set me ter stedyin' 'bout mos' ebery thing in jineral."

"I heard him speak once, don't you remember?" Natalia's eyes narrowed as if she were again reviewing that time. "It was wonderful, too. I can remember it now just as if it were yesterday."

"Dat wuzn't nothin'. He done been all ober de State now and he's cellibrated ebery whar he goes. Honey-chile, yer jes' wait tell yer heah him agin."

"It's no use, Mammy." Natalia sighed leniently. "You see I'm interested in only one man now, and as I'm going to be married next week, I don't believe it's proper for me to listen to the praises of another as you are singing them."

Rising, with her arm still about Dicey, she walked slowly to the door.

"You see how dark it is getting. You have almost made me forget that Morgan will be waiting for me and wondering where I am. Tell him, though, Mammy—your Marse Sargent—that he must come out to see me to-morrow, and be sure to make him promise to let me have you. I am not going away without you."

"He's away on er speakin' trip now. He won't be back fer er week."

"So he will not be here for my wedding!" Natalia frowned with evident disappointment. "Then I must write him about you at once."

Dicey stared at Natalia a moment, and then drawing her face down until it rested on her bosom, she kissed her as she used to do, on the top of her head, in the wide part.

"Listen, honey-chile," she whispered, halting at the door, with the old strange look of visions in her eyes. "Does yer 'member de night yer axed Mammy to fin' picters in de fire fer yer?"

"Of course I remember, Mammy," Natalia answered from the steps. "You always were finding them for me. Do you do it still?"

"I'se speakin' 'bout one time in perticula'," Dicey answered gravely.

Natalia halted, drawing her brows together thoughtfully.

"No, I don't remember particularly, Mammy," she cried gaily, blowing a kiss back to the old woman. "Come out to-morrow and tell me about it. Good-bye!"

Dicey turned back into the hall and locked the door after her. It was almost dark now, and as she stood alone among the grey shadows of the twilight the old look of visions burned wildly in her eyes.

Suddenly she went to the back door and out into the yard. Stopping at last before the wood house, she called to a negro man inside.

"Jonas! Jonas! Does yer know whar Marser is?"

"He mighty nigh two days' good ridin' way from heah. Whut yer wants ter know fer?"

"Nebber yer min', nigger. Yer go ter Jedge Houston's ter-night an' fin' out fer certin whar Marse Sargent am ter be found. We'se goin' ter be needin' him

in er mighty few days."

CHAPTER IV
SLAVES FOR STAKES

The Mansion House was still the gathering place of all the prominent citizens, as it had been when Sargent Everett had landed there; only now the little tavern had grown into a famous hostelry. Its façade had been dignified with the addition of a third story; its front pavement had been widened into a spacious terrace, where tables and chairs were placed invitingly beneath the trees; and along its front was an extensive row of large rocking chairs, gay and hospitable with bright red paint, and always occupied at the hours the coaches were expected. But the real glory of the tavern was its bar and so-called club room, decorated with trophies brought there by its wealthy patrons—Indian relics, muskets from some pioneer campaign, skins and furs belonging to celebrated hunters, and most prominent of all, a huge pair of antlers, silver tipped and engraved with the name of Captain Mentdrop, which he had won in a boat race from St. Louis to New Orleans.

Almost any hour of the day and late into the night, wealthy planters of the surrounding country and prominent men of the town were to be found there, discussing politics, consummating large land deals, gambling, with bales of cotton, slaves, and some times whole plantations as stakes. "We call it 'flush' times," Jervais said, as he drove into the town with Morgan and Joel Talbot. "With State banks issuing bills by the sheet, and no showing of credit asked except for a fellow to prove that he needs money, there is no better name for it. Why, man, there don't seem to be anybody about here that isn't flush; property has gone beyond reach, and the whole Southwest is wide open. Only last month I was talking to a fellow that used to be my overseer. He had just been to New York, and with a letter avouching his citizenship, and a clean shirt, he had gotten all the money he wanted. No wonder everybody's flocking this way."

"It can't last. It's fictitious. Wait until the Specie Circular begins to take effect," Morgan replied.

"Ah, there you have it. But while all this fun is going on, I say a fellow's a fool not to enjoy it and make all he can out of it. I, for one," and Jervais blew a cloud of cigar smoke luxuriously about him, "I, for one, am not asleep. It's the time in a century for a lawyer!"

"So it seems. See how my old friend is rising on the wave," Talbot commented.

"Your old friend?"

"Yes—Sargent Everett. You know he came down here through me."

Jervais leaned back in his seat with assumed indifference. "Why d'ye know, that surprises me," he said, viewing Talbot with the lazy hauteur of his younger days. "What can you possibly find to interest you in a fellow like Everett?"

Morgan did not answer at once. Sitting beside Jervais, he had been observing him closely during the drive. He had already felt a growing dislike for the man, seeing beneath the suave manners a certain cold insolence; but thinking that this was perhaps a reflection of Natalia's attitude towards him, Morgan had attempted to overcome it. Now, with the sneering words about his old friend, he felt this dislike deepening.

"He is going to Congress, I hear," Joel put in during the moment of silence.

"That's not certain, by a long shot. Wait until you see the ballot, and then, from what I know, Sargent Everett will realize that he never did stand a show. But here's the tavern." Jervais spoke with evident relief. "Now, I'll have a chance to introduce you to some of my friends. This fellow coming toward us," he continued, as they stepped from the carriage, "is a good example of what the flush times are doing. A few years ago he was a poor, down-in-the-mouth land agent; now kindly observe him—he has ambitions towards the Governor's mansion if you please! Come over, Mr. Suggs, and shake hands with Mr. Talbot and his brother—from Boston."

Mr. Suggs advanced with his usual appreciation of an important occasion. A chimney pot hat and a tight frock coat, closely buttoned across his narrow chest, accentuated his gaunt figure, and increased the air of prosperity which his recent admission to the bar demanded.

"Mighty glad to meet you, gentlemen. From Boston—did I understand?"

"Of course, Suggs, the original members of the Tea Party," Jervais put in with a wink towards Morgan. "Mr. Suggs wants to give you the impression that he never heard of you before, Talbot. And I'll bet you the juleps he knows more about you now than you do about yourself. But come, let's sit down. What's your last case, Suggs?"

In a moment Jervais had drawn a crowd about them, every one coming up to extend a cordial welcome to the Northerners. There was Colonel Andrews, a gentleman of flowing beard and manners, who told of his exploits in the Battle of New Orleans, with all the enthusiasm of the original moment; there was another just back from the Florida campaign; another on his way to New Orleans to purchase half a hundred slaves for his plantations—and many men of the town, young and old, each evidently glad of an opportunity to meet and converse with

men from the far distant North.

Jervais was at his best as host of the occasion, doing the honours with the elegance of manner which had made him so successful with a certain class. Reports of Talbot's wealth and position had preceded him, and nothing was more to Jervais' pleasure than to introduce such a personage to the town.

"It's certainly a great pleasure to meet you gentlemen," Mr. Suggs was saying to Joel, having placed his chair confidentially near him. "I was only wishing to-day that I could have had some one from a distance to hear me argue a case. Now, you would have appreciated it, I know. A long toddy," to the waiter. "I was defending a boy who had stolen his neighbour's calf. It was a mighty ticklish case, too, I'd let you know—because all the neighbourhood was against the poor devil." Suggs stopped a moment impressively.

"Of course you cleared him," some one called out, who had been listening.

"But tell me how," Joel laughed. "It seems an impossible feat."

"Well, sir, you would think so," Mr. Suggs continued seriously, "though when I looked into the matter, I found the poor fellow was starving, and you know yourself, Mr. Talbot, a man that's starving ain't responsible for his acts—ain't I right?"

"And if he's dying of thirst, Suggs—what then?" some one broke in.

"Of course the jury saw it that way. I made it so plain to them they *had* to. Now, I've a theory—"

"Joel, I want you to meet Mr. Morancy. He's our national hero in this part of the world. D'you ever hear of him in Boston—the fellow who won fifty thousand dollars in one poker game!"

Joel found himself shaking hands with a florid faced man with iron grey hair. Beneath the shade of a broad brimmed felt hat, the calm features gave no clue to such an extravagant reputation.

"But it occurred on a Mississippi River steamboat, Mr. Talbot." Mr. Morancy laughed, as he shook hands.

"He wants to give you the impression that it was an accident," Colonel Andrews put in, "but it was as premeditated as the fellow who had waited for a Royal Flush."

"Tell us, Colonel! Sh'h! The Colonel's on for a story!" came from the crowd.

The old fellow threw back his shoulders and swelled portentously.

"Gentlemen," he said, in his rolling, grandiloquent style, "I never tell that story except when there is a chance for me to hold what that fellow had waited for."

It was a signal for the crowd to move to the club room just back of the bar. There, three cloth-covered tables were placed in the centre of the room. About one, several men were already hard at it, the sound of the chips, the boisterous

laughter and oaths telling that the game was at its height.

Jervais was the first to sit down, his eyes surveying the crowd with the glitter of a devotee of the game. "Sit down, Talbot," he cried to Morgan. "I want you to have a little taste of how we play poker down here. Come on, Colonel Andrews, and you, Morancy, although I don't want you to look forward to fifty thousand on this game. We'll go it easy in consideration for the strangers," he ended, with a glance towards Morgan that brought a rush of blood to his face.

"I beg you gentlemen will not let my presence dampen your game in the least," Morgan said quietly taking his seat next Colonel Andrews. "I shall be delighted to play your game as you play it, and I shall not object even to a table stake, if that is your custom." He looked at Jervais with this last thrust, and smiled broadly.

"We usually start," Colonel Andrews hastened to explain, clearing his throat and glancing about the crowd, "on a modest limit, and sometimes end up on table stakes. But we might begin there to-day, if you gentlemen are agreeable. I think it will be swift enough for any of you if we make it all jacks with a dollar ante. Shall we each buy a thousand for Stakes? ... Very well, then."

The Colonel, acting as banker, dealt out to each player a thousand dollars' worth of chips, and each gave him his I.O.U. for the amount. "Let's see who deals." he continued, dealing a card to each player. "Ah! a king: I deal. Well," the deck of cards falling together between his long fingers, "well, gentlemen, everybody come in and look pleasant!" Another moment and each chipped in his ante, and the cards began flying around.

"Now I can continue my story," Colonel Andrews went on, draining a tall tumbler of champagne, and looking at Morgan with a glance of approbation. He was keen enough to have caught the stranger's refutation of Jervais' remark, and liked his bold stroke.

"Yes—I'm anxious to hear it. You said it was a Royal Flush?"

"That is what it is about. Ever hold one?"

"No, I've never been so lucky as that," Morgan answered, picking up his cards. "It's worth living for, though, I expect."

"Well—I reckon. Yes, sir, he believed it would come to him some day, and..." The Colonel became silent suddenly, as he looked at his cards. All hands passed, and the deal went to Jervais.

"Yes, as I was saying, he knew it would come to him one of these days. He got it at last, too, and as luck would have it, the game was the biggest he had ever got mixed up in." The Colonel paused again when the cards had been dealt, and when Morancy opened with but Jervais staying, he continued: "And, bless your soul, when he actually did see that Royal family staring up at him, he had to tie his handkerchief around his neck to keep from yelling."

Jervais opened the next pot for twenty-five dollars, saying to the Colonel, "Go on, I'm listening. You said the fellow got at last what he was looking for."

But the Colonel was too much occupied then to notice. In the pause Morgan glanced about the room. The third table had been taken now, and the room was gradually filling with a crowd of onlookers. In those days it was not a crime to stand behind a man and watch his game, for such was the common feeling of good-fellowship, that each man trusted the one behind him and accepted him as a gentleman of honour. Besides, the Mansion House was only open to gentlemen.

The sound of clinking chips, the dense clouds of smoke, and the endless hubbub of voices in many keys, were steadily making the room stifling. Waiters were rushing around to supply every want at the same time.

With the rapid succession of pots and the unusually brisk plays, the Colonel had evidently forgot to proceed with his story—or at least had deferred concluding until the present absorbing interest of the game had subsided. Jervais was losing steadily; his hands were just large enough to keep him in nearly every play—and almost invariably small enough to lose the pots. In the meantime he had bought another thousand chips, and that now was nearly gone. Morgan's luck was unprecedented; it seemed he could draw to anything and win.

The last pot—opened by Jervais—had gone to Morgan, and the deal was now his. Jervais had ordered a bowl of punch for the crowd, and was just testing the first glass. Measuring the pile of chips before Morgan, he suddenly asked the Colonel for four thousand more, with the apparent purpose of matching Morgan's money in anticipation of an opportunity for favourable encounter.

"Here's to bridegroom's luck," he called to Morgan. Talbot smiled and drained his glass.

"As I was saying," the Colonel began again, "he was in a big game and they'd gotten the pot up to ten thousand dollars—yes, sir,—there was ten thousand in the pot and that fellow bet ten thousand, naturally. The crowd wouldn't stand for it though: wanted to give him only a show down; they said the fellow didn't have ten thousand dollars to his name. Did he? Well, to tell the truth—no, he didn't."

The cards had been dealt again, and the table went silent. Morancy opened, the Colonel raised, Jervais doubled, and Morgan stayed. Morancy, too raised, and the Colonel, Jervais, and Morgan called.

After the draw the betting became lively once more,—confined, though, to Jervais and Talbot. Morancy and the Colonel having but relatively small amounts before them, came in for a show down. Finally Morgan "tapped" Jervais, the former laying down four Aces, the latter four Queens. Both had drawn the fourth card.

"There's something in bridegroom's luck, after all," commented Morancy,

smiling good-humouredly at Jervais, who had not won a hand, and was begin to show it.

"Pretty good for you," commented the Colonel, as the deal flew again from his fingers. "Take my advice, and don't keep your host in this game much longer," he added in an aside to Morgan. "He's always hard up, the darned fool, and never was known to have sense enough to quit. You see, he's getting pretty far gone, already." Then aloud, "but you couldn't bluff that fellow, even if he didn't have the ten thousand. He wrote out a check on the best bank in the town and threw it on the table. What did the others do? Why, they gave him the laugh. They didn't want checks—they wanted hard cash."

"Five cards," called Jervais irritably.

Morancy's caught the Colonel's eye and his own closed eloquently. "Give me two," he said.

Morgan took two. As the hands went down, Morgan got the pile again.

"Well—I suppose your man was bluffing with his ten thousand?

"When they wouldn't take his check, he called for paper and ink, and wrote to the President of the bank. I've got what I've been looking for all my life. Am I good for ten thousand dollars?"

"For God's sake shut up, Colonel," cried Jervais. "We're playing poker."

The next deal was Morgan's. Candles were being brought in as the room gradually darkened, and with the soft light the surroundings took on a new aspect. lire newcomers were growing numerous with the approaching evening, until a double circle of men was around the tables. A general interest was being displayed in the Northerner's luck, accounts of which had reached to the outside of the tavern.

Morgan stopped before dealing and looked at his watch. Then he looked at Jervais. "They expect us back at seven o'clock," he said. "Shall we stop now?"

"No," Jervais cried, his voice shaking slightly, his face flushing from the effects of too much liquor. "Your luck's too good for me to quit."

Morgan looked up quickly, then glanced at the others. "Well, one more hand around then—but the last," he said deliberately. "We are expected at home at seven," he continued in explanation to the others. "Possibly Mr. Jervais does not understand my impatience."

"Nor your luck." suggested the Colonel.

"Go on—go on," Jervais muttered. "If you're in a hurry, let's get through. I'll show you something this time."

"Better walk around your chair," Morancy laughed.

Jervais wheeled towards him. "Is it your money I'm losing?"

Jervais now replaced his depleted pile by a further purchase of chips, and announced that, as it was the last hand around, he would not limit his stake to

the money in front of him, but would, so far as he was concerned, allow or make any bet.

The cards were dealt in silence.

"Three for me," cried Jervais, his hand falling heavily upon the table.

The Colonel looked around the table, his face elaborately expressionless.

"I stand pat," said Morgan. After the others had drawn he bet fifty dollars.

"I raise you two hundred," added Jervais, who had filled.

"That let's me out," came from Morancy, with the resignation of an old fighter. He was followed by the three other men.

"One thousand more," said Morgan, facing Jervais squarely.

"Gentlemen, you will have to excuse me," and the Colonel laid down his hand.

"Fifteen hundred more."

"Two thousand better," from Morgan.

"Twenty-five hundred better than you."

Morgan studied his hand intently for a few seconds. "Well, we'll make it three thousand more. Colonel, I'm very anxious to hear the end of that story."

Jervais' face was livid now.

"Four thousand—d'you hear? I say four! You can't bluff *me*!"

Morgan met his look with a sudden realization that the affair had gone too far, although a glance around the room told him that he could not afford to end the game; that must be done by Jervais.

"I make it five thousand." Morgan's voice trembled a little.

"By God, I'll call you!" Jervais answered. "And pay you in slaves if I lose."

Morgan was on his feet in a moment. "I'm not gambling for slaves," he cried angrily, throwing four deuces on the table. "You know, Mr. Jervais, how I feel on that subject."

Jervais had risen also, steadying himself against the back of his chair.

"Easy, gentlemen, easy," cried the Colonel, leaning across the table between the two men. "Call the game off for this evening. You're both a little excited now."

"Jervais can call the game off or not as he chooses," Morgan said sharply, turning away. "But he can't pay me in slaves."

Jervais steadied himself with an effort. "Well, I won't then, since you're so particular. You and I can settle this affair ourselves. Let's go home now—only—you've got to come back here again and show these gentlemen how long that luck of yours can keep up." As he turned sullenly toward the door Morancy and several others quietly surrounded him, without saying a word.

"Oh, I'll come back," Morgan smiled easily at the prospect of getting away with so little trouble. "I'm here for two weeks, gentlemen," and bowing to the crowd, he left the club-room, followed by Joel.

"It's a great failing of his," the Colonel explained, as he walked with Morgan to the carriage. "Getting worse and worse all the time. Sorry it happened this evening, but you forget all about it—Lem won't remember a thing by morning."

They were nearly at the carriage now, where Jervais had been safely landed on the back seat.

"Oh, I almost forgot to finish that story," said the Colonel, his hand holding Morgan's in a tight clasp. "The fellow had talked so much about that hand he was living for that the banker knew what he meant. So he said it was all right, and on the strength of that the crowd accepted the fellow's ten-thousand-dollar bet, and every one dropped out. But if it had come to a show-down, by jingo, there wasn't a damn thing in his hand but a pair of deuces. Good night, my boy,—see you to-morrow." And he went off laughing.

CHAPTER V
CANDLELIGHT

After supper that evening, when they were leaving the dining-room, Natalia slipped her arm through Judge Houston's, and drew him towards the big salon across the hall.

"Let's you and I run away from the others for a while," she whispered as they entered the room. "I haven't had any talk at all with you, and if we slip in here and sit over on that old davenport in the corner, they'll never find us, and we can talk, and talk, and talk—like we used to. There is so much that I want you to tell me; so much that I want to tell you."

She led him across the highly polished floor, the old gentleman playfully assuming that he might slip.

"Suppose I should fall, Natalia," he complained; "I never did like these slippery floors. I won't let Maria have them at home."

"Lean on me, Uncle Felix," she answered, smiling. "I know it will be difficult for you to do, though—you never leaned on any one in your life, did you? Put your arm through mine and take a step—so. Any one would think we were dancing a minuet or a Virginia reel! But you will dance the quadrille with me at my own wedding, won't you, Uncle Felix? Now!" she ended, landing him safely on the deep sofa.

"The time is coming, Natalia, when I must lean on some one all the time,"

the old gentleman sighed. "It isn't very far off, either. Do you know, I find myself deferring to Maria for the smallest things, and when not Maria—it is Sargent."

"Sargent Everett," Natalia repeated after him, piling some cushions on the horse-hair upholstery so that the old gentleman would lean back comfortably. Then she pushed a small stool before the sofa, and sat down upon it, resting her chin in her hand while the other one lay across his knee. "Sargent Everett," she said again thoughtfully. "That is one of the things I want you to tell me, Uncle Felix—all about him."

The late twilight of the warm June day still glowed through the windows. The whispering of the birds as they sought shelter for the night in the magnolia grove floated in to them, lending a potent charm to the quiet surroundings. Judge Houston did not answer at once, and in the long silence that widened between them, he felt for a while that almost any words would jar the contentment of the moment. Occasionally his hand moved across Natalia's hair—a touch so gentle and loving that she wondered if her father would have meant more to her than this dear old man.

"There is so much to tell," he began at last, "and I would gain so much pleasure in the telling that you would fall asleep long before I was half through. Indeed, Natalia, Sargent is making these last days of my life very happy, for in his success I seem to get a pleasure so deep that at times I imagine his triumphs are my own."

Natalia moved restlessly, as if to rise, then sank back on the stool again.

"Why is it that every one I meet seems to worship him?" she murmured, half complaining. "You have always loved him more than me—yes, you have, dear Uncle Felix, and now, when I come back home, I find Dicey is his slave—and willingly, too. He has stolen the love of you both from me. I am growing very, very jealous of him. Do you know, Uncle Felix, Dicey says she will not leave him, but I believe she will, don't you?"

"I did not know you had seen her. Was she here to-day?"

"No. I went to her."

"At Sargent's house—to-day?"

"Yes, that is where I was all the afternoon. He was not there. Dicey said he was out of town on some political tour. Tell me about him, Uncle Felix—it has been years and years since I heard from him or about him. Occasionally I have seen articles in the papers about his speeches. Are they so wonderful? Have you some of them that I could read?"

Judge Houston's eyes glowed with the enthusiasm that was always in them when he spoke of Sargent, nor did Natalia miss the sudden quickening of interest and kindling of energies that so obviously manifested his devotion.

"His speeches are remarkable works of beauty and construction, but they

are nothing in comparison with his delivery. It always saddens me when I think of his future reputation—when he goes down in history—as he surely will—for people will not realize half his power in reading his speeches; his magnetism, his charm, his force that holds one spellbound in listening—all that will be lost to the next generation, and it is that, more than anything else, that has made him remarkable. I took out my watch one day to see how long he would take for a certain speech, and I found myself at the end of the speech still holding the watch in my hand, entirely forgotten."

"Then the years have brought him success," Natalia reflected. "I remember his great ambition, and a phrase of his—'I want to show the world that because a man is a cripple he can still be a great man.'"

The Judge bowed his head, enthusiastically "My one great hope is that I shall live to hear his voice sounding in the walls of the Capitol at Washington. It will, too, one of these days."

"Tell me about his success," Natalia said leaning back comfortably against his knees.

"It is a long, long story, Natalia, and would weary you in the telling. It began when you were here. Don't you remember the trial of Phelps? That started him on the upward path, and it also had a much deeper significance than the world ever supposed. When he had convicted Phelps it troubled him so that he went to the jail with the object of releasing the fellow. Fortunately for Sargent Phelps never knew his intention, and killed himself and ever since then Sargent has defended any and every criminal that comes to him. He calls it his life-work—saving men so as to give them another chance. After that case, he was sent to the Legislature and now we are going to send him to Congress—the election takes place this week. After that he says he is coming back here and settle down in his home and be content to practise criminal law, which he has made his special work. Some day, when you meet him, get him to tell you about his theory in regard to it; it is beautiful."

"When I meet him," Natalia reflected softly. "It seems that I shall not see him again, Uncle Felix; and yet, do you know, this place is not the same to me as it used to be, and I believe that it is because he is not here. In some way he seems to be very closely woven into all the impressions of my childhood—he and Dicey." Suddenly she turned and looked up into the old man's face. "Uncle Felix, Dicey told me that he always talked of the time when I should come back to him. Is it really so? Did he think that?"

Judge Houston leaned back, so that the protecting shadows would betray no expression on his face. It was too late now for her to know. He would tell her nothing that would in any way tinge her happiness with a shade of sadness or regret. When he answered her, his voice was steady, almost gay, in an attempt at

carelessness.

"That was a dream of mine, Natalia. You and he were dearer to me than any others in the world. It was only natural that I should have hoped that you two might have loved each other. But you see," he sighed in mock despair, "I am carrying out the words of the prophet—'your old men shall dream dreams'—and I am a very old man, Natalia. I shall be seventy-six my next birthday."

"Seventy-six years," Natalia repeated, absently, wondering over the reason for his not replying to her question. Could it be that what Dicey said was true? She hurriedly drove the doubt from her thoughts, for a strange fear had suddenly crept into her consciousness—the fear that her great happiness might come to her through the suffering of another. With the intuitive perception she rose from her stool with a start. The room had become totally dark; only the light from the hall threw a faint shaft into the room.

She groped her way to the tall black marble mantel, over which hung the portrait of her mother, and lit the two seven-branched candlesticks. Going back to the stool, she sat down as before, resting her face in her hands and gazing at the portrait.

In the soft glow of candlelight the room looked enormous. The vista made by the two mirrors at each end and directly opposite to each other created a perspective that was without limit in its repeated reflection. The portrait gained a semblance of life from the deep shadows and high lights, and looked down from its gorgeous gilt frame on the crimson damask upholstery and rosewood carvings, with the affection that years of association had created. The gleaming mahogany floor gathered into its embrace the reflection, and in the subdued light and the strange fragrance of passed years breathing life into the speechless objects, Natalia felt that she was growing nearer to what it all represented to her than she had ever been before.

"Seventy-six years," she said again thoughtfully. "How beautiful to grow old as you have done, Uncle Felix. Nay, is it growing old? It seems to me that with you and Aunt Maria it has been a gradual growing nearer to a beautiful future life—a gentle approach towards God. I wonder if I shall grow old that way, or die in the heyday of my youth and happiness—as my mother did. To think that I never knew her," she sighed, when she had looked a long time at the portrait. "And now when I seem to think of her most, when I feel that I need her—she is gone. Can there be a greater loss to a girl than not to know a mother? And I shall never know what it is! Sometimes it makes me very sad when I realize there is no one from whom I can claim anything—no one to whom I can go and demand things because of the ties of blood. Even you and Aunt Maria are really no kin—are not tied except by love."

The old man leaned forward and turned her face towards him.

"Could any ties be stronger than those of love?" he smiled into her eyes.

"I know, dear Uncle Felix," she pressed his hands as she answered, "but the tie of blood is a very wonderful thing. It makes me feel so dreadfully lonely at times, to know that you, that Morgan, that every one is doing for me not because they ought to, but because they love me—perhaps pity me. Probably I express myself badly, and yet—you must know what I mean. It is lack of that *right* to lean on some one for help and protection, and feel that you are only demanding of him what it is his duty to give. That is what I expect my marriage to bring me."

Judge Houston leaned nearer to her, intently watching the changing expressions that played across her face, and which seemed to gather brilliancy from the portrait towards which she looked. His eye wandered from the painted face to the living reproduction, then back again—and between them there rose before him his old bridge of dreams—dreams which the last month had shattered. Again he felt an almost overwhelming desire to tell her of that dream which was but the reflection of the dream of another; if it were only possible to let her know of the plans and talks and hopes that he and the other one had made their guiding star for years! But he could not—his duty to her kept him silent, and in her love he realized the hopelessness of his own desires.

Then in the more than three-score years of calm restraint and self-denial, his deep affection for the man who had become his son rushed over him and made him speak.

"Natalia," he hurried over the words, "there is something I want to know—from your own lips."

"You can ask me anything, Uncle Felix." She turned her face towards him with the frankness of a child. "I have no secrets that I would not tell you."

His hand rested on her shoulder while he searched her eyes.

"How great is your love for Morgan Talbot?"

Natalia met his eyes seriously for a few moments; and then she laughed softly.

"What a question, Uncle Felix, and particularly when it comes from you! How great is my love for the man I am going to marry? Do you know me so little that you deem such a question necessary?"

"No. But I know you so well that I know that you will tell me the truth—that is, if you answer me seriously."

Gradually the smile faded into a pensive expression, and Natalia turned slowly back to where the gleaming portrait held her attention again.

"How great is my love," she murmured as if in self-questioning. "How great is my love? Why, Uncle Felix, how do I know how great it is? What is there for me to compare it to?"

The old man leaned towards her, and though her face was turned from him

when he spoke, she felt that there was something left unsaid behind his words.

"Is this the first time you have loved? Is there nothing that went before, by which you can judge?"

"No, nothing." Natalia turned and searched his eyes for the hidden meaning. "I have never been in love before, unless—" her face flushed slightly as she found his meaning, "unless it were my old admiration for Sargent Everett. But then I was too young to know."

Judge Houston leaned back once more into the protecting shadows of the wall, it had come at last he sighed to himself, and she had been the first to mention it.

"And is this love that you now feel, like the first?"

"No." She shook her head, her face saddening sweetly. "No. I adored Sargent Everett. It was worship. A girl only has that experience once in life; fortunately it came to me early and I outgrew it. But I remember it painfully well. It is the sort of feeling that one must have who bows down and worships a god, and sees that god returning his affection—can there be any sensation more wonderful! And all the incidents of our association naturally added a picturesqueness that impressed my childish imagination, coloured it, and made his image sink very deep upon mv mind. This morning when I went out to the old bench under the magnolias where he and I used to sit, I actually felt a return of my old love for him. I actually forgot Morgan for the moment!" She ended with a happy laugh.

"Tell me then," Judge Houston asked after a pause. "How does this other love differ from the first?"

She clasped her hands in her lap and leaned back against the sofa, her eyes half closed in meditation. Finally, with a graceful movement, she put out her hand and drew the old man's into hers.

"My love for Morgan," she began slowly. "How can I ever describe it! It did not come to me suddenly—it was more the outgrowth of association—a drifting into it without realization. Is it not always that way?" She lifted her face towards the old man intently, and found him looking down at her with a sad expression that she did not understand.

"You say you found it that way?"

"Yes, Uncle Felix," Natalia answered gayly. "Now please don't upbraid me for not falling in love at first sight. You know such things don't happen nowadays. I first met Morgan at the boarding school where Mamma Brandon sent me. Millicent was there with me at the time, and through our friendship I began to hear stories of her beautiful brother whom she described as the acme of all that was handsome and brave and wonderful. You must remember we were only twelve then. It is rather a strange thing, now, as things have eventuated, that I used to answer all her descriptions of Morgan with effusions about Sargent Everett.

Then I met him. You can see the impression he would be likely to make upon a lonely little school-girl away from the few people who had ever loved her. Naturally the absent scene faded as the years passed, and I found myself living only in the world about me—a world filled with all the interests of the school and my broadening education, and made a place of enchantment to me by the kindness and affection of Morgan's family. They made me one of them. And when the day of real freedom came, when I left school to enter the world, with the enormous accretions from my plantations which you and Mamma Brandon had so skilfully managed for me—everything was perfect. Ah, it was beautiful! That first year of my real life. I can remember exactly my sensations the night I made my debut. We went to the opera first to hear Jenny Lind sing, and afterwards there was a big ball. I carried a beautiful bouquet of lilies of the valley—oh, Uncle Felix, it was gorgeous! That was two years ago. Since then, you know how I have travelled, how I spent a year in Europe, losing myself in the shadows of all that historic past, all that overpowering procession of events that has left its monuments for us to wonder over.... Those were carefree days, happy and thoughtless, with no suspicion of a to-morrow, and in them, with me—for long periods of travel—was Morgan—always faithful, always attentive, always an ideal lover. I never thought of marrying him then—at least never seriously, until I came back from Europe, and found that the same things that filled my life before amused me no longer. I was tired of playing, Uncle Felix, I had played too much. Something within called me to the great problems of life—I felt that I wanted to be in touch with people whose lives were amounting to something, who were doing good in the world and helping others. I seemed to realize then, for the first time, that I was drifting along in a happiness that would bring me nothing in the future, and I saw myself in my old age, when my youth and freshness and beauty were all gone, as a little child, without any one dependent upon me for their happiness. I think it was that, Uncle Felix," and she drew his hand gently to her cheek, "that opened my eyes to Morgan's love. He was there, waiting to give me a protection and haven from that awful lonely future. And I thought of you and Aunt Maria growing old together so beautifully, and I know now, Uncle Felix, that Morgan and I shall do the same.... When I have a child, Uncle Felix, think how everything that has gone before will be as nothing! When I have one that is mine, a part of me—that is what will make my life divine!" Suddenly she put her hands up to his face and kissed him. "Forgive me! Forgive me! I did not mean to wound you. I did not mean to thrust my happiness at you—so."

There were tears in the old man's eyes as she talked on, lost in her own narration, and when she looked up at him again, they were streaming down his cheeks, she rose from the stool and slipped on to the sofa beside him, pulling his arm around her waist, so that her face lay close against his, with the silence

deepening between them.

"Uncle Felix," she began again, after having risen and carefully snuffed the candles on the mantel. "I have never told any one what I have told you to-night; indeed, there was no one to tell—not even Morgan. It was my thought of you and this dear old place that made me wish to solemnize my marriage here. It may be the last time I shall ever be here, at least for many, many years; yet now that I have come back, and all the past has rushed over me with all its old charm and fascination—I feel that I should like to remain here always. There is something so protected and safe here—an aloofness from the world that would save one from almost every suffering. But of course it is impossible." She stirred restlessly. "Already Morgan is growing impatient, and wants to get back to the rush and stir of a city." She rose and with both hands pulled the old gentleman up after her. "Let's go back to the others now. But first—I may never have the chance to speak to you of it again—tell Sargent Everett of my deep affection for him still—tell him that I shall always be grateful for his having made me a very happy little girl, and that the only thing that marred my happiness on my wedding day was his absence. Now, let's go back to Morgan."

CHAPTER VI
HIS WEDDING PRESENT

The wedding day came—a beautiful day, filled with the glory of June sunshine, warm, sweet, brilliant—bringing in its perfection omens of great happiness.

The old home gained in beauty as the grove about it grew heavily laden with the honeyed fragrance of the magnolia blossoms, and the deep green leaves became even more varnished and glistening. The cool shadows and the topaz patches of sunlight mingled upon the tall columns; the red-tiled roof glowed as if with an understanding of its responsibility that day.

Natalia rose in the early morning and passing through the hall, where already there were signs of much stirring and preparation, went out into the garden. It was still very early. The first smoke from the quarters was curling lazily upward, and from the barn came the tinkling sound of bells as the cows were led into the pens for milking; and all through the atmosphere, insistent and penetrating, was that indefinable, vibrating sound of nature awakening in the early morning.

The garden greeted her with a burst of bloom, veiled timidly in its protection of dew. She lifted her face to the soft air, and breathed the delicious fragrance of the honeysuckle. Everything was perfect to her at this moment. She looked through the eyes of one to whom the world has become a consummation of ideals.

She lingered beside the pomegranate bush, smiling as she vainly sought for the jay-bird's nest that she had found there when a child; then she strolled on into the depths of the grove. How fortunate she was, she reflected, as her eyes lingered on all her surroundings, to have this quiet, beautiful spot in which to solemnize the marriage that was to bring her completeness. How perfect that her honeymoon should be spent in the surroundings that her mother and father had known at such a time. In each detail she imagined she could discover some preference of theirs; in the quiet and aloofness of the early morning she felt intuitively that they were with her.

The sound of a step behind her made her turn quickly, a quick frown at the interruption changing instantly into a smile of happiness, for Morgan had seen her from his window and followed her.

"It is our wedding day, sweetheart," he said when he had reached her and put his arm about her. "Our wedding day—think of it! May I be the first to kiss you on such an important day?"

Natalia looked up at him thoughtfully, dwelling with a tender glance upon his bright, manly face and fair hair. In the morning brilliance he shone resplendent, catching, as if by natural attraction, all the beauty and freshness of the day in his brilliant colouring and deep blue eyes.

"Is it such an important day?" Natalia answered softly. "I sometimes wonder if marriage is not an anticlimax. The greatest moment to me was when I realized that I loved you. Nothing will ever equal the joy of that—not even our wedding."

"That is a girl's way of looking at it," Morgan laughed easily. "With a man it is quite different. You see, dear, he fears so that the girl might change her mind, that he is not really happy and satisfied until she actually belongs to him."

"There you go, Morgan." Natalia looked away, answering his smile halfheartedly. "Joking when I am serious. But it is very fortunate, I suppose. I should always see the serious side of life if it were not for you. I am so glad that we are different, dear. You see—we are antidotes. You correct my seriousness—I sober your lightheartedness."

Morgan looked at her curiously.

"Yet you can be as gay as I, Natalia. You were so at school; you were on our long voyage together. It is only since we have been engaged that you have changed. What is it? Are you not entirely happy?"

"Of course I am—the happiest woman in the world! Only I feel my hap-

piness differently from you. It is a more serious thing to me. It's my nature, I suppose. I've been trying all my life to let people know how happy I was, and even when in my most melancholy spells I found a certain quiet peace, I had to appear gay to keep others from thinking I was miserable. It's a trick of mine, to hide my real feelings, I suppose. We're all acting, anyhow, don't you think so?"

"No, I'm not," Talbot smiled down at her gayly. "I honestly believe I am as nearly frank as people get. I never could hide my emotions, and I've never yet learned to control my anger."

"How dreadfully you frighten me, Morgan." Natalia frowned in assumed fear. "Suppose you should get angry with me—would you treat me very badly? Would you whip me?" She laughed outright. "Dicey says there used to be an old farmer here who whipped his wife every Saturday night because he said it was the only way a man could make a woman respect him. And she also says that when the man was sent to jail for stealing his neighbour's cow, that his wife would go with him. Such a case makes one ponder, doesn't it, Morgan, as to which is the right way to hold another's love?"

"I'll never treat you that way, Natalia, because," and he hesitated, half-serious, "I'm almost afraid of you at times—when your eyes grow very black and the colour fades out of your face. I don't know whether it is anger, or what. It makes you wonderfully beautiful, though."

"I know—it is when I'm very intense. It's when my Spanish blood is aroused. Sometimes I have felt that I was acting without my own volition—that some one else, a new nature within me, was compelling me on to something I was helpless to combat. I will tell you about it some day, but not this morning. I've determined to let nothing mar our happiness to-day. But I have a request to make," she ended tentatively.

"Anything in the world—you have only to name it," Morgan replied promptly, swinging her hand in his, to and fro, like a happy schoolboy.

"Do you know, sir," Natalia began, with mincing manner and chiding voice, "that you spent all of yesterday afternoon and the one before, away from me—and worst of all—with Mr. Jervais!"

Morgan's face showed his evident surprise.

"You don't mean to tell me, Natalia, that you objected to that! Certainly you didn't want me to stay here all the time listening to you women folks discuss trousseaux and wedding cakes!"

Natalia smiled at him silently.

"That must be a very attractive place—that Mansion House," she commented archly.

"The tavern! What do you know about it?"

"Uncle Felix told me how popular you were there—how many friends you

had made already. It doesn't take a very lively imagination to picture the poker games there, for I've heard of them ever since I could remember. There were great old days, then, and still are, I fancy, if you men would only tell about it. But, seriously, Morgan, don't go this afternoon. Promise me."

Morgan's face had clouded as she ended, and slipping his arm around her he led her towards the bench on the brow of the hill.

"Listen, Natalia," he said, when they had sat down. "Something happened yesterday which I did not want you to know. Now, I see I had best tell you. Lemuel Jervais and I got into a pretty reckless game of poker all the afternoon. Towards the end I think he must have reached the limit of his ready resources, for when every one had withdrawn and he and I were sticking it out, he said he was going to pay me in slaves, if he lost. You know my feelings in regard to slavery. So when it came to that, I threw down my hand and said I was not gambling for human beings!" Morgan dropped his hands between his knees and stared before him in silence. "It was all rather unfortunate, but I suppose couldn't be helped," he continued. "What makes it a little embarrassing to me is that Jervais insisted that I should go back again to-day and finish the game."

"But you didn't agree to it, did you?" Natalia exclaimed.

"What else could I do?" Morgan answered rather gloomily. "He is my host and yours, and would take offence—particularly as I have been the winner all along. Besides, it wouldn't do not to go for a little while. Do you know what I've decided to do?" he added, bright again. "I'm going to let Jervais win rather heavily, and then suggest that we come back here."

Natalia met his brightness only half-way.

"I suppose you will have to do it, but you *will* come back soon?"

"You have my word for it."

"Well, then, I suppose I'll have to be contented." Natalia smiled again. "But after to-day, when everybody has gone away, and Brother Joel and Millicent are on their way to New Orleans, and we shall be here all alone—you must not let a single thing, no matter how great, take you away from me. Just you and I—all alone! I've planned each day—almost every moment!"

They strolled a little way down the hill, to where the ground rolled precipitately to the river. The opposite shore was still grey and misty with the retreating night, and over the stretch of wilderness hung a blue veil of mystery.

"The Indians call it 'The Land of the Setting Sun,'" Natalia said, looking out before her. "Poor wild creatures! It seems the only land left them now. To me it always seemed the future. One thinks one sees it, yet it is all vague and unknown."

"That is not the way with our future, though," Morgan replied, gathering Natalia in his arms. "Ours is neither vague nor unknown. This day is a symbol

of what it is to be. It will be only happiness," he kissed her, "happiness—and happiness again!"

The day deepened in beauty as the hours passed, and all the while elaborate decorations were being arranged throughout the house. Many friends came, bringing wagon loads of trailing vines and ferns and wild hydrangeas. Festoons of Southern smilax were twined about the columns and draped from one to the other, so that the old house looked gay and youthful, as it had many years ago; and along the veranda, tables were placed on which stood tall crystal globes protecting the candles which were to illumine the place at nightfall; and along the balustrade of the upper balcony was a row of candles which encircled the house, and would make it a blaze of glory.

In the grove hundreds of transparences were hung high among the thick foliage, vying with the white blossoms in doing honour to the occasion; two big piles of brush were placed far out on the road beyond the gate, which were to be set ablaze in the evening and light the late arrivals on their way.

Within, the large salon was heavy with the odour of gardenias. The walls were covered with the fragrant blossoms and from the corners of the ceiling to where the bronze chandelier swung with its hundred and fifty candles, garlands of ivy were draped. Across the hall, the dining-room floor was waxed until Zebediah pronounced it too slippery for any one to stand upon, much less attempt dancing. Even the library was thrown open, a thing never done before in entertaining, and all the wedding presents displayed there—presents that brought smiles and tears to Natalia, for in many of these gifts she realized that the friends of her parents were parting with their heirlooms to do her honour. There were priceless pieces of Sevres china; a huge punch bowl of Bohemian glass, the sides cut in broad panels which showed layers of rose and cream; candlesticks in bronze and brass and silver; many pieces of Sheffield plate and silver that had come to America with its early settlers; and, causing more trouble and amusement than all the other presents, a magnificent peacock sent by old Mrs. Buckingham, which thought its special duty was to make the air ring with hideous cries.

In the late afternoon Natalia went down the stairs on the back veranda to inspect the last touches that Mrs. Jervais and Mrs. Houston were giving the supper table. The veranda had been enclosed the whole length in osnaburgs, and a long table extended from one end to the other, literally groaning under the weight of appetizing delicacies.

Already the front of the house was gay with the people who had driven many miles to the wedding, and whose carriages and wagons were encamped

without the gates awaiting the return to them in the early morning; for it was the custom of those days to spend the entire night in jollification, the fiddlers never resting their bows until the sunlight clashed with candle-light.

"Oh, Natalia, look at those nougat pyramids! Aren't they dreams!" Millicent cried. "I know they must be six feet high."

"They were made in New Orleans," commented Mrs. Jervais, proudly, following the two girls as they moved down the table inspecting everything.

"Won't it be a pity to break them? But of course every one will want a souvenir to take home. Natalia, I think you ought to keep one whole in memory of the day. And there's the wedding cake! In five terraces! Isn't it beautiful? Where in the world did you get it, Mrs. Houston?"

Mrs. Houston's eyes lit up with enthusiasm.

"I made every bit of it myself. It took the whites of fifty eggs!"

"What on earth did you do with the yelks?" exclaimed Millicent, dumbfounded.

"Is there nothing I can do?" Natalia said, putting her arms about the old lady, and kissing her cheek. "How good you all are to me! I seem to grow happier every moment—"

The clang of the door-bell broke on her unfinished words, and in the next moment a servant had entered with a note. Natalia took it from the salver, and glanced at the address, drawing her brows together, as if in recollection. The others waited silently impatient.

"Do open it, Natalia," Millicent cried. "I *know* it's another wedding present. Won't you read it aloud?"

Natalia still held the note in her hand, thoughtfully regarding it.

"I'm trying to remember whose writing it is. It's very familiar. Oh, I know now! It's Sargent Everett's."

She tore open the envelope, letting it fall to the floor as she hurriedly read the note. When she looked up again, the tears were streaming down her face.

"He has sent me the most precious wedding present in the world," she cried with a sob in her voice. "He has given Mammy back to me!"

She ran through the dining-room, and down the full length of the hall, and out on to the front porch, throwing herself into the old slave's arms.

"He has given you to me, Mammy! He has given you to me! You're mine—you dear old Mammy Dicey! Come on upstairs to my room, and tell me all about it. Mammy, I'm getting everything in the world to-day. Isn't it wonderful? And now you've come back to me!"

She pulled the old woman up the steps beside her, and into the big room where they had spent many hours together.

It was about dusk, and the room was in the quiet gloom of twilight. Natalia

locked the door after they had entered, and pushing a big arm chair close beside the bed, she led Dicey who stood in the centre of the room, dazed into forgetfulness by the familiar objects about her, to it, and made her sit down while she threw herself on the bed and drew the old slave's hands into both her own.

"It's like old times, isn't it, Mammy? Just exactly like it used to be—you there beside me when I went to sleep. Oh, Mammy, I'm so happy! I want to cry just a little like I used to, and you hold my hand and pat it and sing to me,—very soft and low, ah! now!"

And with the light gently fading from behind the bowed blinds, and the room sinking into darkness, the old slave chanted softly, with the tears streaming down her furrowed cheeks:

"Whar, oh, whar am de Hebrew chillun,
Whar, oh, whar am de Hebrew chillun,
Whar, oh, whar am de Hebrew chillun,
Way ober in de promis' lan'."

CHAPTER VII
THE HOUR OF THE WEDDING

Evening closed about the old home; the candles in the garden began to glimmer and throw a fairylike glow through the shrubbery; the two great bonfires on each side of the gate were lighted and illumined the road for near a mile. Carriages began rolling up to the front door and discharging their elaborately costumed occupants. The sound of laughter and merry voices floated up in waves, and in the distance came the wail of fiddles being tuned.

Suddenly a rap sounded on the door; the sanctuary of the two reunited women was broken.

"Natalia! Natalia! All the guests are arriving," Millicent called in an excited voice. "Have you begun to dress? Do let me in! It's scandalous for them to be so late!"

Natalia sprang from the bed and hurried to the door.

"Is it really late?" she exclaimed, as Millicent burst into the room. "I hadn't an idea time was flying so. Mammy and I had gone back years and years, and forgotten everything. Is Morgan ready?"

"Ready! I should think not!" Millicent answered. "Do you know, neither he nor Joel nor Mr. Jervais have come back yet; and they have been gone for hours. Mrs. Houston sent the Judge in an hour ago to bring them back. It's perfectly dreadful for them to behave like this, and I intend to tell them so as soon as they come!"

Natalia listened calmly, then turned away to hide the anxiety in her eyes.

"They will be here before we know it," she answered, after a little while, forcing a smile to her lips.

"I suppose they became interested in some discussion and forgot all about the time. Just like men! But do hurry, Millicent, and come back as soon as you can to help me dress. Now, Mammy," she turned back to Dicey, stopping a moment to survey herself in the cheval glass. "Are you going to help make me very beautiful to-night? I believe I'll wear my hair like I used to. It's dreadfully unfashionable now, but I believe it's becoming."

She sat down in the chair, and unloosening her hair, let it fall in waves about her. Clasping her hands tight in her lap, she looked steadily before her the anxiety creeping back into her eyes. All the while Dicey watched her closely. In the old woman's eyes the strange look had come again. It was burning brilliantly now.

"I wish he had come sooner. I wish—" Natalia lifted her head resolutely—"I mean platted in a crown, Mammy, like you did it when I was a little girl. Have you forgotten how?"

"No—I hain't fergit."

"Then you arrange it for me, and I'll wear the daisies in it that you brought me. Won't that be fetching? I'll sit very still, Mammy, while you fix it. Do you remember," she laughed plaintively, "how I used to wriggle and fidget when you would do it that way?"

Dicey did not move toward her. Shaking her head firmly she only stared.

"I won't fix hit dat way fer yer," she suddenly burst out. "I won't! I won't!"

"Why, Mammy, don't you think it's becoming?"

"I won't fix hit dat way 'cause he allus said he lak hit dat way."

Natalia looked at her bewildered.

"But Morgan never saw me wear it that way. How could he know?"

"I don' mean him. I means Marse Sargent."

Natalia broke into a merry laugh and drew the old woman's face down to her own.

"You dear—old—foolish—Mammy! Of course I didn't know you were talking about Sargent Everett. Besides—what difference does he make now? I believe you were teasing me about him, anyhow. If he thought so much of me he would have come to my wedding."

Dicey shook her head unconvinced.

"Is dat all de larnin' yer done pick up in yer trabbelin', honey? Hit's 'cause he lubs yer so dat he cyant b'ar seein' yer marryin' anoder man. Dat's hit, honey-chile."

Natalia narrowed her eyes a moment; then smiled, a little wistfully.

"You are entirely too wise, Mammy. Sometimes I almost fear you. You are trying to make me unhappy on my wedding night, by telling me my happiness is breaking another's heart. You know it isn't really so—now is it, Mammy?"

Dicey's face was turned away from Natalia as she moved about the room, pulling down the shades and lighting the candles. Twice she opened her lips to speak, then closed them tight and went on. Suddenly she stopped and went back to Natalia.

"Yer is breakin' his heart—yer is—yer is. Yer tole him yer wuz gwine come back ter him an' yer ought ter done hit. Yer know yer ought to—cause yer done pledge yerself ter him." Her face was close to Natalia's as she whispered the words, and involuntarily the girl drew back, startled. The intensity of the old woman's eyes was ominous. The next moment Natalia rose from her chair and faced her.

"Mammy, you are trying your best to make me miserable. I never thought it of you. You have lost all your love for me for your new master. Because you love him so, you think every one must—but I do not—do you hear, Mammy? I don't love him one bit any more; he doesn't love me either. It's all your imagination! And if you don't stop talking about him, I'm going to send you right back to him!"

Natalia's voice was calm, but her eyes flashed into the old woman's, speaking her anger. In another moment Dicey was on her knees with her arms about her.

"Fergive me! honey-chile, I didn' mean nothin'!" she cried. "I lubs yer more'n ennybody in de worl', but I cyant help er feelin' kinder perturbed 'bout pore Marse. Yer hain't gwine sen' me erway, will yer? Say yer won', honey, 'cause he'll be powerful mad wid me ef he knows I'se done made yer mad. I'll do yer ha'r anyway yer says ef yer'll only say yer hain't gwine sen' me erway."

Natalia's anger went as it had come. The next moment she was seated before the mirror, with Dicey brushing and platting her hair.

"We always did quarrel, Mammy," she laughed happily again. "I suppose it proves our love, don't you? But it does make me so jealous to find you loving somebody more than you do me," she added, reflectively. "It really is odd how he makes people love him," glancing at Dicey's enigmatic face reflected in the mirror. "I'm talking about your master, Mammy. I see now that I have lost your love entirely. But if he does for others as he has done for me, I do not wonder at it," she sighed. "Who else would have thought of sending you to me for a wedding

present?"

"Eberybody do lub him," Dicey rejoined, her eyes once more sparkling with her enthusiasm of the subject. "An' de young ladies—yer ought ter see how dey turns out in dere fine kerridges, all rigged up in finery and foolishness, when he's gwine ter speak. Dey all jes' makes sheep eyes at him all de time, an' he neber takes no notice ob none ob dem."

"That's your way of seeing him, Mammy. I'll wager he's in love with half a dozen girls this very minute. Now begin putting in the daisies, please. Yes, three at a time. Honestly, now, Mammy, crossing your heart and body, you don't think he is as handsome as Morgan, do you?"

"I neber did lak bloo eyes," Dicey answered firmly. "'Specially when dey is light bloo."

"But his are not light blue. They are very dark and beautiful. Wait until you see him close. Now, my wedding dress, Mammy. Isn't it a dream?" Natalia went to the sofa where the wedding finery was displayed. "I brought it all the way from Paris last year. You see, Mammy, it has three skirts."

"Lawdy 'bove us!" cried Dicey, touching the gown gingerly. "Hit's got sho' nuff leabes on hit, hain't hit?"

"Yes, they are arbour-vitae leaves. Millicent has been sewing them on, all day. The design represents the walls of Troy. You know all about that, don't you, Mammy?" she laughed merrily. "You see there is a border on each flounce, and on the waist, too. I saw the Princess Amèlie wear one just like it. Now call Millicent, Mammy, for she will have to help me get into it. And Aunt Maria, too, and ask Mrs. Jervais to bring the jewel box."

Left alone, Natalia peered through the closed blinds into the yard below. From the lights and moving figures, she turned her eyes towards the heavens. There, too, the stars shone in a gay brilliance.

"My wedding night!" She whispered happily. "My wedding night!" She turned away from the window with a strange new excitement rushing over her. Her eyes grew deep black, glowing with intensity. Her face became flushed with a gorgeous colour.

Millicent burst into the room, completely arrayed. "How do I look, Natalia? Do you like the ribbon here, or there? It's so dreadfully hard to decide. Would you believe it—those hateful men have not come yet! I don't believe this ribbon is the right colour, after all. Do you suppose anything has happened to them?"

Natalia looked quickly towards the clock.

"It's only half after seven. The ceremony is at eight," she said slowly—then eagerly, "Perhaps they have come and you didn't know it."

"No, I have just come from Morgan's room, and he is not there. But you *must* dress, Natalia," Millicent urged, picking up the wedding gown. "Here—get

into this, while I help you. Aren't you glad the leaves look fresh? They are as green as if they had just been picked. Can't you see the girls wondering if they are real? And the wedding bouquet—it's wonderful! Mrs. Houston has just been telling me how it was made. She says she took a stick and covered it with green silk, then she laid sprays of cedar, fan shape, all over that, then in the centre she sewed the cape jessamines, all real close together. It's the most beautiful bouquet I ever saw!" Millicent ended breathlessly.

Natalia made no comment. She stood silently docile while the gown was fastened.

"It is very strange that he should do this way," she murmured to herself, "and he promised me— Perhaps their carriage broke down on the way out!" she exclaimed. "It must be something like that!"

Mrs. Jervais entered the room, her face beaming her approval upon Natalia. In her hand she carried a large, elaborately carved sandal wood box.

"Do you know where they are? Have you heard from them?" Natalia cried, rushing towards her.

Mrs. Jervais answered her with her calm smile.

"Don't worry, clear, they will be here in plenty of time. Nothing has happened, I'm sure. If you knew Lemuel as I do, you'd know that he had taken them all to the Mansion House, where he always gets involved in those eternal political discussions. You know there is much talk now of a war with the Cherokees—so they are trying to settle it, I know. But here are the jewels, Natalia. They have not been opened since your mother's death."

Natalia took the box in her arms, pressing it to her affectionately.

"I have never seen them," she said, taking a key that Judge Houston had brought her that day, and slipping it into the lock. "I always said I would never wear them until I was married." She placed the box on a chair and knelt down before it. "I have always thought," she began, very softly, "that there are a few things that one should wear very seldom—some things only once. I am never going to wear this dress again." She laid her hand softly into the folds of the white tarletan. "I'm going to put it away in the cedar chest after to-night—way up in the attic—and only take it out on my anniversaries, to dream over."

She turned the key in the lock and lifted the lid. Lying on a white velvet lining, grown yellow with age, was a magnificent collection of jewels. There was a necklace formed of oblong pearl medallions, the centre of each filled by a large sapphire; there were ear-rings of the same design which would hang to the wearer's shoulder; four bracelets completed the set. There were several quaint brooches of onyx and pearls and diamonds, and some heavy pieces of white coral, elaborately carved.

Mrs. Houston had entered while Natalia was gazing into the case, and stood

just behind her, one hand resting on her shoulder.

"You saw her wear them, Aunt Maria," Natalia murmured, finally. "Then place them on me just as she would have liked them to be."

Leading her up to the cheval glass, the old lady clasped the necklace about her throat, slipped the bracelets far up her arms, and adjusted the ear-rings to her minute satisfaction; leaving for the last the veil, which she pinned to Natalia's blue-black hair with a broad band of sapphires, her own present to the bride, and one that had done duty a century before, along the banks of the James River.

"Now you are wonderfully beautiful, Natalia," she said, giving a last touch and stepping away to gain a better view of the arrangement. "Your eyes have caught the glow of the sapphires. Look at her, Millicent! Isn't she lovely?"

Any one who now sees the portrait of her, painted by Weygant, will realize how beautiful she must have been that night; for the artist seems to have caught, with a remarkable inspiration, the gorgeous depths of her eyes, and even in the canvas one sees the faint, velvety shadows that gradually faded away from her heavy black lashes. This, probably, was what accentuated their brilliancy and gave the effect of an inner, glowing light. As she faced the others and felt their admiration, the excitement rushed over her again, and for a moment she was dazzling.

Dicey was the first to turn from her and gaze towards the window.

"Do you see them coming, Mammy?" Natalia asked, still before the mirror.

"No, ma'am, dey's all done quit comin'," came Dicey's low murmur.

Natalia turned swiftly towards Mrs. Houston, searching her face for some sign of anxiety. She found none.

"You all go downstairs and entertain the people," she said at last. "Mammy will stay here with me until Morgan comes."

"I *do hope* they will come soon," Millicent said, kissing Natalia for the tenth time. "I'm terribly impatient and flustered, and I always get so red in the face when I am excited."

"It will not be long now," Mrs. Houston said cheerfully, "I sent Felix for them an hour ago, and you may be sure he will find them. I'll send you word, dear, as soon as I see them coming."

Left alone with Dicey, Natalia turned slowly back to the mirror and looked at herself a long time. The veil was still thrown back from her face, and in the soft glow of the candles, the reflection gained a vague, misty charm.

During the long silence the sound of fiddling floated up to the room. Surely he had come now! That was the reason for the music. As she listened, the music faded softly and finally stopped altogether. Still there was no sound of a carriage on the driveway. Finally she sank into a chair and looked at Dicey, who was peering intently through the shutters. Then she glanced at the clock. It was

exactly eight—the marriage hour. The fiddling began again, and mingling with it, the sounds of laughter in the garden and the swishing of silks along the veranda.

She rose from the chair, walking about the room, while the clock ticked off the minutes relentlessly. In the stillness of the room her voice sounded harsh and unnatural.

"Mammy—do you see him coming?"

Dicey did not answer nor move from her position.

"Mammy—come here!"

The old slave held up her hand cautiously.

"Wait—I sees er kerridge."

Natalia laughed happily.

"How foolish I've been! I was actually getting nervous!"

"Dey is drivin' mighty slow—sh-h—dar's er man lyin' 'cross de back seat—sumthin's done happen."

Natalia rushed toward the window and threw the shutters wide apart. In the glow of the illuminations she saw the occupants of the carriage distinctly. Judge Houston and another man sat on the front seat; on the back seat, lying outstretched, was a limp figure, the face covered with a handkerchief.

She rushed to the door and out into the hall, pausing half-way down the steps when she saw the men carrying the helpless form into the parlour. She stood there, as if frozen lifeless, the crowded hall unseen, the curious glances of the guests unnoticed. Then, when the muffled stillness was broken by a shriek, she moved one step further. It was Mrs. Jervais' voice that had resounded through the crowded house.

It was then that Judge Houston came out of the parlour and closed the door after him. Signalling the crowd to fall back, he went towards the steps. Natalia had reached him now, her hands clinging to him in sudden trembling.

"Is it Morgan—in there?"

The old gentleman shook his head, and looking down into Natalia's pallid, quivering face framed by the wedding veil, he drew her close to him.

"No—it is Lemuel Jervais."

"And Morgan—where is he?"

Judge Houston did not reply at once. Putting his arm about Natalia, and motioning away the staring crowd, he led her down the hall to a deserted place on the back veranda, where the wedding supper was already on the table and the candles blazing.

"They had a difficulty over cards—Morgan and Jervais," the old gentleman spoke in a low voice. "When I got there Lemuel was—dead. If I could only have gotten there sooner!" he ended, his whole figure shaking with emotion.

Natalia leaned heavily against the wall.

”Where is Morgan?” she finally asked.

”There was only one place for him to go to—the jail. It seems to have been a very bitter fight,—the slavery question was at the back of it,—you know the type of Jervais’ followers. I knew the jail was the only safe place for him—I was powerless to stem the crowd.”

”Is he safe—now?”

”Yes.”

Suddenly Natalia tore the veil from her head and threw it away from her.

”Will you take me to him, Uncle Felix—now—at once?”

The old gentleman drew back, startled by her vehemence.

”Not to-night, Natalia. It is no place for you.”

For a second her eyes flashed into his.

”If he is in danger I want to face it with him! Will you go with me? Or shall I go alone?”

CHAPTER VIII

ORANGE BLOSSOMS AND PRISON BARS

The fiddles were hushed. The sounds of gaiety and laughter died on the lips of the merry throng. The guests rushed for their wraps; word was sent to awaken the slaves and harness the horses for the hasty departure; everywhere were the subdued murmurs and confusion of the dismayed gathering.

Through it all Judge Houston and Natalia went calmly to the carriage, the startled crowd falling back with averted faces, letting them pass in silence.

Natalia sank into the carriage, exhausted and trembling. The strain of the last hour, with its culmination, had brought to her a relinquishing of all restraint. She found herself clinging to Judge Houston’s arm as if in some way the mere contact with another would bring back her usual strength and composure. They had passed into the highway before either of them spoke.

”Are you sure that he is safe—that I am not too late?” The words trembled through her lips.

”I am positive of it,” Judge Houston answered, forcing his words to speak encouragement. ”The jail was the best place possible to take him. Indeed, it was the only safe place. You know the reputation of the lower element of this town, and Lemuel always had a strong following among them. He has often admitted

they were his political backing. And this trouble between him and Morgan was what made me fear some sort of an outbreak. You see—at the bottom of it all, was some argument about slavery." The old man drew down his brows thoughtfully. "It seems to be developing into a curse upon our heads. God knows where it will lead us! And Morgan was unwise—he spoke out his views too literally—his statements aroused ill-feeling in others, so that his attitude now is telling against him." He stopped abruptly and pressed Natalia's hand. "I tell you all this," he continued more calmly, "to show you why I thought the jail a safe place. If there should be an unusual excitement, the restlessness of the mob would be quelled by the State's protection. I would not leave him, even to come to you, until I knew he was perfectly safe."

A light wind had risen with the night, and from the south there came a sea of racing, mackerel clouds. The night was intensely dark. Except for the flicker of the carriage lanterns and the few stars that shone through the breaks in the clouds, their surroundings were indistinguishable.

"I can't bear the thought of him there, surrounded by enemies, and I, out here—safe and protected. Why didn't you come for me sooner, Uncle Felix!" Natalia cried. "Drive faster, Zebby! Lash the horses!"

Though the carriage rocked from side to side, and the horses were galloping at their utmost speed, urged on by the singing whip, it seemed to Natalia they were dragging along inch by inch.

At last she loosened her hold of Judge Houston's arm and leaned back against the cushions.

"My wedding night!" she murmured, covering her face with her hands. "My wedding night!"

Finally the lights of the town twinkled down the road.

"Here is the town, Natalia," Judge Houston cried, putting his arm across her shoulders and drawing her to him. "We shall be there in a few minutes now and you will see that he is safe, as I told you."

Zebediah cracked his whip incessantly, and in a few minutes more the suburbs had been passed and the street lights were about them. The town seemed utterly deserted, a quiet gloom hovering over the darkened houses, until they drew near the Mansion House Tavern. Here people were standing in excited groups. A block beyond the street was a seething mass of men. Standing on the fence of the courthouse yard, a rough, savage faced man was inciting the crowd, gesticulating wildly to make himself heard above the noise. There was a deep, vibrating murmur rising from the crowd, filling the air with a foreboding sound. On all sides one could read plainly indignation and violent antagonism.

Judge Houston's face grew pale and set as they drew nearer the jail. One glance at the crowd had told him what it represented. Already the mutterings of

that great trouble which was a few years later to separate a united country, had begun to spread; into the midst of these people had come a man from the centre of the opposition country, who had proclaimed his beliefs and fought for them, killing his opponent in the difficulty. The feeling of the masses centred against this stranger.

The old gentleman who had weathered the years of pioneer life and had seen the deep-rooted evil widening the breach, knew that Morgan Talbot's life hung in the balance. The crowd about him bespoke its ingredients—the lower elements of the town, inflamed by the followers of Jervais into a recklessness that meant almost anything. He also realized that the best element—the friends he could call upon to defend Talbot—were all guests at the wedding and had not yet returned to the town.

"I cyant go no fudder, Jedge."

Zebediah's whisper broke upon Judge Houston's great fear. He stood up in the carriage and surveyed the crowd. It was dense up to the gate of the jail yard. In that moment it rushed over him that the sight of Natalia might have some effect upon the crowd. He glanced at her quickly and saw that she was determined and self-controlled.

"We shall have to walk—take my arm—now."

Taking one of the lanterns that hung to the dashboard of the carriage, and holding it in his hand so that the light fell full upon Natalia, showing distinctly her white gown and jewels, Judge Houston half led, half pushed her into the midst of the crowd.

The effect was as he had expected. The crowd turned and looked at them; a whispered exclamation followed; then, during an ominous silence, a pathway was made for them, through which they passed to the gate of the jail yard.

There the keeper laid a detaining hand on Judge Houston's arm. "If it comes to the worst—if they make a rush, we are powerless!"

"Keep them back until our friends return to town."

The old gentleman's voice rang with a new firmness. "They all know and are coming to our assistance. I shall be back here in a minute and stand by you."

"Is it as bad as that?" Natalia asked so quietly that Judge Houston looked searchingly into her face. In her expression he saw the look that always comes into the faces of the brave.

"No, I don't believe they will do anything—they wouldn't dare! They are not so violent as they look."

At the end of the walk they stood at last before the jail door. When they had passed within and Natalia heard the bolt shoot into place, and knew that the threatening crowd without was separated from her by the heavy iron door, she leaned against it for renewed strength. Then, taking Judge Houston's out-

stretched hand, she followed him down the dimly lit corridor, only vaguely aware that she would find Morgan in such a place. Still gripping the outstretched hand she followed the old man into the cell.

Morgan Talbot and Joel were outlined against the window. From without came the subdued murmur of the multitude so that they did not hear the door open. Suddenly Morgan turned and faced them. Starting back, he looked from Natalia to Judge Houston, his eyes bloodshot and staring.

For a minute no one spoke.

"Why did you bring her?" Morgan's voice came harshly. "Don't you know what that crowd out there means? You could have spared her this at least!"

He motioned to the window where Joel still leaned against the bars, listening intently. There was no look of affection as he glanced from Natalia to the old man; it was hardly one of recognition.

Natalia moved quickly across the floor, putting both hands upon his shoulders.

"He brought me because I would not stay away, Morgan. Do you think I could have left you in this awful crowd?" Her voice broke and she began to tremble violently. "Morgan—what did you do? How did it happen?"

"How did it happen!" He stared down into her face, his hands hanging limp at his sides, his voice hard and grating. "How did it happen? Don't you know? I am a murderer!"

With the words Natalia shuddered and withdrew her hands.

"No! No! don't say that! Don't use that word! it was an accident. I know it was—tell me so!"

Talbot continued to stare at her strangely. When she drew away from him, he laughed abruptly.

"I knew *that* would make you feel differently," he said almost in a whisper, as if to himself. "I knew it would kill your love for me," he ended with a sob.

Natalia lifted her head proudly. Instantly her hands were clinging to him again, and her voice as she spoke to him deepened vibrantly.

"*Nothing* could alter my love, Morgan. I have come here to convince you of that. Look at me! Can't you see?"

Judge Houston went quietly across the room and taking Joel by the arm, led him to the door. They went out noiselessly, unnoticed by the others. "Look here, Joel," said the Judge as they stood in the corridor, "I want you to realize with me that public feeling will probably affect the verdict of the coroner's jury. We have a big battle ahead of us." The young fellow shook his head sadly.

"Don't you see, Morgan?" Natalia within was saying to Morgan, her voice rising as she strove to force some response into his eyes. "Don't you see I am in my wedding dress? I came as soon as Uncle Felix told me."

He stared at her a long time, the wild, hunted look gradually dying out, leaving only an expression of dumb misery.

"Natalia! Natalia!" he murmured at last, as if realizing for the first time that it was she. "Natalia—that is your wedding dress! Oh, my God!" he cried out, turning away from her and leaning against the wall. "It can never be now—never—never!" Then came the dry, hard sobs of a man who sees nothing but despair before him.

Natalia did not attempt to stop him. When he sank on to the cot, his face buried in his hands, she went and sat beside him, her eyes dry and glowing. She knew a more soothing relief had come to him than any words she might employ.

As they sat there, the folds of her wedding dress falling about them, the candles burned low, until only a ghostly gleam sparkled upon her necklace of pearls and sapphires.

Gradually the low murmuring without grew fainter and fainter, then died away entirely. The silence about them deepened; yet neither of them moved. The minutes raced along. Once, Natalia rose and lighted another candle, the first one having burned into its socket.

At last, when Morgan lifted his face to hers, he found its beauty and quiet encouragement a continuance of the peace her presence had brought him.

"Natalia," he whispered, "you love me still? It has made no difference?"

She smiled at him bravely.

"*Nothing* could."

"Are you honest with me, Natalia—or is it only pity?"

For answer she leaned forward and kissed him.

"Then it is true," he said, drawing her hand into his, his face brightening for a second. Then again, crept back the look of deep misery. "I believe you still love me, Natalia, but we cannot be married now. No, I wouldn't ask it of you. I love you too dearly to have your life ruined by being tied to a *murderer*."

"Don't use that word, Morgan. Please don't use it. You are not a murderer. It was all an accident. Am I not right? Tell me about it and I can show you with your own words that I am right."

Morgan stretched his hands out on the cot, his fingers moving nervously in an incessant thumping.

"We spoke of it that morning—*this* morning," he added. "It seems a thousand years ago now! I was telling you about our game of poker at the tavern, don't you remember? To-day it was the same all over again. He had not raised the money,—he had only brought the slaves themselves to pay his gambling debts. One he pointed out, as worthy to pay any man's debts—a mulatto girl, a pitiful, beautiful little creature that wept as she was brought before us. I told Jervais that I played cards with gentlemen for pleasure and not for traffic in human souls! I

told him he was insulting me." He stopped a moment and shuddered. "It all happened very quickly. He struck me a blow—I returned it. Then I saw him draw his pistol and spring on me. His hands were about my neck when I had gotten the pistol out of his grasp. As they tightened I knew I was going to kill him. I can feel his hands loosening now, after the report. Great God! I can feel him slipping down, and down, until he lay dead on the floor before me!" He rose suddenly from the cot and stretched out both arms helplessly before him.

Natalia listened intently. Not an inflection of his voice escaped her. When he finished she met his eyes resolutely.

"It was not your fault. You did not do it intentionally. It was self defence."

"But I knew I was going to kill him. I knew it all the time."

"Yes, but you had to! No one could blame you! You are as innocent as I! The law will protect you."

Morgan gazed at her a long time in silence.

"Natalia,—help me to do what is right. It rests with you to make it easier for me. Don't come back here any more after to-night. Don't let me see you again. This must be the last time, dear."

He went to the cot where she still sat and looked down into her eyes.

"I am going away if I am liberated, and I am never going to see you again. It is the only way I can prove my love to you,—the only thing that would be just to you."

Natalia's eyes wavered from his burning glance. Suddenly she rose and went to the door, her face illumined by a wonderful smile.

"Where are you going, Natalia," Morgan exclaimed.

She did not answer. Knocking on the door until it was opened, she faced Judge Houston and Joel calmly.

"Uncle Felix, I wish our marriage to be performed to-night. Will you send for a minister?"

Judge Houston looked at her, startled, then his eyes sought Talbot's for an explanation. Coming back again to Natalia's, he saw the decision was hers.

"Would it not be better to wait until to-morrow?" he suggested, quickly aware of incongruity in such a marriage.

"No, it is not a time for waiting. I must prove to Morgan that this has made no difference in my love for him."

Finally the old gentleman turned away from her, reading the force in her face that brooked no interference. When he was at the door he heard Morgan speaking.

"Stop!" he commanded. "I refuse to be married to-night. Natalia does not know what she is doing."

"You both see I am perfectly calm," she said, turning to Joel and Judge Hous-

ton. "I desire above everything that we shall be married to-night. I beg of you—Morgan—"

Morgan shook his head with a determination that was greater than hers. With the decision his face gained some of its lost brilliancy. He became once more the handsome, virile man of that morning.

"When I am a free man, Natalia—when I am cleared—if you still wish it then—not before. I am determined."

The four of them were silent for a few moments. So much was at stake at that moment that each one felt the trembling of the future within his hands. At last Judge Houston stepped forward and wrung Morgan's hand.

"You are right, Morgan," he said, with his eyes bent admiringly upon the young man. "You are a brave fellow." Then he turned to Natalia. "Everything outside is quiet. The danger has subsided and I think it is time we were going back home."

"Must I go?" Natalia started, and turned swiftly back to Morgan. "Had we not better stay longer? I don't want to leave you, Morgan."

Judge Houston went towards the door. Holding his watch in his hand, he looked at it intently for several minutes.

"It is after two o'clock." He finally turned to Natalia and drew her away with him. "It will be better for Morgan to rest, and you, too. We should only excite him by staying longer. Take my advice, Natalia."

"Yes, go," Morgan urged, smiling bravely as she drew back at the door and looked appealingly to him. "I am all right now. See how quiet I am! It was brave of you to come, Natalia. God bless you both!" he ended with a break in his voice.

"We shall come back in the morning," Judge Houston said, attempting a cheerful tone. "Try to get a little sleep, and don't think too much about it. Joel—you make him rest. Everything will come out all right in the end—take my word for it."

Natalia broke from his hold, and ran back to Morgan, clinging to him as if it were their last parting.

"I shall not sleep," she whispered, her head buried on his shoulder. "I shall be thinking of you all the time—thinking of you and praying for you. And early in the morning I am coming back."

A moment more and the iron door had been slammed and bolted between them.

Outside the night had grown cool. Gusts of wind blew through the trees, ominously; across the sky the clouds drifted in restless, ever-changing forms.

Natalia was silent as she went out to the carriage, raising her eyes only once

to glance furtively at the deserted street. Everything was strangely still now. No one was in sight, where a short while before was a murmuring throng.

The old man sitting beside her in the carriage could find no words to break the silence of the long drive home. Only by the affectionate pressure of his hand did Natalia know that his thoughts were continually of her.

A single light was burning in the hall when the carriage stopped before the house. The veranda and grove were deserted, the illuminations of the garden had been extinguished, and just beginning to show in the fitful light of the late moon were the ghostly blossoms of the magnolias.

Mrs. Houston and Millicent came to the door at the sound of the carriage, meeting them before they had entered the house.

"Is he safe?" Millicent cried.

"Yes, he is safe," Natalia answered, dully. Then turning to Mrs. Houston, she asked, "Where is she?"

The old lady looked towards the door.

"She is in there," nodding in the direction of the parlour. "She has not left his side since they placed him there. She would let no one stay with her."

Natalia hesitated, as she entered the hall, and stood irresolutely before the closed door.

"I must say something to her. It is only right. Yet—" she clasped her hands helplessly, searching the faces before her as if for some assistance. "Yet—*what* can I say?"

Standing there helplessly, she did not hear the parlour door open, nor see Mrs. Jervais motionlessly looking at her. Her face was not tear-stained. Only in her eyes did the others read a grief which had already crystallized into a brilliant hardness, emanating from her like the diamond cross that sparkled on her breast. She did not move from her position in the doorway, all the time gazing at Natalia with a concentrated expression that gathered intensity as she waited.

Suddenly Natalia turned and saw her. Holding out her arms impetuously she made a step towards her—then stopped. The other woman's face repelled her.

"What can I say—what can I tell you?" Natalia murmured. "You must know how I feel for you—how I suffer with you."

Mrs. Jervais' eyes seemed to be burning into the girl before her.

"Suffer! What do you know of that? Why should you suffer? You have not lost the one you love—yet." She stopped abruptly, lending a sharp accent to the last word.

Natalia drew back. The implied suggestion seemed to scream at her from the woman's blazing eyes.

"If it were not for you he would still be here." Mrs. Jervais made a step

nearer. "You asked me to come here and do this for you. I did, and what has it brought me—death! It is accursed—this place of your ancestors. So were they—*all* of them! When they lived here it brought them nothing but death. It drove your mother to madness. And now—" her voice in its calmness grew even more sinister, "it will bring its curse upon *you.* Do you think a *murderer* could bring you any happiness?"

Natalia shrank back from her, reaching out for the steadying hand of Judge Houston.

"Mrs. Jervais," he expostulated gently, "Natalia is suffering, too. You forget that in your own grief. Have you no kind words for her?"

"It is no time for kind words, Felix Houston. It is only bitterness and hatred that I have now! Why should I feel kindly towards a woman who has brought a man here that he might kill my husband? When she has lost as I have, then I shall be kind, perhaps! And it will not be long that she will wait! I shall not leave a stone unturned to punish with death the one who caused it."

She turned abruptly back into the room and closed the door. In the intense stillness of the house the key grated harshly in the lock, as she turned it. Without a word Mrs. Houston put her arm around Natalia and led her toward the stairs. When she stood on the steps Natalia turned and faced them.

"Don't any of you come with me," she said faintly. "I must be alone. No, Millicent, not to-night. I only want to be alone now." And turning from them, she walked slowly up the stairs, clinging to the rail to steady herself while the others stood silently watching her.

Opening the door, the flickering light of a candle burned far into its socket greeted her. At first she stopped in the centre of the room, her hands clasped vise-like, while the excitement and strain gradually dropped away from her, leaving only a wave of utter weariness. She sank into a chair near the massive, four-post bed, gazing listlessly at her wedding veil and bouquet of gardenias which lay carelessly upon the sheets where they had been thrown. Vaguely she felt their significance; in a way they represented her wedding day—the day that had dawned so brilliantly, and was now only a crumpled, withered memory.

A rasping pain shot through her, and leaning forward she pressed both hands to her temples. Was this the real side of life that had come to her at last? Was this what she had so yearned for—a grappling with things that counted? Ah, no, it could not be that, for this was only despair and horror. Suddenly she shivered violently with the thought that perhaps she was no better fitted to combat it than her mother had been.

A weird, ghostly light on her bride's veil drew her back once more to her surroundings. Looking up she saw the pale outline of the window against the dark room. With the realization that another day was dawning, there rushed

over her for the first time, in its full meaning, the horrifying thought that her lover had killed a man. Hitherto the excitement had kept her from any analysis of her own emotions—everything had been swept aside in the thought of Morgan. But now, facing her pitilessly, was the awful necessity of introspection, of seeing the situation from her viewpoint, of being honest with herself. *Would* it make any difference to her? A feeling of self-hate swept over her that she should consider herself in the least. Yet, fight against it as she would, the question insistently remained. But there would be time enough for all such thoughts after the trial. The trial! Mrs. Jervais' words rang in her ears again. She started at the thought. Would Morgan be cleared? Was there any doubt? The horror of her fancies choked her and she rose from her chair as if seeking something that moment, that would aid her.

As she turned towards the window, her eyes fell upon Dicey, sitting upright in a chair against the wall, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes staring straight into her own. The old slave had kept the vigil with her mistress.

Dicey rose and made towards her.

"Will yer go ter bed, now, honey?" Her voice was very low, caressing and gentle. "Hit'll soon be day and yer ought ter tak er lil res'."

"Rest! I can't, Mammy. I must do something to help him. He is to be tried for murder! He must be saved. Oh, Mammy," her voice broke with a sob. "What can I do?"

She went to the window and raised it, letting the chill breeze of the day-break blow upon her face and neck. All the world in its dreary greyness spoke to her only of despair and death. Finally she felt Dicey's arm about her, gently drawing her back from the window. The strange look of visions was alive in the old slave's eyes once more, more burning and intense than ever.

"Yer kin sabe him, honey-chile, easy 'nuff," she whispered. "All yer got ter do is ter sen' word to Marse Sargent ter cum an' 'fend him."

A weary smile flitted across Natalia's lips as she thought of the old woman's love for her master. Then her face grew serious again.

"I'll do *anything*, Mammy. But he is not here. Where can I find him?"

"Yer jes' write de letter an' I'll make Jonas—dat's his body-servant—fetch hit ter him. I knows whar his wharbouts is. I'se been er keepin' up wid him for fo' days. Yer writes de letter an' he'll git hit ter him."

Natalia stared at her a moment, then going quickly to her desk, pulled out her portfolio. When the paper was spread before her she paused, thoughtfully.

"How strange," she said half aloud. "I remember it so distinctly now. He told me if I ever needed him—" her lips curved into the smile of the little girl, and the tears fell fast upon the sheet of paper.

Before the address was dry, Dicey was flying with it towards the town.

CHAPTER IX
THE HONOURABLE SARGENT EVERETT

In a little village, far off in the eastern part of the State, a great crowd was assembling. The planters and their wives and children, every one from the adjoining counties, were going into the village that morning. Some rode horses; others mules; some were in crude wagons without springs; others in old coaches no longer fit for regular service; and many on foot—all of them followed by their favourite slaves. It was to be a great day in the lives of these simple country folk. Tidings had gone forth that the great lawyer was to speak to them that day, telling them all about their rights; explaining to them the mysteries of their great Constitution, and the importance of proper representation. Every man felt it his special duty to hear what was going to be said, and although this celebrated lawyer was not of their political beliefs, being a Whig while the county was Democratic, they were glad of the opportunity to hear a man speak, whose name was becoming a byword throughout the State. Though un-lettered, hard-fisted woodland patriots caring little for the outside world except in what would bring them absolute freedom, they were still keenly alive to the needs and laws that would open their great forests to the civilized world.

And while the sun rose higher and the brilliance of the June morning deepened, and the crowd grew larger and more impatient, the man who had caused all this interest sat in the cool shade of a veranda, looking steadily out before him through deeply brooding eyes.

It was a beautiful scene of wide, luxuriant cotton fields, stretching out before him. Nearby, a garden of luxuriant flowers, guarded by smoothly clipped box hedges, filled the air with a delicious fragrance.

Beside him on the veranda, comfortably lounging in a spacious rocking chair, sat his host, Colonel Pickram; a portly old gentleman, bluff and hearty, and red of face. Beyond, through the open window, came the laughter and gay chatter of the two daughters of the house, healthy, comely girls who moved about the room, giving directions for what was to be a sumptuous dinner.

Colonel Pickram gazed at his guest under questioning brows. The great lawyer was not to-day as he had known him before. The virility and life seemed

to have lessened in him since the last visit; he was no longer the sparkling conversationalist he had known before; the winning humour that had drawn every one to him was gone. As he sat there silent, his hands clasped en his knees, his eyes full of a sad expression of yearning, even the dull perception of the self-satisfied farmer was aware that he was not himself.

"Mr. Everett," Colonel Pickram broke the long silence, "you've been working too hard on the campaign. It's telling on you. I reckon you're mighty glad to-morrow's the last day."

Everett looked up abstractedly.

"Yes—I'm glad to-morrow sees the end of this trip—and yet," he drew himself together responsively, "it has been a wonderful experience. Whenever I get nearer to the people and begin to like them all the more after I know them, and find them liking me—I feel that I have accomplished so much more than merely winning their votes. That is what I love in this work—the winning of friends. And then, Colonel," he glanced almost affectionately at his surroundings, "being in a home like this always gives me such pleasant memories to carry away with me. Still, it makes me very homesick at times." His voice lowered again and the sadness crept back into his eyes. "It takes me back to my old home days. I'd give almost anything to be back there to-day. But this ambition!" He sighed, a half humourous, half sorrowful expression twisting his lips. "It is wonderful what it will make us give up."

The Colonel crossed one leg deliberately over the other, blowing a long line of smoke between them.

"Well, sir, I've often wondered if the game of politics was worth the candle. Here I am, with my two fine lassies, as good girls as you'll ever find in any country, and a plain home, but it's comfortable enough, and plenty of slaves and mules to make a crop and pay my bills. It's all I want and I'm right happy—just as contented as if I owned the world. But then—I'm old and you're young. I look back and you look forward. That's what makes the difference, I reckon."

"But you are right, Colonel, and I am wrong. All a fellow works for in this life is a happy home; and it seems I'm never going to have that—at least the kind I mean, the complete one. It gets further and further away as I get older. I used to say that when I was thirty I would have all those I loved about me. Look at me now!" He spread out his hands futilely. "I'm nearly thirty, living alone, a bachelor, and many times, for all my gay spirits and friends, terribly lonely."

"You ought to get married. Why don't you? There are plenty of nice girls everywhere."

Everett winced and turned abruptly away. When he spoke again his face was towards the cotton fields. "But they don't want a cripple for a husband," he answered the old man's remark. "They want a man of fine proportions, who will

do them credit when they are seen together. They want one who—" he narrowed his eyes a moment, and in them came the tenderness of bygone days, "—who will go to church with them, and send them beautiful nosegays and take them to dances." He ended, smiling upon the Colonel's surprised countenance. "I once heard a woman say, Colonel," he began again, more seriously, "that she chose her husband because he looked well in a ball-room. And I don't blame her—perfection and beauty are the greatest factors in our lives."

The old Colonel smiled over his pipe.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Everett, that you are a much better lawyer than a judge of the ladies. I have a higher opinion of them than you have. They are not half so silly as you paint them."

"You misunderstand me, Colonel," Everett answered hurriedly. "I revere them more than any man. But they love the beautiful in life, and they are beautiful themselves. My bitterness comes only from my inability to give them what they demand."

Colonel Pickram grunted sarcastically.

"You can give them a good deal, I think. I'd like to see the woman who wouldn't be satisfied to be a Congressman's wife and spend her winters in Washington. The trouble with you, Mr. Everett, and you'll pardon me for saying it, is that you've never been in love."

Sargent rose from his chair almost abruptly. Walking to the end of the veranda and back again, he faced Colonel Pickram, smiling down into the rough old fellow's face as if he were much his elder.

"Perhaps you are right, Colonel," he said, taking out his watch. "Time's up, however, so we had better drop dreaming and be on our way to grapple with politics."

Squaring his shoulders and throwing back his head, a gesture of his earlier days that clung to him still, Sargent threw off the melancholy of the past day, and became once more the man who charmed people by the thousands. Colonel Pickram noticed the quick change and pondered over it. "Big men were curious creatures," he reflected. "They could jump from one mood into another just as easily as a travelling magician he saw last week, could change a rabbit into a pocket handkerchief."

As they passed across the meadow, towards the village, the signal of their approach was given. The multitude left their lunches, and hurried towards the platform from which the speech was to be made.

Every one's neck was craned to catch the first glimpse of the two men as they approached. One they knew well, though in his linen waistcoat and Sunday stock—which had already wellnigh brought on an attack of apoplexy—Colonel Pickram did not look familiar. They noticed the slow and pompous dignity with

which he moved beside the stranger, and felt instinctively that he considered this the proudest day of his life. The man beside him walked with the aid of a cane and dragged one foot slightly after him. The crowd stared. Was it possible that this unobtrusive young man, in a black coat and chimney-pot hat, could be the one they had heard so much about? They looked at him curiously, drawn unconsciously by his kindly dark eyes, and the winning smile upon his handsome face. But he did not represent to them a political champion. Some mistake had been made. They were evidently the dupes of some jest that had been played upon them.

While they speculated over the matter, Colonel Pickram led the young man to a place before the platform where the crowd pressed closest. Here a few introductions were made, after which the word went over the gathering, that the small, limping man was really Sargent Everett.

As they waited, he climbed the steps of the platform and looked down into the crowd of faces. With the removal of his hat, his aspect changed suddenly. He looked taller, the high polished forehead lent a dignity and breadth to his whole physique. The enthusiasm and intellect that always glowed in his eyes when he faced an audience gave out sparks of magnetism that quieted the waiting throng into an inspiring audience.

During the ensuing moments of waiting it seemed to them that the warmth and friendliness of his glance was shed upon each one of them individually. When his lips parted and his opening words came forth—

"FELLOW CITIZENS! By the Father of Waters I have used this greeting; on the banks of the great Ohio I have spoken it; here I say it again, and many hundreds of miles east of us, west of us, north of us, I can still employ these words and thrill with the knowledge that before me are—'My fellow citizens.'"

—the crowd fell under the spell of the man's electrifying talent and listened with bated breath.

Seeing him then one would have said that he was the same as when he had made that wonderful speech that convicted the highwayman; the one who had led so forcibly in the Legislature when the State's new Constitution was formulated; who had thrilled many audiences in New Orleans; who had made his name sound far into the North when he had conducted a famous trial in Kentucky. And he had been the same, years making no change except to deepen and intensify his genius, until a few months before, when, almost indescribably, yet vividly discernible to his intimates, a difference had come. The world did not know; he

was still lighthearted and buoyant to it; but to those who loved him best when alone with him, there was a strange loss of youth in his countenance, an abstraction, almost a lessening of that spontaneous sympathy which was such a potent ingredient of his charm. But in his public life there was no difference. Standing before a crowd, and meeting its warm, inspiring glances, any thought of personal effort was lost. He became a wonderful machine which throbbed and pulsated with the dynamic force of a great mind.

So it was that day before the gathering in the little village. Though before his speech he had sunk deep into a valley of shadows and knew well it would be the same again when the excitement had died out, now that he was facing them, he was only aware of the powerful influence that always made him charm his audience.

He made only a few gestures as he spoke, and even then, the expression of his face and the movement of his hands were perfectly attuned to the subject. There was nothing theatrical; one saw and understood the general effect only. There was no time for any criticism or thought. The words came in a constant flowing sound and through them the magnetism of the man glowed, reaching each listener with an irresistible force that drew him with a surrendering of beliefs, of convictions, of desires, often even against his personal wish. His face, illumined by the inward fire of his imagination, grew steadily in beauty and nobility, until it became fascinating with the brilliance of the thoughts reflected through it. His well moulded features, showing clear-cut and perfect in the ivory whiteness which had recently come to them, drew even those who did not understand the wonderful flow of words; indeed, in all his speeches this look of idealism was ever uppermost—an expression which none of the portrait painters of his day were able to reproduce. When he realized that the attention of the audience was his, he paused. Then, with renewed energy, he plunged deeper into his subject, and was reaching the height to which his forensic talent swept him, when an incident on the outskirts of the crowd caught his attention. Some one had just ridden up on a horse and was trying to force his way through the crowd. Evidently there was resistance on the part of the listeners and voices were raised in protest against the newcomer's insistence. Then, several men pushed aside and made a path for the man, and Sargent saw a negro making his way slowly through the crowd towards him. As he drew nearer he recognized Jonas. Climbing up the ladder to the platform the negro did not hesitate one moment until he had thrust a letter into-Sargent's hand.

Sargent stopped in the midst of the speech and looked at Jonas, half frowning, half smiling at the negro's temerity in reaching him through the crowd.

"Marse Sargent, please sah, read dat lettah—right now, sah! Hit's a mattah ob life an' death, sah!"

Sargent turned back to his audience, smiling. "One moment, please," he said, laughing down into the sea of upturned expectant faces, "I think my opponents have put up some joke on me. I want to read it to you and then we can laugh over it together." Then he tore open the letter indifferently.

"Lawdy, I sho wuz glad ter heah yer voice, Marse Sargent. I'se been er gwine ober dis heah kentry fer three days er sarchin' fer yer. Ole Dicey tole me fer ter git out on de road an' fin' yer an' ter gib yer dis heah lettah. She done said hit wuz a mattah ob life an' death," Jonas ended panting, looking around on the crowd and grinning with the success of his quest.

Sargent did not hear his words. At the first glance at the handwriting he had started. While he read the crowd waited breathlessly. When he had finished he turned to Colonel Pickram, his face flushed deeply, his words coming with a rush.

"Colonel Pickram, I want your fastest horse. I must be in Natchez by Sunday."

"Of course you can have anything I've got. Has anything happened?"

"Yes—a great deal—for me."

Colonel Pickram noted the strangely flushed face and was more deeply puzzled than ever.

"You forget to-morrow at Canton. You are going to meet your opponent there. It is the deciding day. You can't afford to miss that! It's your big chance!"

Everett shook his head smiling. When he answered his eyes were full of the expression of a man who is drunk with joy.

"No," he said, "my chance lies in Natchez next week—the great chance of my life!"

Colonel Pickram looked at him amazed. Had the man lost his mind!

"But the people here! Your speech! They are waiting for you to finish it!"

Sargent had already picked up his hat and cane.

"Tell them I am ill—that I cannot go on. Tell them anything, Colonel, I don't care what. I can't say anything more. I haven't a moment to lose. Good-bye to all of you!"

CHAPTER X

THE LEAD OF HONOUR

On and on through the country Sargent urged his horse, followed closely by the faithful Jonas. They had stopped only for a change of horses and for food, taking no rest until at the end of the second day he realized that his wild impatience must be curbed or the end of the journey would find him exhausted.

But the night's rest had brought him no peace; the physical relaxation seemed to intensify the mental excitement. The few moments of sleep were but agitated lurid dreams. He would awaken from them startled, with cold sweat upon his face and hands and the two words ringing in his ears that had come to him with Natalia's letter—"My chance! My chance!"

Early the next morning he resumed the journey no calmer in the knowledge that before sunset he would reach his destination.

The forest rang with the two words all through the hot day; in the early morning the mists hovering over the cotton fields whispered them to him; the gallop of his horse beat then, into a rhythmic insistence. It was a throbbing, joyful sound, singing in his ears, glowing in his face, crystallizing in his eyes. It was the intervention of Fate, smiling upon him, and telling him that his opportunity had come at last; that it was the moment when the dreams and inspiration of his youth would become a reality. The last months of hopelessness, when he had felt that the loss of his ideal, the goal of all his plans, had slipped from him, were forgotten in the thrilling thought that all hope was not gone. One more chance was left; already he felt it to be the forerunner of happiness.

Always a man who lost himself in the grip of one idea, he could see nothing else but that Natalia was not yet married. The fact that the marriage was postponed because her lover, his old schoolmate, had killed Lemuel Jervais, was all a vague background to the other great certainty. The outcome did not intrude itself upon the theme that sounded so steadily in his ears. Nothing else counted until he could reach her side and pour out all the pent-up yearnings of the years and years that he had planned and builded and waited for her.

When Natalia had gone away a little girl, leaving behind her the fragrance of her charm, the lingering notes of her sweet dependence, Sargent had treasured her memory within his heart, keeping it alive and more vividly before him by its very secrecy. Only two knew that beneath the success of the young lawyer there was a strong, true hope that was leading him on towards a future his dreams made perfect. What difference did it make to him when her letters dwindled and finally ceased? That was only natural in a girl developing into womanhood. Of course she would forget for a while; that in itself would make the memories and devotions of her childhood all the stronger when she came back to them. When the letters to him had stopped coming and only occasionally Mrs. Houston had received one, it was always a great day to them. The old lady would send for Sargent, and reading aloud to him what Natalia had written, they would end

by planning for the wonderful time when she would be coming back to them. Then, at last had come the letter concerning her marriage. Mrs. Houston had not hesitated when she realized the duty that lay before her, but in the choosing of time and place, there was a subtle sympathy and gentleness that expressed her nature completely. She had driven to Sargent's home in the late afternoon and sending word for him to drive with her, had gradually broached the subject, ending by reading the letter. They had driven home in silence amid the gathering shadows, her hand on his, neither meeting the other's saddened eyes. Afterwards had come the work of the campaign, into which Sargent threw himself as never before, seeking vainly, through physical and mental fatigue, forgetfulness. Then, when his intelligence, his humour, and his bitter disappointment were struggling in a great fight to build up his life as it had been before, Natalia's message came to him. Beside her, he could tell her of what the years without her, yet so completely filled with her, had meant to him. She would listen, he kept repeating over and over to himself; he would make her listen, she would be powerless to combat his great love; it was of such force that obstacles would be swept before it as by a storm. In the delirious happiness of this obsession there was left no room for sane thoughts.

Towards evening he rode into the town. The church bells were ringing their call to the evening services, for it was Sunday. The air was filled with the last glow of liquid, golden sunlight; over all Nature was spread the luxurious, lazy warmth of summer.

Sargent did not spare his weary horse as he entered the town; even then his impatience seemed to become greater with his destination reached. Riding directly to Judge Houston's house, for he was not certain but that he might find her with them, he threw his reins to Jonas and dismounted. Walking toward the house, his habitual halting step grown more perceptible in his exhaustion, he suddenly realized the strain he had forced himself to undergo. Yet, in his face still glowed the beauty of his hope. Fatigue and utter weariness were powerless to affect its potency.

The servant told him that Judge Houston was just preparing to drive back to the country; that he had been in town all day. Sargent found him in the garden back of the house, his head bent forward in deep thought. With the quick straightening of his body and the bright light in his eyes when he looked up, Sargent knew that his coming had brought a great relief.

"I am glad they found you, Sargent," he exclaimed. "Natalia told me she had written you. We need you, boy—we need all the help we can get."

Sargent held the old man's hand while he searched his eyes.

"Where is she now?" he almost whispered.

"Natalia? At her home. Maria and I are staying out there with her."

Judge Houston drew his hand away slowly, his brows wrinkling into an expression of bewilderment as he noted more closely the flushed face before him. Suddenly he put out his hand and motioned Sargent to sit on the bench beside him. His voice trembled slightly when he spoke.

"Do you know what has happened?"

"Yes—she wrote me—and asked me to come and save Morgan!"

"Do you know what she meant?"

Sargent glanced up. The old man's hand was shaking as it rested on his shoulder, and in his eyes there had come quickly an expression of sharp pain.

"Do you know what she meant?" he repeated, almost harshly.

"Yes, of course—but why—"

Sargent's voice failed him. His old friend had read his hope and in his face now was speaking the suffering that he knew was coming. In the moment of silence Sargent faced the old man squarely.

"You mean—" he said, his voice cold and hard. Already his happiness of the past two days was stealing away from him.

"She loves Morgan Talbot with her whole intense nature. If he is not saved I fear almost anything. You know her mother's end? It is your chance, Sargent—"

"My chance!" Sargent stood up, repeating the words that had rung in his ears for so many hours, though now the accent spoke of dead hope. Still saying them over to himself as if seeking for some hidden meaning in the mere sound of the words, he left Judge Houston and walked to the far end of the garden.

The old gentleman followed him, finally standing beside him when he leaned on the fence.

After a long silence, his glance still riveted on the ground before him, Sargent spoke:

"Are you quite sure?" he murmured. "There might be some mistake—yet."

Judge Houston moved nearer him, his whole face showing his surprise. It was a phase of Sargent's character that he had not seen before.

"I was not certain until I carried her to the jail to see Morgan," he said slowly. "That night I knew he meant everything to her. It was a silly dream of ours ever to hope for anything else. As well as we knew her, we should have been sure of her love for the man she would marry. Why did you, of all of us, hope for any change?"

Sargent lifted his face with a quivering flash of anger.

"Why did I hope? Why did I think my chance had come?" he burst out with vehemence. "Are you so old that the meaning of love and all its joy have been forgotten? Do you think that because I have sunk all desires and cravings into my ambition, that covered up in my heart was no passion? I am only a human being—with all the pent-up yearnings for what I see others possessing. Why

should I not use my opportunity now that it has come to me? I will, Great God, I will! Don't stop me! I'm going to her to plead my cause, to lay my love before her. She will not refuse it—she *shall* not. There is a time in every man's life when he must forget everything but himself! I am going to do that now!"

Judge Houston did not interrupt him. When the wild flow of words had ceased he remained quietly beside Sargent, giving no sign that he had heard what was said.

"You think I am insane, I suppose," Sargent rushed on, even more intensely than before. "You think because I speak out the great desire of my heart—because at last the blood is boiling in my veins, making me like other people, like all the creatures God has made to claim their rights—you think because of all this," his voice broke shrilly, "that I am not the man you thought I was. Is it not so?" He turned and faced Judge Houston, grasping both his arms. "You are disappointed, distressed, terribly shaken in me—answer me? I want to hear you speak?"

The old gentleman's eyes beamed into Sargent's.

"My faith in you is shaken—not one jot!" His words came crisp and full of a deep significance. "I know you too well. I love you as I would have loved my son. My confidence in you is without limit. I know what you will do as surely as if I were going to do it myself!"

Their eyes burned into each other: then over them, enveloping them, came the silence of a miracle. Sargent's hands fell to his side. His body shook for a second like a man who was in the grip of a chill; then, as he gradually grew steady, a great calmness swept over him; his face grew white and set, and from his eyes shone out the look that the wise old man beside him knew would come—the expression of one who has been tempted, and is feeling at last the infinite glory of renunciation.

"How did you know?" Sargent asked at last with a broken sob.

The old gentleman shook his head sadly.

"The other side was not you, Sargent. It was a dream—a horrible dream."

Sargent put his hands to his forehead, pushing back his hair and showing the ivory whiteness of his brow. His face, illumined by the miraculous thought that had come in one minute, grew steadily in beauty until it became almost glorified in its brilliance.

In that instant the meaning of his whole life came to him. His early training, the teachings of his mother, and later his first great experience in his chosen profession, when it seemed that all sides were narrowing about him in his great failure and despair. In Phelps he realized the beacon light that started him towards the goal. It was through him that the conviction had come to him to make his life-work a defence of men who had taken the wrong road. Now, with a thrilling sense of seeing deep into the mystery of life, he realized that every little

detail had been a preparation for what was coming. Even his recent temptation was a strengthening of his forces. And from it all he lifted his head with the transcendence of the knowledge was to come the flowering of his life.

He stretched out both hands to Judge Houston.

"Thank God!" he murmured, "my dear, dear friend. It was left to you to stand by me and show me the way." He wrung the old gentleman's hands, then turned resolutely, with the upward lift of his head that was more eloquent than ever before. "Now let us go to Morgan. My work begins there first."

Judge Houston slipped his arm through Sargent's as they strolled back to the house.

"And afterwards—to Natalia. She needs you, too."

"No—not yet," Sargent answered, the glow of the great thought burning deeply in his eyes. "Later—when I have shown her what my love can do; then—perhaps—but not before!"

CHAPTER XI
A ROAD TO HAPPINESS

The Judge's surmise as to the verdict of the coroner's jury had proved to be true. It had seemed wise, therefore, to proceed quickly with the trial in order to avoid inflaming the already excited sentiment of Jervais' adherents. Now the first day of the trial was ending. Natalia stood on the veranda waiting for Judge Houston; he was to take her to see Morgan.

The approaching evening brought to her strange, restless thoughts; an overwhelming rush of emotions which had so filled her for the last four days. She felt, as she stood alone, with all the old, familiar surroundings about her, that she was being pushed relentlessly on towards a situation which, for some unknown reason, she dreaded. A change had come over her; already she felt the great influence of the tragedy upon her life. It had opened the more serious side of her nature, unchaining characteristics which had been felt only vaguely heretofore. The very depths of sympathy seemed to have stirred within her; a closer relationship to those about her made her realize that before she had viewed the world through the eyes of a happy egoism. Now she was an integral part of life, bearing her burden as the endless thousands had done before her. With this realization had come a feeling of strength, of capacity, of endurance; and a deter-

mination to make the ties which had bound her and Morgan more full of meaning and purpose.

Breaking through this comforting purpose came, at moments, a strange restlessness. It always forced itself upon her after her visits to Morgan. After the first night in the jail, she had gone to him every day, spending several hours in the little white-washed room where the iron bars across the window kept their surroundings palpably before them. She had hoped that after the first night of suffering and despondency Morgan would gradually drift back into the buoyancy which had seemed always such an integral part of his nature. She had expected that to help him towards a more hopeful outlook. But it was quite the other way. The weight of the crime had fallen with a crushing blow upon the man who had known nothing but a care-free life during his thirty years. The courage in his eyes had died out; there were deep circles beneath them; even his brilliant colouring had faded into a lifeless pallor. To one whose life had been so far removed from tragedy as Morgan's, the blow brought a lessening of all energies. The full realization that he had killed a man came to him with such a shock that he shrank from it like a child, cowed and irremediably injured.

Natalia had at first felt her whole being go out to him in sympathy and love; when she saw him each morning seeking her eyes so like some pitiful, wounded animal, she began to wonder if he could be the same man she had known before. Disappointment followed pity, and afterwards self-hate that she should have expected him to be unchanged by this experience. It was then that the full conception of the great moral outcome of the tragedy came to her. She knew in a moment of flashing intuition, that her happiness and Morgan's lay in her hands alone. All the courts of the world, with their justice and gifts of liberty, could not do for him what she must do. But could she do it? The question left her cold and trembling.

All during the week she had gone bravely through the ordeal that confronted her. Mrs. Jervais had left the morning after the day set for the wedding, having refused to see Natalia, and leaving behind her a request that they should not meet again. Then had come the greatest trial of all, when, looking out of the window, Natalia saw the funeral procession pass through the grove where still lingered some of the decorations for her wedding.

Always beside her, through these dismal days, Dicey stood; encouraging and comforting in her tenderness. Each evening the old slave would leave Natalia for a little while, going through the big gate and out to the highway, where she stood and watched for the long-expected messenger. When at last Jonas had ridden out to impart to her his successful mission, Dicey had spoken no word of approval, but turning swiftly, had rushed back to the house and into Natalia's room with wildly illumined face.

"He's cum, honey!" she cried. "He done cum at las'. Now hit's gwine be all right. Eberything's done been sabed."

And later that evening Judge Houston sent word to them that Sargent had come and that he would stay in town with him that night.

When Judge Houston came for her, Natalia took her place in the carriage beside him, her lips silent, her eyes seeking his for some outcome of the first day's trial. As they passed out of the gate into the deserted road, the old gentleman put his arm about her and drew her head down on his shoulder.

"We haven't long to wait now, little girl," he said, his words gaining a benignity in their tenderness. "Everything is going as we wish it now. Sargent is at the helm," he ended, his voice full of calm certainty.

"He came in answer to my letter?" Natalia murmured.

"Yes—he got it in the midst of one of his speeches."

"He left his campaign for me?"

The old gentleman nodded.

"For you—and for Morgan."

Natalia lifted her head, suddenly.

"Uncle Felix," she cried, "will it mean a loss to him? Did he let his chance go for—for us?"

"I hope it will not be that way." Judge Houston looked away from her questioning eyes. "There was only one more speech. It was the one in which he was to meet his opponent. But that was nothing to him, Natalia. If you knew him as I do, you would realize that nothing counts with him when a friend calls for help."

Natalia clasped her hands, helplessly. When she spoke again her lips were trembling.

"I know, Uncle Felix, I know that. But I have no right to call him back from his work. If this should cause him to lose his election to Congress, it would be upon my hands. I have no right to wreck people's lives as I am doing. Already Mrs. Jervais' words are sinking heavily upon me—I can't forget them. Uncle Felix, what does it mean? Why has all this come to me? Is my race accursed—as she said?" She shrank closer to him, her hands seeking his for comfort. "It seems to me that I pray every moment. My lips are moving always in supplication. And yet—" her expression changed to one of intense fear—"I wonder sometimes if I know what I am praying for."

He looked down at her, puzzled at this sudden shrinking, his eyes seeking hers in explanation.

"I know you don't understand," she began again, in answer to his look. "I am not myself. Perhaps it has been too much for me to stand. But I dread something, Uncle Felix, something that is coming. I don't seem to have the strength for the duty that lies before me. It is not so much the outcome of the trial," she continued,

calmer, "as what will come afterwards."

The old man pressed her hand sympathetically. "I know," he said thoughtfully. "That is a question that had to come to one of your nature. And the hardest part of it is that no one can help you; you must work it out alone. Only one thing can bring you back your happiness—Morgan and your love for him."

"You mean, Uncle Felix—"

"That your love for him will make you forget the deed."

She drew a long sigh, and clung closer to his side.

"It is not that," she answered slowly. "That has made no difference in my love for him. It will make a difference in our happiness, I know; but what I fear is the change in Morgan. There is something that he is keeping from me. I have seen it every day that I was with him. Do you know what it is, Uncle Felix?"

The old gentleman looked away, avoiding her question.

"Sargent went to him yesterday evening, as soon as he had come. I left them together," he resumed after a short silence.

"Did you see him afterwards—when he had left Morgan?"

"No. I only saw him at breakfast this morning. But he could talk of nothing but the details of the trial." Judge Houston was still looking away from her. "Perhaps," he said with a start, "Sargent will do for Morgan what no one else could do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when Morgan hears the speech for his defence, couched in legal terms and showing in a convincing way that he is not guilty of—of murder, it will bring to him a realization of his innocence. Sargent's speech is going to be wonderful." The old man's eyes deepened with the certainty of that knowledge. "I saw that yesterday when he came back, worn out and exhausted from the long journey. Do you know, Natalia," he looked at her searchingly, "I believe it would help you, too. Will you go?"

They rode along in silence, while Natalia's hand trembled in his clasp.

"When will it be?"

"I hope to-morrow. If all the evidence is heard by noon, the speeches will come in the afternoon."

"Do you think I could bear seeing Morgan in that room before a court of judges?" she murmured, asking the question more of herself than of him. "I am afraid, Uncle Felix. It would be indelibly stamped upon my memory."

"But you would be hearing him defended against an accusation that was unjust. You would see him in the light of justice and right. That would be the lasting thought. Take my advice, Natalia," he urged. "Perhaps your sensitiveness recoils from being seen there; but there are some situations in life in which we must forget our preferences for others."

"Your confidence helps me—but if the outcome should be otherwise?"

"It cannot be otherwise. If you knew Sargent as I do, you would know that there could be no doubt."

Natalia sank back against the cushions. Every argument that she had used lately seemed to lead directly to one answer—Sargent Everett. The confidence he inspired in every one seemed without limit; even Judge Houston, with an age and experience that were exceptional, was willing to trust everything to him, gaining from that trust a happy confidence where doubts were unknown. And deeper than this trust, was the love that she had seen with her own eyes. Mrs. Houston showed it in the brightness of her face when she discussed him, and Dicey seemed to be under a spell which not even her love for Natalia could affect. Natalia found herself wondering over Judge Houston's words when he had finished talking, and in her thoughts had suddenly flashed a pang of resentment that this man had grown deeper into the hearts of those she loved, than herself. She was passing his house as this thought came into her mind, and in the quiet dignity of the classic white columns against the red brick, the clean swept lawn and carefully clipped box, she imagined she saw a reflection of the man's purpose and strength.

Following the feeling of jealousy came the remembrance of what he was doing for her. He had given up his campaign, unfinished, to save her lover. And it was alone from the call for help that she had sent to him. Suddenly every word that she had heard about him since her return to the old home stood out distinctly, full of hidden meanings, full of evasions, that she had only guessed at and pushed out of her thoughts as unreasonable. Now she saw plainly. Every detail spoke a certainty. And she, stumbling blindly through it all, had at the end demanded a sacrifice that would ruin his career in the world.

They had reached the town and were passing along the streets at the hour when people were coming from their supper tables to sit on the lawns. Natalia loosened her veil and shrank further back into the carriage, shuddering from the looks of sympathy cast towards her. When they had reached the jail and gone up the walk together, she stopped a moment before the door and laid her hand on Judge Houston's arm.

"Why did Sargent Everett not come to me instead of to Morgan? It was I who sent for him." The overpowering discovery had pressed out all other thoughts at that moment.

"Because Morgan needed him," came the answer, the old man's face averted. "You did not."

Natalia withdrew her hand, a little bewildered. Perhaps, after all, her inflamed imagination had carried her beyond the truth!

They entered the gloomy corridor together, and as the door to Morgan's cell was unlocked, Judge Houston stepped back to let Natalia enter alone. Dur-

ing her former visits she had found Joel always beside Morgan, cheering him and talking about the trial in a lively manner that was a feeble attempt to dispel the gloom which had settled over him. This time Morgan was alone, standing at the window looking out at the gorgeous sunset. When he turned at her entrance, she started back when she had seen the expression of his face. The change was remarkable; instead of the mute suffering which she had seen in his eyes during the last few days, was now a semblance of his old self, the same brilliant expression and colouring, only deepened and strengthened by experience. And in his eyes, as they rested on her, she saw again the love which had hitherto been veiled in the unwonted expression of his despair.

As he came toward her, a flood of doubts swept over her and she put out her hands as if to ward off a blow.

"Something has happened, Morgan," she cried. "What is it?"

He gathered her hands into his strong clasp and led her to a chair, looking down at her all the time, like one who had not seen her for a long time. When she had sunk into the chair, still staring at him anxiously, he pulled a stool up beside her, and took hold of her hands again.

"It is nearly over, Natalia," he said with a happy ring in his voice. "They tell me to-morrow will bring the end of the trial. Will you ever forgive me, dear?"

"Forgive you! What?" she answered, still reading his face for some explanation.

"For almost ruining your happiness and mine. I had felt all along that your love for me would die after I had killed Jervais; that even if it were in self-defence, you would not be able to forget the crime. But it isn't true—you do not feel that way, do you?"

"Morgan—you have changed! Something has happened that I do not know about! What is it?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and searched his face. A rush of doubts was making her heart beat furiously.

"I am changed! I am an entirely different man," he answered, smiling into her anxious eyes. "How could a man who was as wretched as I, and who has suddenly been shown the way to happiness, be otherwise than changed! The world has become a different place to me, Natalia; and after the trial, when I am a free man and take up my life again, it will mean so much more to me than ever before. Perhaps I shall be a little older—but we aren't children any longer, either of us, and the serious side of life had to come some day. I think what made it so hard on me was that it came so suddenly." He stopped for a moment, pressing her hands tight, then holding them to his lips. "There has been a change in you, too, Natalia," he continued, his face glowing with the love he was expressing. "I saw it keenly that night you came to me here. At first I thought your love for me

was gone,—not that you were not kind and sympathetic and gentle—but in your eyes I fancied I saw more pity than love."

Morgan rose from his seat and stood before her, as if shaking off the remembrance of that hour. "It almost drove me mad that night when my imagination was let loose, and in its reflected images I saw a future in which you had forsaken me, and I was left to drift through life alone, without hope, with only the horror of a crime for companionship. It was always with me—that haunting fancy—until," his voice deepened vibrantly, "until I was shown my mistake."

"Until you were shown," Natalia repeated mechanically.

"Yes, until I was shown my happiness—by Sargent Everett."

She pressed her hand quickly to her heart. Its quick throbbing had frightened her. It was true now; she no longer felt any doubts. Her happiness and Morgan's were being builded upon the sacrifice of another. The exaltation of the thought swept through her with a great rush; a lightness, almost a dizziness, made her breath come quickly. She found herself trembling with vague, uncomprehending emotions. Then followed the quick reversal; and the throbbing life ebbed away, leaving her cold and numb.

"What did he tell you?" she heard herself asking.

Morgan looked down at her from the great height of his renewed self-confidence.

"He told me so much that I hardly know where to begin. In my utter despair, last night, when it seemed to me that I should prefer this trial to end in my death—I had reached that depth, Natalia—he came. It was the moment when I needed help most, and when I saw him standing there at the door, and looking for all the world as he used to when he would come into my room at college—I knew that he had come to help me. His whole aspect told me so, before he had said one word. It was a long time before he would let me tell him about this awful week, but when he did, it was wonderful to see how the friend disappeared in the lawyer. He asked me question after question, relentlessly, sharply, insistently, over and over again the same questions until I felt that he had forgotten what he was doing. Finally he stopped; it was after midnight. When he had risen to go, I asked him to stay longer so that I could tell him of the plan I had been formulating. I did not speak of it to you because I knew so well what your answer would be. I had decided to go away after the trial—for a year or more. I was not going to write to you nor ask you to write to me. I did not even want you to know where I was, so that when the year had passed, you would know if you still loved me—if this tragedy had made any difference in your love."

"You told him that?" she interrupted, wondering over the answer.

"Yes—just as I am telling you. He listened to me quietly,—strangely quiet, I thought—until I looked up and saw him gazing down upon that table as if he had

not heard a single word. It was a long time before he answered me, and when his eyes met mine again, they were full of weariness, almost pitifully weary. I believe the fellow is killing himself with work."

"What did he say?" Natalia's voice came low and halting.

"He said that if we should ever need each other, it would be now; that when I went away I must take you with me; that if you were not with me at such a time, our love would have lost its usefulness; that if it meant anything to us, it must shine brighter in our time of trouble."

Natalia rose from the chair and went to the window. Resting her hands against the bars, she peered out into the fast gathering dusk; her back towards Morgan, giving her a certain sense of privacy which she craved at that moment. As Morgan continued talking to her, she found herself watching with a strange intentness, the objects disappearing from her view as the night shadows crept nearer and nearer.

"I told him how I feared your love for me was gone," Morgan continued, his words rolling out with increasing enthusiasm. "Of how I felt my deed had made a great abyss between us. It was then that he said you were not a woman who would forsake the man she loved when he needed her most. He said it was the time in a woman's life when she became divine—when the woman was like you; pure and true and noble."

"Pure and true and noble." Again the great thought of immolation surged through Natalia. She gripped the bars before her, steadying herself with the little strength that seemed left her. Pure and true and noble! He had said that of her, he had thought that of her, and he had known her only years ago. And yet she was causing him to give up everything in his life, even his political career, to save her happiness!

The night was about her now. The square of window through which she peered became a black splotch in which her thoughts burst into tongues of far-reaching flames.

In the long silence she heard Morgan coming towards her. His arm slipped around her waist, and as his words came, she felt his hot breath against her cheek.

"He talked about you so beautifully, Natalia," he said, with a half-humourous note in his voice, "that one would have thought it was he who was in love with you instead of I. He said that I must fight for your love now, more than I ever had before; that I must make you forget everything that had happened, in the happiness I could bring you. And then—in a moment—it came to me—the mistake I had made. I had been looking for you to do everything; and I nothing for myself."

Suddenly a sob broke from her, and in that moment Morgan pressed her to him in a close embrace and covered her face with kisses. All the passion of the

man had been called into life by the sob. He knew now that she did love him. The tragedy and its days of misery were forgotten in the future that stretched before them, as brilliant and as beautiful as it had ever been.

Pure and true and noble! The words still rang in Natalia's consciousness, blotting out even the thought that her lover had regained his strength. With his arms about her, she still heard them; even with Morgan's lips pressed upon hers, she seemed to gain a wider perception of what had been done for her sake.

"My trial will end to-morrow, Sargent thinks," he went on, in a torrent of words, still holding her tight in his arms. "Afterwards—when I am free—for I shall be free, Natalia, I feel it can not be otherwise—we shall go away, you and I; a long way off, where there will be nothing to remind us of this awful week. We shall forget everything, even the old house that you used to love so. But you don't now, do you? Why, you are shivering, Natalia! Haven't you the confidence in my release that I have? But you have not heard Sargent yet. Wait until you hear him to-morrow, for you are going, aren't you? I want you to. There's an odd power about him; I noticed it to-day when he questioned the witnesses. He seems to get everything out of every one by his quiet, easy manner." He stopped a moment and went back to the table. "Natalia, after the trial, will you do something I wish very much? There is a boat Wednesday; if everything is settled to-morrow, are you willing to leave the next day? I somehow feel that we shall be happier the sooner all this is behind us."

Natalia's eyes were closed tight, her lips pressed close together, while she stood listening to Morgan's voice as if it came from a great distance. Through the happiness of his words, through the happiness they brought her, was blending a bitter suffering that kept back all response to his joy. The power of the greater thought still throbbed in her veins. Her own love and Morgan's had become a weak, puerile thing by comparison.

At last she forced herself into a calm self-possession and turned towards him.

"Of course I am going with you, Morgan," she said, laying her head on his shoulder and forcing a smile to her lips, "and the sooner we go, as you say, the happier we shall be."

The lantern on the gate post flashed into Natalia's face as they drove into the grounds; and as Judge Houston assisted her from the carriage, he extended his arm, for he had seen her pallor.

"You are very pale, Natalia," he said, bending over her. "Poor little girl, it has been a bad, bad time for you; but 'twill be all right soon. Let me carry you up-stairs."

"No, Uncle Felix," she put out her hand quickly. "You go in. I want to stay out here a few minutes. Tell Millicent that Morgan is happy again."

The old gentleman stooped and kissed her very gently and went into the house.

When she was alone, she walked along the stone slabs of the veranda to a place where the columns cast a deep shadow. Kneeling upon the cold stones, she lifted her clasped hands in prayer for the one who had saved her happiness through his own renunciation.

CHAPTER XII
THE MUSIC OF HIS VOICE

In the early morning Dicey went into Natalia's room, and noiselessly turning the slats in a shutter, crept toward the bed. She stood there irresolutely for a few moments; then went softly around to the other side of the bed where she could look into Natalia's face. She started back when she saw the wide-open, sleepless eyes gazing at her.

Laying her hand soothingly on Natalia's feverish brow, she gently smoothed back the long black hair.

"Honey-chile," she said, when the light began to stream through the shutters, "I jes' knows yer ain' slep' er wink an' heah hit's de day Marsa gwine speak. An' yer hain' tole yer ole Mammy whut fixins ter lay out fer yer. Which is dey, honey? Yer jes' tell Mammy an' she'll fix dem so's yer won' habe er speck ob worry 'bout dem."

Natalia looked at her yearningly.

"Dear old Mammy," she answered, "how you love me—how I love you."

"Sho I lubs yer, honey—bettah dan anybody else—eben bettah dan Marse Sargent. But yer mus' look killin' ter-day, honey-chile," said Dicey, returning to the subject of most importance in her eyes. "Whut furbelows mus' I put out?"

Natalia stirred restlessly, finally taking hold of Dicey's coarsened hand and holding it close to her face.

"Don't bother, Mammy—I am not going to hear him speak—I don't think I could bear it."

"Yer not gwine heah de Marser speak?" Dicey stared at her, her countenance eloquent of dismay. "Yer not gwine heah him!" she reiterated, her voice rising to

a higher pitch.

"No," Natalia answered, meeting the angry eyes sadly. "I can't do it, Mammy."

"An' he cum all dis way jes' fer yer, and dat de way yer gwine treat him! I calls hit er bu'nin' shame!"

The old slave's temper gained control of her, and in her impatience she frowned darkly upon Natalia.

"He will never know, Mammy." She questioned the words as she spoke them. "He would not see me if I were there."

"He'd see yer and he'd know ef yer wuzn' dar. Ef yer don' go, I'se gwine back ter him."

"You can't go back to him, Mammy. You belong to me, now."

"Cose I does, honey." Dicey's voice softened as her anger ebbed.

"But I wants yer ter go. He wants yer ter go, too, I know he does."

"Mammy," Natalia said, lying perfectly still, her eyes staring into Dicey's. "Do you know why he is doing all this for me?"

"Cose I does. Hit's 'cause he lubs yer."

"Yes, that's it, Mammy. But what have I done for him? What right have I to demand all this from him? What have I done to deserve it? What can I do now—"

She ended abruptly, turning away and burying her face in the pillows. It was then that Dicey sat down on the bed and leaned close to her, her eyes suddenly ablaze with a great hope.

"You'se gwine ter heah him, honey," she said, after a long pause, during which she viewed the situation in her mind, seeking through channels of thought to find the road that would lead towards the goal she had been planning. "You'se gwine ter heah him, 'cause ef you'se gwine way ter-morrow hit'll be de las' chance yer'll git ter heah him. Yer see, don' yer, dat yer bettah see him dis one las' time—dis one las' time."

Natalia moved suddenly and sat up; resting her hands for a moment on the side of the bed, as if still undecided, she finally put her feet to the floor and faced Dicey.

"I believe you are right, Mammy," she said thoughtfully. "It is the last time I shall ever hear him or see him. If I only had the courage—"

Downstairs she found Mrs. Houston standing in the midst of boxes and packing materials. Judge Houston had told her the night before of Morgan's desire to leave on the first boat. Seeing the wisdom in such a step he had advised his wife to go on with the preparations for departure as if everything were already

decided. So great was the confidence of this old couple in Sargent's ability, that they could conceive of no outcome of the trial other than they had planned.

When Natalia had gone out on the back veranda, she went directly up to the old lady and kissed her. There were no words either of them could find to say. Mrs. Houston went back to her work, wrapping each article with the precise care of a vain housewife.

"I am nearly through," she said at last. "Almost all of the wedding presents are packed—except the peacock." She attempted a smile, and failed sadly. "Of course you do not want to take him with you."

Natalia turned away quickly.

"I don't want to take any of them, Aunt Maria," she said, tears coming into her eyes. "I don't want to go away. It has all been terrible—these last days—but I still love this old place better than any in the world. But I must do it for Morgan's sake. He would be miserable here."

The old lady put down her package carefully, then went to Natalia and gathered her in her arms.

"You'll forget all about it after a while," she said gently. "And some day you both will be coming back here, happier than ever. Now tell me," wiping her eyes and returning to matters of the moment, "when will you be married—to-night or in the morning?"

"To-morrow morning," Natalia answered slowly.

Just then Dicey brought a tray on which a steaming cup of coffee and hot rolls were displayed temptingly.

"Now, you'se got ter drink hit, honey," she insisted, making a great fuss over placing it before Natalia. "'Cause we ain' gwine hab no dinnah, fer de Jedge done jes' send word fer us ter be in town fo' two o'clock."

The Court House yard was crowded. Along the fence and beneath the protection of the trees was the gathering of carriages and wagons which always told that something unusual was taking place within the old brick building.

When the carriage containing Natalia, Millicent and Mrs. Houston had stopped before the gate, Natalia looked silently at the building, feeling almost as if she were viewing it through the eyes of another person. That within it, her lover was being tried for his life, and defended by the man who had given up everything for her, seemed to enhance the feeling of aloofness and helplessness which had taken possession of her since the day before. She felt that she no longer lived in the same sphere with those about her; that she had reached a vague, uninhabited world where her surroundings were only dreams and weirdly haunting words and fiery tongues of conscience that moved in an endless circle

and crushed her with their fearful cries.

She had not heard the words addressed to her during the long drive; and it was only when Judge Houston came towards the carriage and spoke to them, that she awakened from the lethargy. Even then, as he told her that it was time to go into the court room, she seemed to be only half conscious of his words.

"Give me your hand, Natalia," the old gentleman said, standing beside the carriage. Mrs. Houston and Millicent were already on the sidewalk.

Natalia looked at him a moment, then glanced beyond to the building where people were banked in the windows. Within, she easily imagined the sea of faces.

"Uncle Felix," she cried, shrinking back, and covering her face with her hands. "I can't go. It would be fearful to see Morgan there, before that crowd. I could not bear it! Let me stay here and wait, but tell him I am here, near him!"

The old gentleman looked at the others, perplexed. Without a word, Mrs. Houston stepped back into the carriage and took her seat beside Natalia.

"I shall stay with her," she said.. "You all go in. We will be waiting for you over there—under that tree. Don't wait a minute to come to us, when you know," she added with a quick anxious look towards her husband.

Zebediah drove a few yards away from the gate, where a great spreading elm cast a protecting shade. They were closer to the building than before, and from where they sat they could easily see into the court room through a wide window. The sounds of the stirring crowd within came to them quite distinctly, particularly as the grounds about the building were deserted for the great interest within.

Mrs. Houston, alert and keen to see all that was taking place, sat bolt upright, one hand on Natalia's, the other moving with nervous jerks as she swayed a large palmetto fan. Natalia was in the same position as when she had shrunk back from Judge Houston—both hands covering her face while she huddled pitifully against the cushions.

A half hour passed, with the sound of monotonous voices floating out to them. The murmur of some one reading seemed endless. Then came a long pause. Mrs. Houston suddenly leaned forward and listened.

"Sargent is speaking—at last!" she whispered. "Listen! Listen!"

Natalia lowered her hands slowly from her face. At first she heard only a slight rippling of the leaves of the tree above her, then, on the stillness of the summer day, the sound of a voice drifted towards her—a voice she had heard years and years ago. Her hand tightened on Mrs. Houston's. Suddenly she stood up and stepped out of the carriage.

"Where are you going, Natalia?" Mrs. Houston cried after her.

Without answering she walked to the gate and went rapidly up the walk. Reaching the steps to the main door, she seemed to change her mind quickly and

went along the side of the building until she was just beneath an open window. Here she sank behind the protection of a shrub, and sat perfectly still.

The voice that had drawn her was very near now. She could hear the words distinctly; they came in a steady stream, mellow, soft, fluent.

At first she attempted to follow the words, vainly trying to force her thoughts into a comprehension of the reasoning employed. She soon found that useless; and with a long sigh in which a deep contentment enveloped her, she abandoned herself to the luxury of listening only to the music of the voice. It was sweet and clear like the ringing of silver bells in the early morning; it was deep and modulated and resounding, like the veiled diapason of a Cathedral organ; it was winning and gentle and fresh, bringing to her in some indefinable way, the faint fragrance of delicate flowers.

Suddenly the years dropped away. It was all a dream—her thinking she was really grown. She was sitting on the terrace under the big magnolia tree and the schoolmaster was reading to her. It was such a very sad story he was reading; she could hardly keep back the tears, for it was all about some poor lady who sewed all day on her dress and had to spend the night ripping it. She had cried, she remembered now; and when he had asked her why, she had been so ashamed and said it was because she hated her frock so—a red and purple poplin that had come all the way from Boston. And then they were sitting there again, one cold winter afternoon, and were watching the sun sink behind the black, frosty lowlands. She had asked him why the Indians had called it the Land of the Setting Sun, and he had told her wonderful stories of a race that had inhabited all this country and were forced, step by step, to go out into that distant wilderness where the sun set every night. Trifling incidents crowded one upon the other, accentuating the reality of the vision, until she suffered as keenly, throbbed with as great a joy, as she had in living those days.

A slight pause came.

Then the flowing words continued. But in that moment the dreams had vanished. She knew now what the voice meant. It was fighting for her lover's life, her happiness. Her whole future was dependent on its continuance, its force, its compelling magnetism. She felt it now in every fibre of her being. It filled her with an indefinable happiness. She understood so well what it meant; it was the full glory of his love. She was satisfied now that he had carried her to that dizzy height with him. She would never forget; it would be with her for ever. In that lay its transcendent beauty. Through its divinity it would become eternal.

Suddenly the music ceased. She looked up. Mrs. Houston was leaning over her and saying something. Finally she understood the words:

"His speech is over. Come back to the carriage with me."

She rose from the ground and walked unsteadily back to the carriage. In a

few minutes Judge Houston and Millicent had joined them.

"Would you prefer to wait at my house?" she heard him asking. "The speech for the prosecution will last about an hour, I suppose. After that we don't know how long the jury will take."

"Let us stay here," Natalia answered in a voice that did not seem her own. "I shall be nearer Morgan. It would be deserting him to go away."

"Very well, my dear. I shall come to you as soon as I know the verdict."

An hour more, with the sound of other voices. Endless arguments and set phrases and instructions to twelve men who had already reached a decision. Evening came on gradually, the trees grew dark and began their twilight whispers; negroes began to harness their horses to the wagons, coachmen straightened up and roused their teams; the air grew charged with expectancy. There was a deathly, waiting stillness. The case was before the jury. Natalia grasped Mr. Houston's hand.

"How much longer?" she asked. "How much longer, Aunt Maria?"

"The speeches are evidently finished, Natalia. We have not heard any voices for a good while."

"Then the end is nearly here?"

The old lady smiled, reassuringly.

"I believe we shall all be happy in a very few minutes."

Suddenly Millicent stood up in the carriage.

"Here comes Judge Houston!" she cried, her voice shaking a little. "Oh! he is smiling! I can see him from here. Look, Natalia! Don't you see? Morgan is free! There he is—coming to us now!"

CHAPTER XIII
THE GARDEN OF SHADOWS

They drove home in the fast-gathering dusk. The sun was gone, but through the breaks in the trees a gorgeous after-glow was illumining the skies. Mountains of clouds were piled up, bank upon bank, until the broad sweep of heavens was filled with pinnacles of deep rose, each vying with the other in more majestic composition.

When they had reached the house the colour had faded; the bright light from the windows streamed out across the doorway; the magnolia grove was

slumbering in the peaceful summer night.

Natalia stepped within the hall, where the candles were burning cheerily and the savoury odours of supper came from the dining room, and smiled wistfully upon them all.

"You go with them, Morgan," she said, a weary note in her voice as she stood with his arm about her. "All of you have a good time at supper—but let me go to my room. You will not mind, dear?" She looked up at him yearningly. "I believe I would be a little happier alone—for a while," she ended, turning away.

Judge Houston followed her to the steps, detaining her hand in his.

"Natalia," he said, in a lowered voice. "Everything is all right with you? You are happy again?"

She smiled into his eyes a little sadly.

"Yes, I am very happy, Uncle Felix. Only—it is so different a happiness from what I used to know. It seems a deeper, a more meaning thing than I have ever felt before. That is why I want to be alone. You understand, don't you?"

The old gentleman pressed her hand.

"Will you come down again?" he asked, after a moment's pause. "Sargent is coming out here to-night. I should like for him to see you."

Natalia's eyes deepened and she came closer to him.

"I am glad, so—so glad, he is coming," she said thoughtfully. "Yes—I shall come down again. Tell him I shall be waiting for him in the garden—the garden of shadows—he will know."

She went slowly up the steps to her room. It was empty; even Dicey had been attracted to the kitchen by reports of the wonderful supper that was being prepared.

She stood looking about her for a long time. It was to be her last night among the old surroundings she had loved so well. The old bed, with its huge posts and carvings of fruit and flowers, seemed to respond to her caressing glance; the marble mantel spoke to her of the many winter evenings spent before its hospitable face; the wall paper and the carpet, each repeating a design of baskets of roses, held stories of the long ago; everything was overflowing with what had gone before—holding their story of her mother's life, and now, her own.

She picked up a cashmere shawl she had found in an old cedar chest in the attic and pulled it across her shoulders. That, too, was of that elder day, and as she felt its folds about her, it seemed a link that brought her in even closer contact with the past.

After a little while she went down the stairs again, avoiding the door to the dining room, and slipping into the parlour unnoticed. Her mother's portrait gazed down upon her, calm and peaceful, in the candle light. Was it their last parting, she mused as she stood before it; would they never look into each other's

eyes again! She turned away with dimmed eyes, and went noiselessly out into the night.

It was an evening in which the vibrant sounds of Nature became only a distant throbbing, vague and indistinct. It was very still for moments, almost breathless save for the occasional breeze with its burden of rustling leaves.

Unconsciously Natalia went towards the bench under the magnolia, and sitting down, looked out across the wide, shimmering river, towards the far horizon. The minutes drifted along while the stars came out, and the evening deepened in beauty. The breezes slept now; all the world seemed to have sunk into a balmy somnolence.

As she sat there, lost to her surroundings yet vividly in sympathy with them, the sound of a cane tapping lightly on the ground, broke the silence. She lifted her head quickly, with the movement of one who is startled by a memory; then, rising quickly, she looked through the grove and saw some one coming towards her. The light was in her eyes so she could see only indistinctly the silhouette of a figure coming directly towards where she stood. Suddenly she smiled, made a quick step forward, then drew back again.

"The schoolmaster!" she whispered to herself, smiling over the familiar name. Then she called to him in a low voice with the words that brought rushing back the night she had waited for him by the kitchen fire. "It's you—you've come—I'm so—so glad!"

He was before her now, holding her hands in his and looking down into her face with the kind, sweet expression she had forgotten for so long a time.

"Natalia! Natalia!" he said as if a little dazed. "You have grown into a woman, haven't you?"

Quite suddenly she drew her hands away from him and sank on the bench, the tears streaming down her face.

"I am so, so glad you have come," she repeated between her sobs. "If you only knew how I have suffered these last few days. I can't help crying—forgive me. You seem to bring back the old, happy days to me so. I know you will think I'm quite the little girl still."

Sargent sat down beside her, drawing her hand through his arm, and holding it gently.

"They told me you were out here," he began, his voice trembling slightly, "and I asked them to let me find you. I thought I knew where you were. I did—you see."

Natalia did not attempt to answer him; drying her eyes with her free hand, she began to look at him intently.

"When I got your message," he continued in the low, modulated voice that rang in her ears searchingly, "I believe I expected to see you again just as you

had gone away. It brought back our days together, with such a rush; it made me realize that *you* had not forgotten, either. You see, Natalia, even in politics, everything is not entirely blotted out."

She drew her hand slowly away from him, clasping them both tight in her lap.

"And yet you threw away your chance, to come to me!"

"Don't you remember my promise to come to you? I said no matter where I was, I would come to you when you needed me. Do you think I should have deserved to win if I had done otherwise?"

"I had released you from that promise—by not keeping mine," she answered with unsteady voice.

"You were only a little girl then, Natalia—of course you did not know what you were promising. Besides, we were both children, and children forget quickly."

She looked at him, curiously. Could it be true that she was mistaken?

"*You* did not forget," she murmured.

"How could I forget what you had been to me! Those were long, long days to me, Natalia, and without you, I don't know how I should have gotten through them. You made them beautiful and happy for me, for in your confidence and dependence, I was brought out of my brooding upon those I had left behind me. You and Judge Houston were the only ones to whom I could tell my real yearnings, and even as a child, I felt you understood and sympathized. It was hard on me when you went away; only in endless work did I find any consolation. Ah, how I did work, Natalia! People say things come easy to me, but that is because when others begin to study a case my nights of ceaseless labour have been finished. But in the late afternoons, my thoughts always drifted back to you; and when this dear old place was closed, and your little brothers and their mother went away, I would come out here often and sit, right where you are now, and wonder where you were and if you would ever come back to me again."

Natalia leaned back on the bench with a gradual lessening of all forces. Sargent's influence, the calm tones of his voice, the old charm of his presence, crept over her with a quieting effect that left her wholly contented. She had no other wish now than to hear him talking to her.

"And yet," he said wistfully, "there is so little that I know of you during those years; there is so much for you to tell me."

"It seems nothing now," she answered, breaking the silence of a few moments. "I do not seem to have really lived until the last few days—the rest was only playing, and not worth recounting."

"Ah—but you are wrong. It is because it was your life that I want to hear it."

Natalia looked at him quickly and saw only his kind, glowing eyes bent on

her.

"And since I have suffered," she continued slowly, "it seems to me those years of my life taught me so little how to know life."

"They taught you to love," Sargent answered quietly. "Don't you count that as a great deal?"

"Yes,—but I—" she stopped abruptly. It was on her lips to say she had known that as a little girl, and in the knowledge that she could not say it to him, came to her the first feeling of restraint.

"That is all one need learn to be happy," he continued, as if unaware of the interruption. "It is the centre about which the world is circling—at least the part of the world that is worthiest. Tell me about yourself and Morgan, Natalia. Tell me as you used to, when we would sit out here after school hours, I forgetting that I was a teacher, and you, that you were a little girl. I wonder if you have forgotten the lines about 'books in brooks.'"

As if in reply she leaned a little forward and looked up before her into the starlit sky, quoting softly:

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

"Do you remember how you would explain to me over and over again, about sermons being in stones? And how you laughed when I asked Mammy if she understood. No, I don't believe I've forgotten anything," laughing lightly, as the restraint slipped from her and the old feeling of sympathy rushed back. "How your voice brings it all back to me! Have I been asleep and dreaming all these years and just awakened? I can shut my eyes and listen to you, and at once I am a little girl again. That is what I am going to do now. Talk to me, as you say I used to talk to you. Tell me of your great success."

Sargent gazed at her as she leaned back against the bench, one hand over her eyes to shut out all sense of reality. He could see the gentle rise and fall of her bosom beneath the thin frock; and the helpless, tired look of her hand as it lay in her lap, struck him with a peculiar tenderness. It made him forget for a moment. He leaned forward to kiss it, then drew back slowly.

"I used to tell you fairy tales then," he began at last. "You see—I can't now. You wouldn't believe them."

With her hand still before her eyes she answered him.

"Start at the time when I went away and tell me everything. I know it will sound like a fairy tale—your rise to the heights."

"My rise," he said, questioningly. "I believe it has come."

Natalia turned towards him, her face brilliant.

"Then you were elected—you go to Washington—Uncle Felix said the news would come to-night!"

Sargent turned away from the brilliance of her glance. It was almost too much for him to bear that she should have thought that was what he meant. Suddenly his lips tightened firmly. She should not know!

"You don't know what happiness it is to me to know it," Natalia continued, her face glowing with a new happiness. "I thought I had caused you to give up your election, to come to me. Now, it is all different. Everything with you is successful—absolutely everything you undertake."

Sargent winced at her words, thinking of a time, years gone by, when Judge Houston had told him that success seen by the world, and felt by the man, were widely separated. "Yes, even my old friend calls it that—and yet," he leaned forward, letting his face sink into his hands, "it is not what I want. I care not one jot for all the politics in the world. What I love best is the work here in a restricted field where I am so close to those I help. Can't you see it as I do, Natalia? I feel that every man whose life I save and start on a new course of living in which he realizes his sin, and through repentance gains the true light—can't you see that such work is greater than all the arguments of government, the discussions of tariff, the settling of bank questions, all the impersonal work that goes to make up the life of a public man?"

Natalia had turned towards him as he talked on, watching the glow of enthusiasm in his eyes, and gradually feeling the force of his magnetism sweep over her. Unconsciously her lips parted in her intentness, while she listened spellbound to the controlling influences of his life.

"You make me feel that religion and law are the same," she said, when he paused for a moment's rest.

"They *are* the same. All our laws have their foundation in the word of God. No law without that basis is worthy of consideration. My first case taught me that, when I convicted Jacob Phelps; and ever since, when I see a man condemned to death, I feel all the suffering I endured the day he was sent to jail. I always feel an irresistible desire to rise up and cry out to leave vengeance to God. And now," his voice deepened vibrantly, "when a man comes to me and asks me to defend him for some crime, I feel a wonderful inspiration all through the work. The greater the crime the greater seems my inspiration, for out of the depths of the deed, I see the man's awakening, his regeneration, his approach towards God for it is only through suffering that we attain the heights."

He stopped abruptly, carried further than he had realized, by his enthusiasm. When he turned to Natalia, he found her hand on his arm, her eyes glowing

into his.

"Do you believe that? Are you sure? It only came to me to-day, that we reached the heights through suffering." Her voice trembled as the words rushed forth. "I had always thought before that suffering ruined everything; that life should be made up entirely of joy and sunshine and happiness—that suffering would rob it of its beauty. But in my love," she ended sadly, "I had hoped to escape it. I had wanted that perfect—always."

"Perhaps this suffering has come to you, Natalia, to show you how deep your love for Morgan was—how much he meant to you. Perhaps it came to show you that—" Suddenly he stopped and turned away from her—changing his words with a violent shifting of thought. "Love is the only unselfish thing in the world," he continued, calm once more. "Everything else is but a gratification of self, some suffering undergone for an already estimated compensation. Even when we lead good lives, refrain from sinning, form for ourselves strict codes of honour—it is not because we wish to do all those things; it is the eternal benefit which we believe will be the outcome of such a course. The very motive of the world is selfishness, and that there should be in it such a wonderful thing as love, is incomprehensible; for in love the ego is lost; we feel only a desire to make the object of our love happy, to grant every wish, to anticipate every desire; and in the accomplishment of this, every part of selfishness is forgotten. We sink our being into that other one. It is the most beautiful thing God has given us, and it is the greatest sin of all; for in it we forget our duty to our Creator—we go directly against his great command."

Natalia searched his face as she listened. When he had stopped and turned towards her, his eyes bent upon her in the great love he had just spoken, the blood rushed to her face, mounting higher and higher, until it pounded in her temples. Still she could not turn from him. The love in his eyes held her painfully. Words rushed to her lips. She strove to hold them back. Why should she ask it of him? She knew now from his own lips. He had told her everything. Again the words cried out to her for utterance. Her will was as nothing, and she listened to her own voice when she finally spoke, as if it came from a great distance.

"That is what love means to you?"

He bowed his head silently.

"And you find in it a great happiness?"

Her question died unanswered on the quiet evening. Far down the sloping hill, on the glittering expanse of water, the vague form of a flat-boat drifted by, a single light gleaming at the bow. At last Natalia stirred. One hand was pressed against her bosom, as she stared straight out before her.

"You make me feel unworthy all the love that has been given me," she said. "It seems I have done nothing for any one—always nothing."

"Ah, but you have done a great deal, Natalia," Sargent answered quickly. "Think what you were to Morgan in his hour of adversity. He told me before the trial that without you his life would be wrecked. He says you are the only reason for taking up his life again. Is that not a great deal? And then," his voice lowered and grew very gentle, "you have brought a great happiness into my life. Without the memories of our happy days together, it would have been a very desolate old world to me. I always knew you would not forget me entirely; a guiding star, no matter how high it soars, never forgets its follower. If every man could have a memory, as I have had, to guide him through the pitfalls and temptations of his youth, when he is struggling on to the heights where character is formed, this would be a far better world. My greatest efforts could never be enough to show what I mean—Natalia."

He waited for her to speak, but no words came. She sat looking out into the night, as if his voice had been unheard. Her shawl had fallen to the ground and lay at her feet. Sargent stooped and, picking it up, held it to his lips a moment.

"Our lives seem to have grown very far apart," he began once more, attempting no longer to keep the caressing notes from showing, "but I want you to remember that I shall never forget you. You believe that, don't you? There is only one thing I am going to ask of you." He paused and brushed his hand across his eyes. "When you and Morgan go back home—when you go back to Boston to live, will you go some day to see my mother? I should love for her to see you once. She knows all about you. I hardly believe that you would have to tell her your name."

Suddenly, from a distance, the sound of music floated to them. Sargent lifted his head and listened; then stood up. "They are coming for me," he said, a great weariness creeping into his voice. "I must go back to the town and make my speech of thanks."

Natalia's hand touched his arm.

"Don't go—yet," she murmured. "I have something to tell you."

Sargent sat down beside her, her hand still resting on his arm. In the dim light he could see her tears:

"I don't know how to tell you—you sent me Mammy Dicey—I can't thank you—now you have saved Morgan—"

The music was coming nearer. The sound of drums and fife throbbed loudly in the quiet night. Suddenly the flare of lights shot through the grove. The torchlight procession had reached the gate, and now many voices were calling loudly for their new representative.

Natalia stopped in the midst of her words. A streak of light from one of the torches fell full upon Sargent's face, in which she saw with pitiless detail the signs of his great renunciation. In the knowledge her heart grew cold and

still. She moved nearer him, and held out both her hands. For a little while they stood thus, each meeting the other's glance steadily. "When you were a little girl, Natalia," Sargent said tentatively, his words a whisper, "I always kissed you when I went away."

She leaned toward him, and in her uplifted face he read her answer. Putting his hands gently on he hair and pressing back the heavy coils, he kissed her on the brow.

Another loud cry from the impatient crowd, and the gates were thrown open and the grounds brilliantly illuminated by the torches.

Natalia stood where he had left her, watching him walk towards the crowd, his head held high, his figure outlined against the flaring torches. For a few moments she stood motionless, then going swiftly through the garden to the back veranda, she went up-stairs without meeting any one.

When she had reached the upper hall, the hurrahs and loud cheering of the crowd floated up to her through the open windows. Hesitating a moment, she finally went to the door leading on the balcony, and stood looking down upon the gathering.

Directly in front of the house the crowd was forming into a line. The band was already at the gate, closely following came the torch bearers, and last of all a carriage. She leaned forward, shading her eyes from the flickering illumination. He was in the carriage now, on the back seat, and beside him sat an old, grizzled-haired man, whose weather-beaten, joyful countenance beamed upon Sargent in his hour of triumph.

As she watched them the signal was given, the drums beat a resounding tattoo, the fife took up the melody, and the parade began to move. Through the gate they went and out into the road, where the sounds gradually grew muffled and the flaring torches, gleaming through the trees, became faint as fireflies. At last the drum sounded in a faint echo; then the night grew once more dark and still.

A hand grasped Natalia's. Starting, she turned and found Morgan's arm about her.

"We have been searching for you everywhere, dearest," he said, looking down into her face, his smile suddenly fading when he saw the tears in her eyes. "Sargent told me he had seen you."

In the silence that was deepening about them, Morgan gazed intently at Natalia. Once he brushed his hands before his eyes as if clearing away a mist; then his arms tightened about Natalia as she lowered her head on his shoulder.

"I am beginning to understand, Natalia," he said, his voice breaking with emotion. "It was all for *your* sake—for *your* happiness—what he has done!"

"For *our* happiness, Morgan," Natalia answered, the tears streaming down

her face. "He has brought you back to me—he has saved our love."

For a while they stood thus, looking out into the quiet night, her head upon his shoulder, his arm about her. "And, oh, Morgan," Natalia finally spoke, her eyes deepening with the glow of an inward light, "I can hear it still—the music of his voice," her words sank to a whisper, "it seems to me it will always be ringing in my ears—always—always."

THE END.

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