At The Ranch on the Divide.

The ranch was not large, not particularly noticeable, as ranches go, but its situation was splendid. The road from the valley of the Platte to that of La Fontaine Qui Bouille crosses the Divide, or ridge; and, just over it and sheltered by it from the northern winds, were the ranch-house, sheds and corrals. At the west, one saw the foot hills, and glimpses of the great peaks behind them; and, not far from the house opened a canon between whose steep and verdure-clad walls ran a clear and rapid stream, chafing in its restricted channel, and seeming impatient to bestow the largest of its beneficent and priceless waters upon the arid plains stretching far to the eastward. Looking to the south, again, one saw the rolling country, rising at intervals into mesas and dotted with scanty groves of trees.

The sun had just passed beyond the range, above which rose a wealth of clouds of airy texture and gorgeous colors; and the edge of the shadow in which the ranch lay could be seen creeping steadily over the buffalo grass toward the eastern horizon. Converging towards the house came parties from the four points of the compass; and, awaiting them, and standing on the door-step, looking first in one direction and then in another, was a quaint and curious youthful specimen of that alien race which has had so sorrow a reception on our shores, the Chinese.

His sharp, almond-shaped eyes caught a glimpse of the great flock of sheep the moment they surmounted the slight elevation over which he had often seen the sun rise; and, with the two watchful Mexican herders behind them, they came straight toward the water troughs. These same eyes saw Uncle Jim Boyle, as he tramped slowly and deliberately down the sloping side of the nearest mesa at the south, and even caught the smoke of his pipe rising in the clear air. Ah Fong knew that Uncle Jim had promised to sleep at the ranch while its master was absent, and having a profound respect for the strength and prowess of this redoubtable frontiersman, he thought the arrangement excellent. Then they saw the pretty bit of color which Fanny Carroll's dress made against the dark back ground of the canon wall, as she climbed over the rock at its mouth; and the tassels of silver thread on the cord around the crown of young Sam Ruxton's sombrero as he assiduously helped her holding her little hands perhaps somewhat longer than was necessary. This made something as near a smile show itself on Ah Fong's face as was ever seen on those emotionless features.

When, however, the Chinese boy again walked to the rear of the house and chanced to look to the northward, he stopped and gazed intently at two men who were coming over the ridge. He stood perfectly still for some time and then, making his way quietly toward a rude out-building, concealed himself therein.

Farther and farther crept the line of shadow to the eastward; nearer and nearer the ranch came the different parties. At last the herders shut the bars of the corral behind the last of the bleating sheep, and, unslinging their canteens, began pumping water for their charges. Uncle Jim Boyle mounted the steps of the rude piazza with firm and heavy tread, and the two young people—she swinging her large straw hat by its ribbons and he walking decorously at her side—came round the corner of the shed.

Everybody on the Divide took an interest in Fanny Carroll. When her father, old Tom Carroll, up at Georgetown, made his great strike, and sold out to the eager "tender-feet," there was a general sentiment of satisfaction; for Tom had worked faithfully, and had plenty of hard luck and was a good fellow through it all. When, too, he came into possession of a solid bank account, he behaved particularly well; declined to be "interviewed," bought no diamond pins, extended liberal help to some old "pards" whose luck had deserted them, and, as the boys expressed it, "wan't stuck up and didn't go back on 'em."

Miss Fanny was sent to an eastern seminary, whence she had returned as accomplished and pretty, and refined and well-dressed as heart could desire. When she came down to the Divide to make a visit at the ranch, it was unanimously decided by the population of that region that she "just everlastingly laid over" anything from the U. P. down to New Mexico. She was indeed a charming girl by any standard, and, with her chestnut-brown hair and mahogany-colored eyes, and lithe, slender figure, would have attracted attention anywhere. Small wonder, then, that this gracious young creature soon reigned an uncrowned queen over many loyal and devoted subjects. Now, as she came near to him, old Uncle Jim's face relaxed, and his eyes took on a tender expression.

"Bless her heart," said he to himself, 'she's the pootiest creetur I've seen in many a long year. The young feller's mashed pooty bad on her. Waal, I've been young myself an' I know how it is. I kind o' think she kin do jest anyththing she likes with him. I don't believe thar's a man livin' in thet could say no to her, let alone do her harm." He doffed his hat, and, with a curious timidity, took her little hand, proffered as she greeted him, in the firm grasp of his own large and rough one. Then her aunt, whose guest she was, came out upon the piazza and invited Sam Ruxon to sup and spend the night at the ranch, instead of taking the long ride to his own quarters.

Meantime, the two men who had been approaching from the north, had stopped and held a consultation close to the out-building in which Ah Fong was concealed. Their appearance was sadly against them. One was a tall, thin fellow, with a sullen countenance and shaggy black hair; the other a smaller man with a freckled face and red whiskers, looking for all the world like a ferret. A precious pair of ruffians, Ah Fong thought them, as he strained his ears to catch the dialogue, interlarded with profanity, which lasted for five minutes, and until having apparently made up their mind what to do, they started in a direction which took them round the corner of the ranch-house and toward the party on the piazza.

The Chinese boy, when they had passed his place of concealment, emerged, ran round the house in the opposite direction and approached Uncle Jim before the latter saw the pair.

"Master," whispered he, "hab got two piecee man come. Wantchee stop this side to-night. More better you talkee he can no stop. Mi can secure he b'long lalle-loon man (I can prove that they are ladrones or robbers)."

"Waal, now," said Uncle Jim, "I didn't never hev no use for a cuss that wears a pig-tail and eats rats. 'The Chinese must go,' says I. Clear out now and go washee-washee, or whatever you call it."

As Ah Fong well knew, Uncle Jim's bark was much worse than his bite, nor was there any fear that he would disregard a warning. The Chinese boy drew back just as the two rough fellows came in sight. They approached the piazza and one could see the look of repulsion come on Uncle Jim's expressive face as his experienced eye took in the details of their obnoxious appearance. The smaller fellow advanced as spokesman.

"I allow yer disremember me, Mr. Boyle," said he, in a voice which he tried in vain to modulate, and which contrasted curiously with his unctuous manner, "I knowed yer when yer was a sinkin' a shaft up to Central, and I was pro-pectin'. My name is Martin, William Martin; but the boys all call me Beaver Dam Bill. This yere's my pard, Mr. Moses Smith; him they call Mustang Mose. Say, Uncle Jim, we allowed ye'd give us a shake-down fur the night, fur we've tramped nigh on thirty miles to-day and we're jest everlastin'ly played out."

Uncle Jim's keen eyes were fixed on the unwholesome pair; evidently, while he did not recognize them, some vague and fleeting memory was suggested by their appearance, and he was trying to fix it clearly in his mind. The larger of the two shifted his weight from one foot to the other as he glanced away to the east-ward, and the spokesman found himself unable to look the old frontiersman fairly in the face. Indeed, his uneasiness was increasing each moment under the scrutiny to which he was subjected.

At last Uncle Jim spoke, in slow tones, and with marked deliberation. "This yere house ain's mine," said he, "and the owner he's down to Pueblo. Ef ye keep on the trail thar to the left of the mesa and nigh on three mile, ye'll strike Dutch Pete's ranch, an' he's all fixed to take folks in and give 'em a squar meal an' a shake-down. It's right over them trees yonder, whar ye see—" here he was interrupted.

Fanny Carroll, who had been inside the house, suddenly came out and stood on the piazza.

"Oh, Mr. Boyle," she cried, "do not let any one be turned away from these doors. These poor men are weary and footsore. They must not be compelled to go farther. Let us give them shelter, and supper and a good night's rest."

She made a beautiful picture as she stood there, in a graceful attitude; with heightened color, eyes sparkling, rosy lips slightly apart. Uncle Jim's face relaxed in an instant, and the effect of this lovely apparition upon the two wanderers was marvelous. Beaver-Dam Bill took off his shabby hat, shuffled with his feet and made an attempt to stammer out his thanks; and Musing Mose, turning to look at the exquisite young girl, showed his astonishment and interest by a complete change of countenance. Never in all his life of vicissitude, and worse than vicissitude, had any one seen on his face such an expression of surprise, then of almost wondering delight; and natural enough, to be sure; for never in all this same life had he seen such a sight, much less heard pity for him expressed in such dulcet tones.

"Waal," said Uncle Jim, "that settles it. I allow the young lady's boss. Here, you pig-tailed Chinaman, show these men a place where they can wash the dust of Colorayde off of 'em, and give 'em some grub.

Ah Fong obeyed, with a curious reluctance, and the two men followed him, more than once turning to look over their shoulders.

Then came supper, and some pleasant evening hours on the plazza, under the stars and in the soft air. The two strangers had supped heartily, and now sat by themselves, at some distance from the rest of the party. When Fanny Carroll sang, in her lovely and well-trained voice, Mustang Mose took the pipe from his mouth and let it go out as he held it in his hand. When most of the inmates of the house had retired, Uncle Jim told Ah Fong to take the two men to a chamber at the head of a small stairway leading from the main room of the ranch. The boy obeyed and then returned to this main room, in which, on the wide hearth, burned a cheerful fire of logs. He approached the stalwart frontiersman, who sat before the fire gazing into its blazing depths.

"Master," said Ah Fong, "he t'luly b'long lallee-loon man. Mi hear he talkee. (They are really robbers. I heard them talk.)" Uncle Jim looked at him gravely.

"Ah Fong, or whatever yer blamed heathen name is, 'said he, "I didn't never think I'd come to say it to a Chinee, but I wouldn't be surprised ef her head was level. Now you skip to bed an' I'll stop here. Skip, I say!"

Ah Fong went out, closing the door behind him but he proceeded no farther than the passage, where he crouched in a corner quiet as a mouse.

In the solitude in which much of Uncle Jim's life was passed, he had formed a habit of talking to himself, as Ah Fong could now hear him.

"Knowed me, did he? Perhaps he did, and perhaps he didn't. But I could swar I'd seen the mean little cuss before. Wonder whar it was. Could he have been one of them cusses we bounced out of the old town down to Pueblo. Or in the crowd thet tried to jump Tom Carroll's mine? Or in thet thar outfit we was after for stealin' mules up to Fairplay? Waal, I disremember." He sat silent for some time, then suddenly started and struck his knee with his hand. "I'v got him," he said. "Why on airth didn't I catch on before? It's the feller that we catched with aces in his sleeve up to Bill Larned's ranch, the winter of the big snow storm. An' I heerd next year that he was in with the gang thet stopped the Fairplay stage. He don't mean no good in this yere place, he an' thet unrighteous-lookin' pard of his'n, and they're two to one. I allow I'd ought to be well heeled an' all ready for 'em, if they is up to any little games."

He drew a large revolver from behind his hip, reloaded and capped it, making every motion with marked deliberation; then, taking a piece of cord from his pocket, he bound the trigger to the rear of the guard. He laid the formidable weapon on a chair by his side; then lighted an old pipe and began smoking. Thus, through the night hours, he kept his vigil. What his thoughts were, no one could tell; for no sign of them appeared on the rugged features lighted up by the cheerful blaze. It was just daylight when he heard sounds overhead, and, after an interval, steps on the stairs. He arose and stood erect, and with the six-shooter in the firm grasp of his left hand covered the door, holding his right hand in front of the hammer, ready for that quick and deadly motion called "fanning." Another moment, and the door softly opened and Beaver-Dam Bill entered, followed by his companion. They must have been looking cautiously downward and picking their steps, for they were both in the room before they saw the weapon pointed at them, and the fierce eyes behind it, and heard the command:

"Hold up yer hands——ye!" They obeyed in an instant, in unmistakable surprise and panic. Uncle Jim advanced.

"I don't know why I didn't shoot the pair of ye on sight," said he in concentrated tones.

The small man, cringing before him, managed to command his voice.

"Mr Boyle," he stammered, "don't shoot, don't shoot! We ain't a doin' no harm. Hope to die ef I ain't givin' it to yer straight. Our guns ain't loaded; yer kin see fur yerself."

Uncle Jim's face relaxed slightly. He approached the men, who dared not lower their hands, and took the revolver from the belt of each. Sure enough, they were not charged. He felt for concealed weapons, but found none.

"All right," he said. "I allow ye ain't very dangerous jest now; but I'd like to know what you cusses is a doin'."

Then Mustang Mose spoke to him, for the first time since his arrival at the ranch. "I'll tell ye," said he. "Me an' this yere pard o' mine struck a streak o' bad luck; an' we had to light out of Denver in a hurry, an' we come down here. We might as well be hung fur a sheep as fur a lamb, and we wouldn't a' made no bones of makin' a strike in this yere ranch; but, when you was a-givin' us the grand bounce, an' that pooty little gal come out an' looked at us two toughs with them gentle eyes o' her'n an' spoke in that pityin' voice, waal, blamed ef thet didn't jest fetch me; an' when I got my pard alone, I sez to him, 'No funny business here,' an' he sez, 'You bet.' An' we allowed to light out of this at daylight an' strike fur the mountains. Say Mister, ye ain't got no call to keep us, hev ye?"

Uncle Jim hesitated one moment; then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he said:

"You're right; I ain't got no use fur ye. Git!"

The men needed no second permission. In five minutes' time they were well on the road to the foot-hills. Uncle Jim watched their progress.

"A precious pair o' toughs, an' no mistake," he said to himself. "They'd a-got away with us last night ef they'd a-wanted to. An' they let up because the little girl was good to 'em. Waal, I said there wa'nt no man thet would harm her, an' even them cusses—thet when ye come to size 'em up, wa'nt men, but brutes—they couldn't do it. Now I allow they've been up to a sight o' wickedness, but they done one squar thing, and no mistake."

An hour passed, and still Uncle Jim sat in the bright sunlight, gazing toward the foot hills. Then the sound of galloping hoofs was heard it came nearer and nearer, and six horsemen, splendidly mounted, rode round the corner of the house and pulled up. To any one familiar with the west a glance would have told their character and their purpose. On their stern, but not angry nor excited faces, in their curiously unmistakable air of grim, persistent determination was written, asif in plain type, Vigilante!

"Hullo, Jim! shake!" cried the leader.

"What's up?" asked Uncle Jim, returning the salutation.

"Have you seen a pair of cusses we're after?" asked the leader. "One was tall, and the other short, with red hair."

"Why," said Uncle Jim, "we put 'em up fur the night, an' they ain't been gone more'n an hour."

"You put them up?" cried the leader, with an air of astonishment, some sign of which appeared even on the stern and solid faces behind him. "You put them up, and there's any one of you alive to tell the tale this morning? Well, I haven't time to talk now, but when we come back I shall want to ask you what on earth you did to keep them quiet. Now, which way did they go? Straight up that road to the range? All right. Good-bye. Come on, boys," and they were off at a gallop.

Uncle Jim sat as before, looking straight before him. Close to the foot-hills the mountain road forked, one branch leading toward the south, another to a pass; and the frontiersman had seen the two men take the former.

"Ef John had asked, of course I'd a-told him which way they went," said he to himself, "but they didn't wait. I allow them cusses is a goin' to be took, but I swear I'd sooner hev 'em took some other time than jest when they've done the one squar' thing o' their lives." Then he lighted his pipe. Ah Fong had come noiselessly behind him. Later on he heard the latter cry, "Hi yah!"

Uncle Jim looked up and saw the Chinese boy gazing to the westward. Following his glance, he caught the last glimpse of the vigilantes spurring up the road to the pass—the wrong road!

"Good morning, Mr. Boyle," he heard in a soft voice behind him. "Where are our guests?"

"Waal, ye see, miss," he replied, they was in an awful hurry, an' they've been gone nigh on an hour."

Then he looked at the charming girl, standing there with the sun shining on her brown hair; and thought, almost with a shudder, of what might have been in the long night watches just passed. She had indeed been the beneficent fairy who had exorcised the demons; the good angel who had set at nought the powers of darkness. All this Uncle Jim thought from the depths of his honest heart, but, after the manner of his kind, he expressed himself very laconically, just as the call came from breakfast.

The sun was shining more brightly than ever. The plains at the east and the mountains at the west, were bathed in a flood of golden light. The happy party were gathering around the well-spread table. Then Uncle Jim drew a long breath.

"Blame me," said he, 'ef she ain't a daisy!'"—A. A. Hayes in the Epoch.

WOMEN WHO SPECULATE.

Their Successes and Failures—Actresses Who Dabble in Stocks.

New York Mail and Express.

"That women speculate and do not stop at ordinary ventures I know to be a fact," said a prominent banker, when approached on the subject; "but they usually employ men to do their work. You see, they cannot operate in person because of the prejudice of their own sex, but they can study and scheme and direct—and this is what they do. The cases in this city where brokers carry heavy lines of stock under their own names which really belong to their clients are not a few, I can tell you. These women, however, do not all live in New York. Bless your heart, they represent every county in the State and, for all I know, every city and town. They are usually women who have inherited property, wards of indulgent guardians or women who have seen the world. By this I mean women who have traveled and learned of the wonderful achievements in the stock line of some noted foreigners; titled or untitled, and desire to outshine them."

"And are they successful?"

As a rule, yes. "Women have a very keen appreciation of the 'perhaps.' Then, again, they are content with a small margin of profit. And, finally, they seldom play, like a man, for a four-time winner, as it were, to press the limit. If the purchase of to-day shows a gain they are content to pocket that gain, rather than wait for another advance to-morrow, which advance is not always sure to come."

"But if they lose?"

"They lose as little as possible by getting clear of their stock as soon as they see it is going contrary to the way they want it to go. They are very philosophical and cautious, are these same women. But all the women who are represented on the street and in the exchanges are not moneyed parties by long odds."

"No?"

"Far from it. Many a woman sends her last $10 to put up her margin when the day shall begin."

"I should not think a broker would bother with a business so small."

"The brokers in those cases are usually the woman's brother, sweetheart or cousin. She wheedles a few bank notes out of papa and gives them to her agent, who in turn gives them to some small broker, and very often the miserly little sum of the morning is quite a respectable bank account by night. I remember an instance when a young woman came to New York to attend lectures at the Woman's Medical College. She found living, tuition and other expenses so very much more than she had expected that she was not willing to commence her work until she had realized sufficient money to see her through her studies. Listening to the advice of a male cousin, she sent $50 by him to put up as margin on oil. That $50 in a week's time brought her back nearly $1,000."

"All women, however, are not so successful."

"I should say not. There are thousands of dollars swallowed up in margins every day that represent many a young woman's pin-money for a month. Women are natural-born gamblers. They take to gift enterprises, lotteries, speculation and betting as a duck does to water. If you want a good proof of it go any day to these large tea stores where the proprietor gives away a piece of crockery or a silver-plated spoon with every pound of tea. You will find women coming there to buy from districts miles away. They really spend more in car fare and time than the gift is worth, besides getting an inferior grade in their purchase. The proprietor, however, knows their weakness and profits accordingly."

"Are there any female brokers in business in New York?"

"None that I know of. Men brokers, however, have their female aides—women like Vic Woodhull and Tennie Claflin—and these women are powerful allies, I can tell you."

"What is their method of operating?"

"It depends upon circumstances. As a rule, they seek the confidence of some recently bereaved widow—one, bear in mind, who has not been left moneyless. Then they proceed to advise her against trusting the wicked men in matters of business, invariably winding up by recommending their banker or broker as the man above all others to look after her affairs. The same plan is followed with young girls who succeed to legacies or young women from the country who come to the city looking for safe investments for their savings."

"As a class, what women do you think have the greatest use for a broker?"

"Actresses. There is hardly an actress in America to-day, that is one of any note, that does not dabble more or less in stocks. The reason for this is, I suppose, that no class of men become more intimate with ladies in the theatrical profession than the banker and broker. Confidence, of course, begets confidence, and in a short time the actress has made the plunge into the financial maelstrom. There is an up-town firm of brokers whose business is almost entirely made up of orders from prominent actresses. Mrs. Langtry, Lotta, Maggie Mitchell, Rose Coghlan, Modjeska, Mary Anderson, Fanny Davenport, and others of equal fame all have a nice little bundle of good-paying stocks, and, as a rule, are ready to buy more."

The young assistant minister of a Fifth avenue church in New York is reported to have made his way into great social favor by making the influential ladies of his congregation believe that they had suggested the best points in his discourses. In making a pastoral call he would pick out some remark of his hostess, declare it admirable and promise to use it next Sunday. On that occasion she would proudly hear him introduce an embellished form of the conceit with such an introduction as "One of the brightest minds I know," or "From a beautiful source comes the idea." Such flattery could not fail of its purpose.

It never rains but it pours on the farm of Myron Huskings of Maple Grove, Mich. The other day Mrs. Huskings gave birth to triplets, two of his ewes to five lambs and the family cat to seven kittens.

A DOMESTIC PROBLEM.

BY LUCY RANDALL COMFORT.

From Harper's Bazar.

"A woman's education is a mistake from beginning to end," said Roxy Stephens, in a sudden outburst of despair. "Yes, it is. Here I have been going to school all my life, and I don't know anything. There never could have been," Roxy deliberately added, "even in the Dark Ages, such an ignoramus as I am. I don't even know how to feed the chickeus properly," as a downy colony of little "Dominiques" scattered this way and that before the mass of scalded meal which Roxy had flung to abruptly into their midst, while the mother hen, sounding a trumpet-note of shrill alarm, scuttled back against the picket-fence, with flapping wings and feathers all a-bristle.

The door-yard, starred with yellow dandelion blooms and turfed with rosettes of plantain leaves, was steeped in the soft noon heats; a chevaux-de-frise of pink and puce-colored hollyhocks guarded the garden wall, and a faint scent of ripening raspberries floated on the air. Down by the maple swamp cow-bells tinkled softly, and some wild bird whistled the same refrain over and over again with melodious qersistency from the hazel copse across the road. And Roxy Stephens, sitting dolorously on the door-stone, with her chin supported in both hands, neither saw nor heard these sweet interpretations of nature.

Up to a certain degree there was truth in her lamentation. Roxy had been seventeen years old when she came to live with her aunt Sally Stephens on the Redbrook farm. She was a bright-haired, fresh-complexioned girl, with shady blue eyes, emphasized by perfectly arched brows a thought heavier than fall's to the usual lot of womankind. They had always been a secret grievance to her, these black leech-like curves; but, had she only known it, the dark, strongly pencilled brows were what gave character to her whole face, and redeemed it from the insipidity of mere pink and white prettiness. In a certain fashion her mind corresponded to her eyebrows. There was a quaint vein of originality pervading it. Her nature was strongly outlined, too, and in the fullness of her youth and vitality she had once believed that she was born to conquer fate.

Roxanna Stephens was a city-bred girl, the daughter of Miss Sally's oldest brother, who had died unexpectedly, leaving a motherless girl totally unprovided for. Thus do people give mortgages to fate, and dying, leave others to foreclose on them. There is undoubtedly a certain degree of injustice in it; but who shall venture to carp against the Lord's will? Miss Sally herself, a complaining little woman, with a face full of fine wrinkles, like China crape, and blue eyes hidden behind misty spectacles, accepted the trust, as she had accepted all the other inconveniences of her life, limply and without protest. She had never had any strong emotions one way or the other. If she had any active pleasure it was in gathering the humble herbs and simples of her native fields and drying them in preparation for the aches and pains that beset her poor humanity. "It's always well to be prepared," said she. "I don't hold with the homeopathies, nor yet I hain't no faith in calomel and mercury. There ain't nothin' like roots and herbs, and every neighbor within ten miles around comes to me for 'em when they've sickness in the house."

And to this little old brown woman in a little old brown farm-house came Roxanna, the young princess who had set forth to conquer the world.

"I'm desput glad you've come, Roxanner," said Miss Stephens, sniffling at a bunch of wilted pennyroyal. "I ain't able to keep on doin' as I hev been doin'. Somehow its borne in upon me that Providence has sent you. I've worked powerful hard all my life, and now I'll just rest a spell, and let you keep house for me. I hain't no doubt at all but what we'll get along together first-rate, you and me."

Roxy looked with solemn eyes at her aunt. Evidently the old lady had faith as a grain of mustard seed, and there was something contagious in her example.

"It must be very easy to keep house," said Roxy, fresh from the class-room and recitation-hall. So the household helm was delivered into her hands, and then—not till then—she realized the fact of her exceeding ignorance.

Not for worlds, however, would she have confessed her inability to rule the domestic menage. Aunt Sally had a profound contempt for "book-larnin,'" and did not hesitate to assert roundly that "ef brother Simon had took her advice he would hev brung up Roxanner in quite a different way," and the girl had a certain silent pride in vindicating her father's judgment. So, by the help of a dog's-eared cookery book which she found in the garret, she learned some of the simpler secrets of the cuisine, and her own neat nature taught her the mysteries of sweeping and scrubbing; while old Hinda, a jet black negress, with grizzled wool and a soft, appealing voice like a flute, who prevaded the neighborhood, came twice in a month to wash and iron for the little household.

"Jes what ole Hinda's good for," said she; "dat an' nuffin' else. Missy car do mos' anyfing; but dar ain't no sense in Missy stan'in' at de wash tub. Leave dat ar to ole Hinda."

And Roxy's spirits rose with her good luck.

"I'm getting to be a housekeeper," said she, cheerily, to herself. "Those fried fish this morning tasted quite good, and the wild plums that I preserved yesterday are certainly going to be a success."

But if it is always darkest jest before daylight, it is also sometimes brightest before an unexpected thunder cloud. And one day old Hinda bethought herself to feel ill of a Monday morning—of rheumatic fever.

Roxy went to carry her a little pail of milk and a stone crock of the wild plums, for Hinda had a childlike fondness for sweets.

"Hinda," she faltered, "can't you wash for me this week? Do try—there's a good Hinda."

The old woman riggled herself about on her uneasy couch, wringing her hands, and rolling up the yellow-white of her African eyeballs in piteous fashion.

"Not dis yar week, honey," she answered, plaintively; "not for de Queen an' all de royal chilluns. No; ner next week, neider. Don't know's as I'll eber wash agin, honey," with a mournful croak in her voice.

Roxy's countenance fell. "But, Hinda," she pleaded, "Aunt Sally isn't able to wash; and besides, she has found a whole thicket of witch-hazel somewhere up the creek, and she won't sleep night or day until she gets the roots all dug and scraped, and the bark stripped off and put steeping in alcohol. Hinda"—with a sudden inspiration—"do you think I could do the washing?"

"You, Miss Roxy—oh, git out!"

"But, Hinda, somebody must wash."

"It ain't no work for a young lady, Miss Roxy," aaid Hinda, decisively.

"Everything is work for a young lady," pleaded Roxy, "if it has got to be done."

Hinda shook her head. "Yo'll break yo' back, honey, an' parboil yo' hands' an'—"

"Oh, I don't mind all that, Hinda, if only Aunt Sally would think the clothes looked decent," urged Roxy. "Tell me how to do it, Hinda—there's a darling."

"Well, honey, yo put de clothes asoak de night afore," unwilling began Hinda, "in plenty o' bar soap sliced up thin; an' yo' bile 'em well, an' yo' doan forgit de bluein,' an' mind yo' doan git de starch too stiff, an' be suah yo' rensh de clothes right smart, an'—oh! oh! dar goes de pain in my po' ole bones agin, jes for all de world like crooked lightnin'."

So Roxy returned home not much wiser than she went. "I'd give all my algebra and geometry," sighed she, "if only I knew how to wash."

Joy of joys! as she went past Squire Honeywell's big cream-colored house she saw a colony of white garments, veritable flags of truce to her troubled mind, fluttering in the wind from a line, in the back garden.

"They're washing, said Roxy to herself, with a brightening face. "Now's the time for me to go in and see how it is done."

She slipped insinuatingly in at the open kitchen door, whence a cloud of white steam floated forth. "Good morning, Docia," she said to Miss Theodocia Honeywell, the Squire's daughter. "Do you suppose your grandmother would like a jar of my wild plums? They're a nice color, and keep their flavor beautifully. No, don't stop your work" (as Miss Theodocia paused courteously, and began to wipe her soapy arms on a roller-towel); "go on, just as if I wasn't here."

And she eagerly settled herself to take note of the stout young woman's every motion. But Miss Theodocia's ideas of politeness were a great deal too well defined to allow her to spend her time in washing when there was company.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," said she, "but the clothes can wait. I dare say granny would relish the plums, and anyhow we've a city boarder this month, an artist young gentleman, and any little luxury comes in handy for the table."

"An artist?' wistfully repeated Roxy.

"Yes," nodded Docia. "Such pictures as he paints with a squeeze or two out of his color-tubs, and a dab of his brushes! I declare it seems like magic. You paint, too, Roxy Stevens, don't you?" "A little," confessed Roxy, thinking guiltily of the peach-blossom plaques and the panels covered with abortive attemps at autumn leaves that she had spoiled. "But painting is no use, Docia. For a woman, I mean. I'd a deal rather know how to—wash."

Docia Honeywell burst out laughing. "What odd things you do say, Roxy!" cried she. "But when it comes to painting being no use, I just wish you could see the little bits of canvas and mill-board that our Mr. Jefferys gets a hundred and fifty dollars for. A—hundred—and—fifty—dollars! Going, are you?"—for, since the business of washing was temporarily suspended, poor Roxy's purpose was blighted. "Well, I'm sure it was very kind of you to think of the preserved plums, and we'll be very thankful for them, especially since ma's citron all moulded, and the blackberries fermented, and blew the tops off the cans and broke the cellar windows. And, Roxy, if I'll stop in some afternoon will you show me that new crochet stitch?—the one in shells and waves, you know, like Mrs. Deacon Dodd's shawl."

Roxy promised that she would, and set forth, wondering to herself why it was that she lacked the moral courage to ask Docia for instruction in my mysteries of the wash-tub just as frankly as Docia had requested her assistance in unravelling the perplexities of the new crochet stitch.

"I think I must be a dreadful goose," sighed Roxy. "But, all the same, that washing has got to be done, whether well or ill. It can't be worse than those algebra problems in the second book. As x and y equals z, so must soap, water, and plenty of sunshine equal clean clothes."

And so the next morning, when Aunt Sally had eaten the ham and eggs which Roxy had now learned to fry in so appetizing a manner, and drunk the coffee which was as clear as any amber, she set fourth on her daily task of root and herb hunting, and Roxy carried the basket of clothes out to the shore of the brook, where a mighty old chesnut tree spread its dome of shade, washed and wrung and rinsed them until it was a mercy that there were any two threads left together. Then she hung them out on the lines, which she had streched from tree to tree, skewering each article safely in its place with wooden pins, so that no frolicsome wind should lure it away.

"And now," said Roxy, as with head slightly on one side she viewed the result of her prowess, "I think I've earned a little rest." And drawing a "Franklin Square" novel from her pocket, Roxy sat down under the big tree, with her sun-bonnet thrown back, her loose curls tangled over her forehead, and her round white arms still bare to the shoulder, to read, and before she knew it she was asleep.

When she awakened she was no longer alone. Between her and the sunshine there was—could she believe her eyes?—yea, verily there was a young man hurriedly working at a portable easel, which was set up on a level spot on the grass, with all the composure and aplomb of a young man who felt himself to be in the right place in creation's diagram. She looked at him with solemn, sleep-shadowed eyes; he looked back at her exactly as if she was a part of the landscape, and worked on in silence.

"Are you an artist?" said she. "Are you painting the old chestnut-tree? Oh, you must be the gentleman that Docia Honeywell told me about." And then she suddenly remembered the tangled fringe of curls, the round, uncovered arms, and jumped up in a panic of very becoming confusion.

"I am Mark Jefferys, said the artist, composedly. "Yes I am boarding at Squire Honeywell's house. And you?"

"I am Roxy Stephens," said the girl, hurriedly pulling down her calico sleeves. "If you will just step up to the house I will give you a jar of wild plums that I promised to Docia; that is" (with an abrupt consciousness of her own temerity), "if you don't mind carrying it.

And this was the manner of their first acquaintance.

Roxy was very sorry when Mr Jefferys returned to the city. It seemed as if his absence left a yawing hiatus in her life, which had not previously been eventful or rich in incidents. But she did not know how more than sorry Mark Jefferys was to part from her.

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen," he quoted to himself, after the hackneyed style of the young man in general when the little winged god has him at a disadvantage. "But she shall not blush unseen if my pictures in this year's exhibition bring their price She shall be my wife—always supposing that she considers me worthy of the treasure-trove of her love. I will wear her like a flower on my heart. I think—yes, I think she likes me a little now. I am quite sure that if I had the chance I could make her like me just a little more."

And so now and then he ventured to write to her, lest by any chance she might forget that such a person existed.

Now in real life things will sometimes happen as strangely as they do in novels. And it came to pass that in the mid-April time, when the skies above and violets below are blue with a blueness that no description can equal, Docia Honeywell came up to New York to buy herself a silk dress, and asked Roxanna Stephens to accompany her.

"I never like to trust entirely to my own taste," said Docia; "and you have such excellent ideas of color, Roxy."

When the dress was duly settled upon—one of those delicious olives which, like the hair of the poet's heroine, was "Brown in the shadow, and gold in the sun"—

there was yet a good hour and a half to spare before the train went.

"Oh, do let us go to the Academy of Design!" said Rovy; "it can't be far. And I think it would rest my eyes to look at some pictures."

It was a fine sunshiny, breezy afternoon, and all the world was out. Roxy came slowly up the broad marble steps, looking around at the giant palms, and the caoutchouc leaves, and the monster camellia-trees, whose dark green foliage shone as if it had been vanished. Beyond glowed the pictures, outlined in gold, full of vivid lights and deep mysterious shadows. A little crowd had collected before one particular canvas, and following the usual impulse of human nature, Docia and Roxy left the other pictures—possibly possessed of equal merit—unsurveyed, and joined the fluttering, perfumed knot of gazers,

"The picture of the season," she heard some one saying in a soft, distinct tones that denote your society oracle; "'La Jolie Blanchisseuse.' Would you believe that that little square of canvas has been sold for a thousand dollars? It's a charmingly painted thing—oh, of course—but, after all, what is there to it?"

"It is the sentiment, the tone!" answered a wise critic who was penciling down notes for an art paragraph in the next day's Sphinx. "In this age of the world nobody can tell what's going to succeed and what isn't. The public pulse don't bear feeling as it used."

Little Roxy, in her plain brown gown and the poke hat of rough-and-ready straw, with the loops of cherry ribbon which she herself had sown on, stood on tip-toe to peep over the shoulder of the tall lady in front of her at the picture.

"Ah, Docia!" she cried, starting back, as she caught a glimpse of it, with the strange sensation of one who looks into a mirror, "I—I have seen that before."

In the foreground a crystal, clear brook gurgled away under a fringe of luxuriant cresses; in the middle distance there was the green mystery of chestnut shadows on the grass, and a young girl asleep with bare white arms, and sun-bonnet fallen down her neck, while an open book lay on the ground. A red-winged blackbird balenced itself on a bush at her right, and in the background a line full of fluttering clothes seemed to come and go at the signal of the wind. One could almost hear the murmur of the brook, almost see the stir of the tall grasses in the yellow mist of the noontide heats. Is was a very simple picture, to be sure, but it is the simple pictures that speak to people's hearts nowadays.

Docia stared intently. "It looks like you, Roxy," she said, "and that is the very chestnut tree with the hollow heart that blew down in the equinoctial gale last March. Have you found the number in the catalogue? Who painted it? Ah, I thought so—Mark Jefferys."

Roxy turned around with a curious thrill, half of pride, half anger, in her heart, and saw a tall figure coming toward them from the monster palms that guarded the stairway beyond—Mark Jeffery's himself.

"You have seen the picture Roxy?" he said—"'La Jolie Blanchisseuse'? Dearest"—drawing her away from the crowd into the cool green shadow of the giant ferns and the caoutchouc trees—"my fortune is made, and all through you, and I was coming to-morrow to lay it at your feet."

It was a strange place for a young man to speak out his heart in; but Mark Jefferys was like no other man, and Roxy had a certain individuality of her own. And x was then the lover, and y the tender little fluttering maiden heart, and what should it equal but z—the old, old story of human happiness, that repeats itself anew for every generation? Was it not as plain as any of the algebraic equations in Roxy's books at school.

Dr. Holmes says that when he stepped forward in the Sheldonian theatre at Oxford to receive the degree of D C L., the only chaffing that he heard was the question from the gallery: "Did he come in the One Hoss Shay?" There was a hearty laugh, in which the jovial doctor laughed.

Defective Page