THE MAIN CHANCE

A THOROLY WESTERN STORY OF REAL PEOPLE

BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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CHAPTER XXV.

The Key to a Dilemma.

EVELYN had telephoned to Mrs. Whipple of her father's illness in terms which allayed alarm; but when the afternoon paper referred to it ominously, the good woman set out thru the first snowstorm of the season for the Porter house, carrying her campaign outfit, as the general called it, in a suit case. Mrs. Whipple's hopeful equanimity was very welcome to Evelyn, who suffered as women do when denied the privilege of ministering to their sick, and forced to see their natural office usurped by others. Mrs. Whipple brought a breath of May into the atmosphere of the house. She found ways of dulling the edge of Evelyn's anxiety and idleness; she even found things for Evelyn to do, and busied herself disposing of inquiries at the door and telephone to save Evelyn the trouble. In Evelyn's sitting-room Mrs. Whipple talked of clothes and made it seem a great favor for the girl to drag out several new gowns for inspection,—a kind of first view, she called it; and she sighed over them and said they were more perfect than perfect lyrics and would appeal to a larger audience.

She chose one of the lyrics of black chiffon and lace, with a high collar and half sleeves and forced Evelyn to put it on; and when they sat down to dinner together she planned a portrait of Evelyn in the same gown, which Chase or Sargent must paint. She managed the talk tactfully, without committing the error of trying to ignore the sick man upstairs. She made his illness seem incidental merely, and with a bright side, in that it gave her a chance to spend a few days at the Hill. Then she went on:

"Warry and Mr. Saxton were at the house last night. It's delightful to see men so devoted to each other as they are; and it's great fun to hear them banter each other. I didn't know that Mr. Saxton could be funny, but in his quiet way he says the drollest things!"

"I thought he was very serious," said Evelyn. "I rarely see him, but when I do, he flatters me by talking about books. He thinks I'm literary!"

"I can't imagine it."

Evelyn laughed.

"Oh, thanks! I'm making progress!"

"It's funny," Mrs. Whipple continued, "the way he takes care of Warry. The general says Mr. Saxton is a Newfoundland and Warry a fox terrier. Warry's at work again, and I suppose we have Mr. Saxton's influence to thank."

"A man like that could do a great deal for Warry," said Evelyn. "If Warry doesn't settle down pretty soon he'll lose his chance." Then, her father coming into her thoughts, she added irrelevantly: "Mr. Thompson will probably come home. Mr. Wheaton telephoned that the directors had wired him."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Whipple, looking at the girl quickly—"so much responsibility—I suppose it would be hardly fair to Mr. Wheaton—"

"I suppose not," said Evelyn.

"It's just the same in business as it is in the army," continued Mrs. Whipple, the military establishment. "The people who referred everything back to bugle's got to blow every morning whether the colonel's sick or not. I suppose the bank keeps open just the same. When a thing's once well started it has a way of running on, whether anybody attends to it or not."

"But you couldn't get father to believe that," said Evelyn, smiling in recollection of her father's life-long refutation of this philosophy.

"No indeed," assented Mrs. Whipple. "But in the army there is a good deal to make a man humble. If he gets transferred from one end of the land to another, somebody else does the work he has been doing, and usually you wouldn't know the difference. The individual is really extinguished; they all sign their reports in exactly the same place, and one signature is just as good at Washington as another." This was a favorite line of discourse with Mrs. Whipple; she had reduced her army experience to philosophy, which she was fond of presenting on any occasion.

The maid brought Evelyn a card before they had finished coffee.

"It's Mr. Wheaton," she explained; "I asked him to come. Father was greatly troubled about some matter which he said must not be neglected. He wanted me to give the key of his box to Mr. Wheaton—there are some papers which it is very necessary for Mr. Fenton to have. It's something I hadn't heard of before, but it must be important. He's been flighty this afternoon and has tried to talk about it."

Evelyn had risen and stood by the table with a troubled look on her face, as if expecting counsel; but she was thinking of the sick man upstairs and not of his business affairs.

"Yes; don't wait for me," said the older woman, as tho it were merely a question of the girl's excusing herself. When Evelyn had gone, Mrs. Whipple plied her spoon in her cup long after the single lump of sugar was dissolved. Mrs. Whipple had a way of disliking people thoroly when they did not please her, and she did not like James Wheaton. She was wondering why, as she sat alone at the table and played with the spoon.

The maid who admitted Wheaton had let him elect between the drawing room and the library, and he chose the latter instinctively, as less formal and more appropriate for an interview based on his dual social and business relations with the Porters. His slim figure appeared to advantage in evening clothes; he was no longer afraid of rooms that were handsome and spacious like this. There was nowadays no more correctly groomed man in Clarkson than he, tho Warry Raridan had remarked to Wheaton at the Bachelors' that his ties were composed a trifle too neatly; a tie to be properly done should, Raridan held, leave something to the imagination. Wheaton heard the swish of Evelyn's skirts in the hall with a quickening heartbeat. Her black gown intensified her fairness; he had never seen her in black before, and it gave a new accent to her beauty as she came toward him.

"It was a great shock to us down town to hear of your father's illness. He seemed as well as usual yesterday."

"Did you think so? I thought he looked worn when he came home last evening. He has been working very hard lately."

Wheaton had never seen her so grave. He was sincerely sorry for her trouble, and he tried to say so. There was something appealing in her unusual calm; the low tones of her voice were not wasted on him.

"Father asked me to send for you this morning, but he had grown so ill in a few hours that I took the responsibility of not doing it. The doctor said emphatically that he must not see people. But something in particular was on his mind, some papers that Mr. Fenton should have. They are in his box at the bank, and I was to give you the key to it. It is something about the Traction company; no doubt you know of it?"

"Yes," Wheaton assented. It was not necessary for him to say that Mr. Porter had told him nothing about it.

"You can attend to this easily?"

"Yes, certainly. Mr. Fenton spoke to me about the matter this afternoon. It is very important and he wished me to report to him as soon as I found the papers. No doubt they are in your father's box," he said. "He is always very methodical." He smiled at her reassuringly and rose. She did not ask him to stay longer, but went to fetch the key.

It was a small, thin bit of steel. Wheaton turned it over in his hand.

"I'll return the key to-morrow, after I've found the papers Mr. Fenton wants."

"Very well. I hope you will have no difficulty."

He still held the key in his fingers, not knowing whether this was his dismissal or not.

"There is one thing more, Mr. Wheaton. Father seemed very much troubled about this Traction matter—"

"Very unnecessarily, I'm sure," said Wheaton, soothingly.

"He evidently wished all the papers he has concerning the company to be given to Mr. Fenton. Now, this probably is of no importance whatever, but several years ago father gave me some stock in the street railway company. It came about thru a little fun-making between us. We were talking of railway passes—you know he never accepts any"—Wheaton blinked—"and I told him I'd like to have a pass on something, even if it was only a street car line."

She was smiling in her eagerness that he should understand perfectly.

"And he said he guessed he could fix that by giving me some stock in the company. I remember that he made light of it when I thanked him, and said it wasn't so important as it looked. He probably forgot it long ago. I had forgotten it myself—I never got the pass, either! but I brought the stock down, thinking that Mr. Fenton might have use for it." She went over to the mantel and picked up a paper, while he watched her; and when she put it into his hand he turned it over. It was a certificate for one hundred shares, issued in due form to Evelyn Porter, but was not assigned.

"It may be important," said Wheaton, regarding the paper thoughtfully. "Mr. Fenton will know. It couldn't be used without your name on the back," he said, indicating the place on the certificate.

"Oh, should I sign it?" she asked, in the curious fluttering way in which many women approach the minor details of business. Wheaton hesitated; he did not imagine that this block of stock could be of importance, and yet the tentative business association with Miss Porter was so pleasant that he yielded to a temptation to prolong it.

"Yes, you might sign it," he said.

Evelyn went to her father's table and wrote her name as Wheaton indicated.

"A witness is required and I will supply that." And Wheaton sat down at the table and signed his name beside hers, while she stood opposite him, the tips of her fingers resting on the table.

"Evelyn Porter" and "James Wheaton." He blotted the names with Porter's blotter, Evelyn still standing by him, slightly mystified as women often are by the fact that their signatures have a value. He felt that there was something intimate in the fact of their signing themselves together there. He was thrilled by her beauty. The black lace falling from her elbows made a filmy tracery upon her white arms. Her head was bent toward him, the shaded lamp cast a glow upon her face and throat, and her slim, white hands rested on the table so near that he could have touched them. She bent her gaze upon him gravely; she, too, felt that his relations with her father made a tie between them; he was older than the other men who came to see her; she yielded him a respect for his well-won success. A vague sense of what her father liked in him crept into her mind in the moment that she stood looking down on him; he was quiet, deft and sure—qualities which his smoothly combed black hair and immaculate linen seemed to emphasize. She gave, in her ignorance of business, an exaggerated importance to the trifling transaction which he had now concluded. He smiled up at her as he put down the pen.

"It isn't as serious as it looks," he said, rising.

"It must be very interesting when you understand it," she answered.

"I'm sorry—so very sorry for your trouble. I hope—if I can serve you in any way you will not hesitate—"

"You are very kind," she said. Neither moved. They regarded each other across the table with a serious fixed gaze; the sweet girlish spirit in her was held by some curious fascinating power in him. He bent toward her, his hand lightly clenched on the edge of the table.

"I hope there may never be a time when you will not feel free to command me—in any way." He spoke slowly; his words seemed to bind a chain about her and she could not move or answer. With a sudden gesture he put out his hand; it almost touched hers, and she did not shrink away.

"Good evening, Mr. Wheaton!" Mrs. Whipple, handsome and smiling, sent her greeting from the threshold, and swept into the room; and when she took his hand she held it for a moment, as an elderly woman may, while she chid him for his remissness in never coming to call on her.

On his way down the slope to the car, Wheaton felt in his pocket several times to be sure of the key. There was something the least bit uncanny in his possession of it. Yesterday, as he knew well enough, William Porter would no more have intrusted the key of his private box to him or to any one else than he would have burned down his house. He read into his errand a trust on Porter's part that included Porter's daughter, too; but he got little satisfaction from this. He was only the most convenient messenger available. His spirits rose and fell as he debated.

The down-town streets were very quiet when he reached the business district. He went to the side door of the bank and knocked for the watchman to admit him. He took off his overcoat and hat and laid them down carefully on his own desk.

"Going to work to-night, Mr. Wheaton?" asked the watchman.

Wheaton felt that he owed it to the watchman to explain, and he said:

"There are some papers in Mr. Porter's box that I must give to Mr. Fenton to-night. They are in the old vault." This vault was often opened at night by the bookkeepers and there was no reason why the cashier should not enter it when he pleased. The watchman turned up the lights so that Wheaton could manipulate the combination, and then swung open the door. Wheaton thanked him and went in. Two keys were necessary to mon to all and was kept by the bank, mo nto all and was kept by the bank. Wheaton easily found it, and then he took from his pocket Porter's key which supplemented the other. His pulses beat fast as he felt the lock yield to the thin strip of steel, and in a moment the box lay before his eyes. He had flashed on the electric light bulb in the vault and recognized instantly Porter's inscription' "Traction," on a brown bundle. He then opened his own box and took out his Traction certificate and carried it with Porter's packet into the director's room.

He sat playing with the package, which was sealed in green wax with the plain oval insignium of the bank. The packet was larger than he expected it to be; he had no idea of the amount of stock it contained; and he knew nothing of the bonds. He felt tempted to open it; but clearly that was not within his instructions. He must deliver it intact to Fenton, and he would do it instantly. He hesitated, tho, and drew out the certificate which Evelyn had given him and turned the crisp paper over in his hand. Each of them owned 100 shares of Traction stock; he was not thinking of this, but of Evelyn, whose signature held his eye. It was an angular hand, and she ran her two names together with a long sweep of the pen.

His thoughts were given a new direction by the noise of a colloquy between the watchman and some one at the door. He heard his own name mentioned, and thrusting the certificates into his pocket, he went out to learn what was the matter.

"Mr. Wheaton," called the watchman, who held the door partly closed on some one," Mr. Margrave wishes to see you."

As Wheaton walked toward the watchman, Margrave strode in heavily on the tile floor of the bank.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Meeting Between Gentlemen.

"Hello, Wheaton," said Margrave, cheerfully. "I've had the devil's own time finding you."

He advanced upon Wheaton and shook him warmly by the hand. Then, this having been for the benefit of the watchman, he said, in a low tone:

"Let's go into the directors' room, Jim, I want to see you."

The main bank room was only dimly lighted, but a cluster of electric lights burned brilliantly above the directors' mahogany table, around which were chairs of the Bank of England pattern.

"Have a seat,' Mr. Margrave," said Wheaton, formally. He had left the door open, but Margrave closed it carefully. Porter's bundle of papers, in its manila wrapper, lay on the table, and Wheaton sat down close to it.

"What you got there, greenbacks?" asked Margrave. "If you were just leaving for Canada, don't miss the train on my account."

"That isn't funny," said Wheaton, severely.

"Oh, I wouldn't be so damned sensitive," said Margrave, throwing open his overcoat and placing his hat on the table in front of him. "I guess you ain't any better than some of the rest of 'em."

"I suppose you didn't come to say that," said Wheaton. He ran his fingers over the wax seal on the packet. He wished that it were back in Porter's box.

"We were having a little talk this afternoon, Pim," began Margrave in a friendly and familiar tone, "about Traction matters. As I remember it, in our last talk, it was understood that if I needed your little bunch of Traction shares you'd let me have 'em when the time came. Now our friend Porter's sick," continued Margrave, watching Wheaton sharply with his small, keen eyes.

"Yes; he's sick," repeated Wheaton.

"He's pretty damn sick."

"I suppose you mean he is very sick; I don't know that it's so serious. I was at the house this evening."

"Comforting the daughter, no doubt," wtih a sneer. "Now, Jim, I'm going to say something to you and I don't want you to give back any prayer-meeting talk. The chances are that Porter's going to die." He waited a moment to let the remark sink into Wheaton's consciousness, and then he went on: "I guess he won't be able to vote his stock to-morrow. I suppose you've got it or know where it is." He eyed the bundle on which Wheaton's hand at that moment rested nervously, and Wheaton sat back in his chair and thrust his hand into his trousers' pockets, looking unconcernedly at Margrave.

"I want that stock, Jim," said the railroader, quietly, "and I want you to give it to me to-night."

"Margrave," said Wheaton, and it was the first time he had so addressed him, "you must be crazy, or a fool."

"Things are going pretty well with you, Jim," Margrave continued, as if in friendly canvass of Wheaton's future. "You have a good position here; when the old man's out of the way, you can marry the girl and be president of the bank. It's dead easy for a smart fellow like you. It would be too bad for you to spoil such prospects right now, when the game is all in your own hands, by failing to help a friend in trouble." Wheaton said nothing and Margarve resumed:

"You're trying to catch on to this damned society business here, and I want you to do it. I haven't got any objections to your sailing as high as you can. I know all about you. I gave you your first job when you came here—"

"I appreciate al that, Mr. Margrave," Wheaton broke in. "You said the word that got me into the Clarkson National, and I have never forgotten it."

"Well, I don't want you to forget it. But see here; as long as I recommended you and stood by you when you were a ratty little train butcher, and without knowing anything about you except that you were always on hand and kept your mouth shut, I think you owe something to me." He bent forward in his chair, which creaked under him as he shifted his bulk. "One night last fall, just before the Knights of Midas show, a drunken scamp came into my yard and made a nasty row. I was about to turn him over to the police when he began whimpering and said he knew you. He wasn't doing any particular harm and I gave him a quarter and told him to get out; but he wanted to talk. He said—" Margrave dropped his voice and fastened his eyes on Wheaton—"he was a long lost brother of yours. He was pretty drunk, but he seemed clear on your family history, Jim. He said he'd done time once, back in Illinois, and got you out of a scrape. He told me his name was William Wheaton, but that he had lost it in the shuffle somewhere and was known as Snyder. I gave him a quarter and started him toward Porter's, where I knew you were doing the society act. I heard afterward that he found you."

Margrave creaked back in his chair and chuckled.

"He was an infernal liar," said Wheaton, hotly. "And so you sent that scamp over there to make a row. I didn't think you would play me a trick like that." He was betrayed out of his usual calm control and his mouth twitched.

"Now, Jim," Margrave continued magnanimously, "I don't care a damn about your family connections. You are all right. You're good enough for me, you understand, and you're good enough for the Porters. My father was a butcher and I began life sweeping out the shop, and I gues everybody knows it; and if they don't like it, they know what they can do."

Wheaton's hand rested again on the packet before him; he had flushed to the temples, but the color slowly died out of his face. It was very still in the room, and the watchman could be heard walking acros sthe tiled lobby outside. A patrol wagon rattled in the street with a great clang of its gong. Wheaton had moved the brown parcel a little nearer to the edge of the table; Margrave noticed this and for the first time took a serious interest in the packet. He was not built for quick evolutions, but he made what was, for a man of his bulk, a sudden movement around the table toward Wheaton, who was between him and the door.

"What you got in that paper, Jim?" he asked, puffing from his exertion.

Still Wheaton did not speak, but he picked up the parcel and took a step toward the door, Margrave advancing upon him.

Wheaton reached the door, holding the package under his arm.

"Don't touch me; don't touch me," he said, hoarsely. Margrave still came toward him. Wheaton's unengaged hand went nervously to his throat, and he fumbled at his tie. The sweat came out on his forehead. It was a curious scene, the tall, dark man in his evening clothes, pitiful in his agitation, with his back against the door, hugging the bundle under one arm; and Margrave, in his rough business suit, walking slowly toward Wheaton, who retreated before him.

"I want that package, Jim!"

"Go away! go away!" The sweat shone on Wheaton's forehead in great drops. "I can't, I can't—you know I can't!"

"You damned coward!" said Margrave, laughing suddenly. "I want that bundle." He made a gesture and Wheaton dodged and shrank away. Margrave laughed again; a malicious mirth possessed him. But he grew suddenly fierce and his fat fingers closed about Wheaton's neck. Wheaton huddled against the door, holding the brown packet with both hands.

"Drop it! Drop it!" blurted Margrave. He was breathing hard.

A sharp knock at the door against which they struggled caused Margrave to spring away. He walked down the room several paces with an assumption of carelessness, and Wheaton, with the bundle still under his arm, turned the knob of the door.

"Hello, Wheaton!" called Fenton, blinking in the glare of the lights.

"Good evening," said Wheaton.

"How're you, Fenton," said Margrave, carelessly, but mopping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Here are your papers," said Wheaton, almost thrusting his parcel into the lawyer's hands.

"All right," said Fenton, looking curiously from one to the other. And then he glanced at the package, as if absent-mindedly, and saw that the seal was unbroken.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said. "Sorry to have disturbed you."

"Hope you're not going to work to-night," said Margrave, solicitously.

"Oh, not very long," said the lawyer.

"Hard on honest men when lawyers work at night," continued Margrave, as the lawyer walked across the lobby.

"Yes, you railroad people can say that," Fenton flung back at him.

"How much Traction was in that package?" asked Margrave, closing the door.

"I don't know," said Wheaton, smoothing his tie. The watchman could be heard closing the outside door on Fenton.

"No, I don't think you do," returned Margrave. "You'd fixed it pretty well with Fenton. If he'd only been a minute later I'd have got that bundle. I didn't realize at first what you had there, Jim, until you kept fingering it so desperately."

"Now," he said aimably, as if the real business of the evening had just been reached, "there are those shares you own, Jim. I hope we won't be interrupted while you're getting them for me."

Wheaton hesitated.

"You get them for me," said Margrave with a change of manner, "quick!"

Wheaton still hesitated.

Margrave picked up his hat.

"I'm going from here to the Gazette office. You know, they do what I tell 'em over there. They'd like a little story about the aristocratic Wheaton family of Ohio. Porter's girl would like that for breakfast, to-morrow morning."

Wheaton hung between two inclinations, one to make terms with Margrave and assure his friendship at any hazard, the other to break with him, let the consequences be what they might. It is one of the impressive facts of human destiny that the frail barks among us are those which are sent into the least-known seas. Great mariners have made charts and set warning lights, but the hidden reefs change hourly, and the great chartographer, Experience, cannot keep pace with them.

"Hurry up," said Margrave impatiently; "this is my busy night and I can't wait on you. Dig it up."

Wheaton's hand went slowly to his pocket. As he drew out his own certificate with nervous fingers, the certificate which Evelyn Porter had given him an hour before fell upon the table.

"That's the right color," said Margrave, snatching the paper as Wheaton sprang forward to regain it.

"Not that! not that! That isn't mine!"

Margrave stepped back and swept the face of the certificate with his eyes.

"Well, this does beat hell! I knew you stood next, Jim," he said insolently, "but I didn't know that you were on such confidential terms as all this. And you witnessed the signature. Gosh! How sweet and pretty it all is!" The paper exhaled the faint odor of sachet, and Margrave lifted it to his nostrils with a mockery of delight.

"I must have that, Margrave. I will do anything, but I must have that—You wouldn't—"

Margrave watched him maliciously, thoroly enjoying his terror.

"How do you know I wouldn't? Give me the other one, Jim."

Still Wheaton held his own certificate; he believed for a moment that he could trade the one for the other.

"I'm not going to fool with you much longer, Jim; you either give me that certificate or I go to the Gazette office as straight as I can walk. Just sign it in blank, the way the other one is. I'll witness it all right."

Wheaton wrote while Margrave stood over him, holding ready a blotter which he applied to Wheaton's signature with unnecessary care.

(To be continued Monday.)

It is reported that there has been a deficiency of 78,000,000 gallons of illuminating oil in the production of the last nine months. The output of the Standard Oil company fell from 817,000,000 gallons in 1901 to 766,000,000 gallons in 1902.

ACCORDIN' TO SOLOMON

By MARY M. MEARS.

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HOLD still, Teddie! How d'y' s'pose I can dress you when you wriggle so?" The old woman knelt before the child, one chubby ankle in hand. She was buttoning his shoe. Above her bent gray head his face showed as fresh as a rose, and his hair was carefully curled. He reached over and dabbled his hand in a basin of water.

"Is I doin' on a boat, drandma?"

She did not answer at once, and when she did it was a tense voice.

"No, you're goin' on th' cars with your father and your—your new mother," she added bravely.

"On d' steam cars?" he interrupted, bobbing up and down.

"Yes; and grandma wants you to remember what she's told you. You will be a good boy, won't you—and you won't forget grandpa and grandma?" The face bent above the shoe worked convulsively. He leaned down and tried to see if she was crying. "Drandma," he lisped, "Teddie 'on't go 'way."

She flung arms about him. "No, no, he must go with papa." She rose stiffly and tied on his hat. Then she led him out of the bedroom, and, releasing his hand, gave him a little push.

"He don't look as nice as I would like to have him, but his other white dress is torn. I packed it, tho."

John Wood turned. He was standing beside the center table pretending to look at some photographs. His wife, a handsome young woman, was poised on the edge of a chair. "He's all right," he muttered, and extending his hand to the child. He did not look at Mrs. Hopkins. "Come here, Teddie."

But the boy caught at his grandmother's skirts. "I do' 'ant to go," he half sobbed. Mrs. Wood adjusted her bonnet strings.

"Come, you haven't seen papa in a long time," repeated John, but the child slipped back of his protector, wrapping her dress around him.

"No! No!" he screamed.

The new wife pulled out her watch. "You'd better pick him right up, John," she suggested. The old woman cast a glance at her; then she stooped as well as she could and unfastened the little clinging fingers. "Didn't he tell grandma he'd be a good boy and don't he want to ride on the steam cars?" she cooed.

Reluctantly he allowed her to lead him to the door, when his father would have lifted him. "Ain't you goin' to let him say good-by to his grandpa?" she cried. "You and her go 'long to the carriage, and I'll bring him."

And John Wood followed his wife, a flush on his face. The very pebbles in the path brought back memories of other lighter steps, wandering beside his, and when he reached the gate he could not look at the leaning posts. Shadowed by the decaying cap of one, two names were written—his and another's. He wondered if the rains had washed away the traces of those paired names.

"Drand-ma! Drand-ma!" The heart-broken wail sounded above the roll of wheels.

The old woman did not glance at her husband, but went heavily into the house. Theodore Hopkins sat on the porch. He was partially paralyzed and his face showed pale above his black clothes.

In the kitchen she sat down and gazed straight ahead of her. Presently the restraint she had placed upon herself gave way. "It's jest her!" she exclaimed. "John would have left him here if she hadn't been so jealous. Pretended 'bout the work bein' too hard f' me. I'm sure I ain't complained. Wa'n't Jennie my daughter, and ain't it likely I'd be willin' to do for her child? And now they've took him away." She put her head down on the table and stretched her arms toward her grandson's half emptied bowl of bread and milk. "He won't be here to-night to go in his little bed, and he won't be here to-morrow mornin'. I can't wash and dress him no more, nor comb his curls—nor nothin'. Oh, me!"

Supper that night was eaten silently. The boy's high chair stood against the wall, and they both avoided glancing toward it. At last the old man broke out: "I could hear him when they reached the corner. He was callin' you, over and over."

"I guess she won't take much comfort travelin' with him," was the grim response.

Nevertheless, when the dishes were put away and her husband had opened out his newspaper, she could only sit hopeless, thinking of the impotent grief of a little child. Presently he glanced at her. It was his delight to roll out the words sonorously. "You ain't payin' attention," he cried, sharply, "and you always said it was because of Teddie's wantin' suth'n, and now you ain't got any excuse." She really had a better one, for she was listening to her grandson's crying over a space of many miles, and her lonely arms were aching to reach him; but she bore the rebuke patiently, tho the next day she retaliated by putting all the evidences of the child out of sight with a relentless hand until the rooms were barren as if they had never been littered with spools and clothespins, and the numerous unbeautiful articles so precious to a baby.

"Chicago's a big place, and he'll have more chance livin' there," volunteered the grandfather.

"I guess most any town's big enough for a baby," returned his wife; then added, in what she tried to make a hopeful tone, "but he's dreadful fond of lookin' into store winders, and there's considerable many more shops there than there is here."

Mrs. Hopkins had never been to Chicago. Her husband, however, had purchased goods there. Now he broke into a cracking laugh. "Stores! Well, I guess there are a few more than there are in Sheldon. I tell you the boy's eyes'll stick out when he sees them winders, and the horse cars, an' omnibuses, an' people hurryin' thru the streets an' never seemin' to git anywhere, and peddlers and hand organ men. I tell you, the little feller'll like it."

"Yes, he'll like that part," agreed his wife. "But she won't let him take any comfort lookin'," she concluded drearily; "she'll drag him right along."

"Well, she won't try to more'n once," put in the old man. "Remember that day when he came nigh pullin' over that Indian cigar sign?" He laughed again, but his wife sat very still. A red spot grew on either soft, withered cheek.

"Do you know what she'll do to him if he acts like that?" she demanded. "She'll spank him."

They continued to look at each other. Then Mr. Hopkins got up and took a few halting paces. "Oh, I guess she won't," he said.

"Yes, she will. She ain't one to have patience with him. And, oh, I can't stand it, no way. Jennie's baby!" Suddenly Mrs. Hopkins covered her face. Since the announcement of her son-in-law's marriage, a keener realization of her daughter's death had come to her than on the day of the funeral. Her husband eyed her with consternation.

"Why, don't, mother! I guess she won't do anything to Teddie but what's for his good." His words recalled her.

"Spankin' him won't do any good. I ought to 've told her."

"Yes; you ought to 've." He let himself down into his chair.

"I suppose I could write to her," she suggested, "and I guess I will. I'll tell her that he won't be drove, that he's used to havin' sugar in his bread and milk, what stories will put him to sleep best, and—some other things."

For a time they awaited an answer, but as the weeks passed they gave up expecting one. Their longing for the boy increased. One afternoon, when he had been gone two months, Mrs. Hopkins started to make some calls, but she returned within half an hour. Her face had a strange look. She untied her bonnet fiercely and cast it from her little gray head, then began pulling off her gloves.

"Why, ain't you had a pleasant time?" her husband demanded. "Seein' folks I thought would be good f' you." Then he fairly jumped.

"Theodore Hopkins, air ye a fool? 'Tain't folks I want to see—it's jest Teddie." She extended her little knotty hands. "And I'd rather be drudgin' f' him than mincin' 'round this way, like an old—ape. When that little Ray boy climbed into my lap, it all come over me. I tell you, I can't stand it no longer, nor I ain't a-goin' to. And I'm goin' down to Chicago and tell John so, and he's got to let me bring Teddie back."

"I don't see what excuse you'll offer."

"Excuse enough. I'll tell him how lonesome it is after we've had the baby ever since he was born, and I'll tell him how pindlin' you be."

"I dunno as it's that."

"Yes, it is that, too. Fact is, it's killin' us both. I'll get 'em to let me bring Teddie back, if it ain't no more'n for a visit. There's no use waitin'. I'll get the oldest Smith girl to come and look after you, and I'll start right off."

Mr. Hopkins was almost as excited as his wife, but he still objected. "You don't know anything about Chicago. You can't go there alone."

"I'd like to know why not. I'll write to my niece, Minerva Taylor, and she'll have her husband meet me; then the next day I'll get directed over to John's. I guess I've got sense enough to turn the right corners and read the figgers over the doors."

"'Tain't as simple as all that, you'd find. It's confusin'. If it wa'nt for my foot—I dun know but I could——"

His wife interrupted him. "Now, you jes' stop. I guess Teddie'll be as much as I can look after comin' back, without havin' you on my hands."

And three days later she went. She was 70 years old, and she had never been thirty miles from her own town; but if the magnitude of her undertaking grew upon her as the time of departure approached, she betrayed nothing of the feeling to her husband.

Hiram Taylor met her at the depot. The confusion, the noise, the smoke, the brilliant lines of light winking out of the darkness were to her as the distorted visions in a dream. But when they left the car her fright subsided, and by the time she met her niece she was quite herself. The ceaseless beat of traffic kept her awake until near morning; nevertheless she rose at the usual time. "I want to make an early start for my son-in-law's," she exclaimed.

"Why, you ain't goin' over there to-day, are you, Aunt 'Mandy? Hi's got tickets for the museum, and is goin' to git off this afternoon. You wait until to-morrow, and I'll go with you. I can't this morning; the plumber's coming."

But the other shook her head. "Thank you, 'Nerva, but I guess I won't wait. I'll git back to go to the museum, tho," she added, conciliatingly, "f' I never see one."

Her self-reliant manner deceived the younger woman, and after breakfast she accompanied her to the corner. "Gracious knows, I'm scared to have you go this way," she declared, "tho you don't have to transfer or anything."

And the trip was, indeed, a very simple one. She had no difficulty in finding the house. She toiled up the stone steps, quivering with excitement and triumph.

"There, I told father I'd git here all right. My, won't Teddie be glad to see me!"

John himself opened the door. "Why, mother!" he exclaimed. She was so associated to his mind with a certain village home, he would as soon have thought of one of the shrubs in its dooryard pulling up root and coming to the city as her. "How do you do?" he said. "Well! Did you come alone?"

"Yes; father was awful worried to have me, but I come, and I—want to see Teddie, John." Her voice trembled into a sob.

He gave her a quick look. "Why, of course."

He came back in a moment followed by his wife. The old woman rose and looked past them eagerly. "I'm so sorry; he goes to kindergarten, and Rose has just packed him off; but he'll be home at noon," he added, pitying her disappointment. "Where's your baggage?"

Continued on Seventh Page.

"BUT IT WAS ONLY TEDDIE, SLEEPY AND WINSOME, WHO ENTERED."