A NEW YORKER'S WOOING.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY CALL BY JULIAN RALPH.

CHAPTER I.

MOUNTING THE LADDER TOWARD MATRIMONY.

YOU have seen those step-ladders that shut up like one piece, and look like the famous Roman symbols of unity, made of red-slats instead of reeds; that look fragile and decrepit, and voice out their pretended pains as roughly as a servant's bedstead, and yet, being stood upon, prove stronger the more they find strength exacted of them. You must have seen them, and if you have you and I are reasonably well acquainted already. I am 29 years of age, but my history begins with my invention of the first such step-ladder, when I was five years younger. I came to New York from Vermont with fewer dollars than fingers and toes, but not without the step-ladder. I had then in my head, to be sure, but accompanied by a conviction that it need only be gotten out of that confinement and be set up for me to mount to honor and comfort. Thus equipped I rented a cellar in Varick street, and furnished it with a saw, a plane, a hammer, screw-driver, chisel, and you would hardly believe how few other tools. With these I first made a folding bedstead. Then I bought a cheap mattress and a blanket, some coffee and bread, a tiny lot of planks, and had 7 cents remaining. Then I fell to and made the first two step-ladders. It was late in the second day that they were displayed on the sidewalk at the head of the stairs, under a placard, saying: "George Fletcher, Portable Yankee Step-ladders." I had at that time been twenty-four hours without sleep and half as long without food. I bought some crackers and a cent's worth of milk, drew a stool up to the foot of the cellar-stairs, and waited to see the effect of the sudden introduction of my invention upon an unsuspecting public.

"Oh," said she, "you brought those ladders."

A double procession of humanity swept past. Those in the northward line of march had to swerve to pass the ladders. In the first hundred there were perhaps eight or twelve who looked squarely at the exhibit, either stoldly or absentmindedly. Perhaps as many as five others turned out of their paths and looked at the ladders from the sides of their eyes, as horses do at anything they are not certain about in their way. By and by a spry elderly gentleman stopped, read the sign, looked at the ladders and came down the steps.

"How much?"

"Three dollars," said I.

"Hear me out, wont you?" he said somewhat testy. "I want to know what you will charge to make me a small box to hold a few bottles—sort of medicine-chest that will hold together to go by express."

I told him that I had supposed that he was asking the price of the ladders. Thereupon he called them jimcrack things and declared that he wouldn't fool away his money on such trumpery. I tried to explain their utility, but he would not hear him.

"My name is Dr. Whitfield," said he. "You'll hear from me. On second thoughts, I'll make the box myself. Good-day."

Though he appeared neatly clad, the seams in his coat were strained and gray, the gloves he carried jauntily in his hand had gaping fingerends and his step was not that of a vigorous man. As to the expectorant, it does it great injustice. It was intended to be savage, but the nose that clothed it was kindly and the light in the old gentleman's eyes was sympathetic.

A rattle of the door as I yielded to a sudden pressure, and my second customer stood before me. He also was an elderly gentleman, but of comfortable figure, and with a self-satisfied and almost proud manner. He bought both the ladders, but I explained that I could not deliver them until I had made a third, so that I could keep up my sidewalk advertisement. He gave me his card—"James Henning, Gramercy Park," and went away.

Early next morning there came a young painter, who said he had come to "paint that sign." I had had work to draw out of mind that he had been sent by Dr. Whitfield to letter whatever I wished over the basement door. I asked him who was to pay for the job.

"Nobody's to pay for it; that's his wife," said he, as he painted rapidly. "I'm doin' it for Dr. Whitfield, an' if he ain't payin' for it that's my funeral. He's a regular gent—an up-and-down gent, I tell you. An' if he's walkin' on his tippers an' a livin' between meals like a camel, an' havin' hard-scrabble time all along the line, it's his business. An' it's your business, too, if you pretend to be a white man, to do what you ask for him, and not give him the grand go-by, as some folks do, because he's down on his luck—an' don't you forgit it."

When my third step-ladder was made I went to deliver its two predecessors at Mr. Henning's solid and spacious house in Gramercy Park. He must have seen me from an upper window, for he surprised me by opening down the stairs and giving me good-morning, instead of leaving me to the care of servants. He took the package from my hand, the servant standing uneasily by, put it against the wall, and satisfied that he might look want the ladders after all, but could not decide until he saw his daughter, asked me into the large room at the right to sit down till she came. He made me feel at ease, and I talked volubly and freely. Imagine me, a tall, big-limbed, awkward country fellow, with a head of long hair that had never been presentable, and had never been earnestly urged to be, in a suit of country clothing, good and clean, but fitting as though fashioned by a tailor to a rhinoceros, and with my hands and feet insisting upon attention, and appearing incapable of modest retirement. Imagine such a figure on a throne of pale blue silk, in a handsome parlor, conscious of having presented a bundle five feet long in lieu of a visiting card, and yet made to forget his awkwardness by said my poverty by the interest shown in it by the man.

"Look here, you say you are fond of books?" Mr. Henning remarked; "why not come here evenings and make use of my library? I have no inducing elsewhere but that my daughter to care for, and both are of the best. Not that my daughter requires my care—she is her own mistress, and my own as well I sometimes think. My daughter pursues the tenor of her own character and makes those with whom she comes in contact bend to her superior strength of will. She is a queen, sir; a very remarkable young woman. Ah, Beatrice, Mr.—upon my word your name has escaped me—Mr. Fletcher, my dear."

There stood before me in the doorway a tall young woman, with the extra lengths of a black cloth riding habit thrown over one arm. The habit fitted her exactly, displaying her large but shapely arms, her slender neck, broad, sloping shoulders, a girlish, budding bust and a waist that seemed compressed more than the necessities of presentable dress-fitting, so that I judged her to be about 17. Beneath her flossy round-topped riding hat a flaxen coil of heavy bands of hair matched the fringe of ringlets that curtained her white brow. She had great deep gray eyes, and when she spoke she turned them full upon me as I never felt a woman's before. There was no immodesty in their look; there was no sign of or need for that air with which we see expression given to self-consciousness, to shyness, to reserve, or by which women in the presence of a masculine stranger pay homage to the strongest conditions of femininity. Vigorous health, naturalness, rulership as well as thorough self-command, were eloquently expressed in her full, firm glance. I think at first I saw only her eyes. I came to know afterward that there were other marvelous beauties in her face; that her cheeks were touched with rose color, her shell-like ears were large but beautifully shaped, and her nose was, though not small, clearly cut and as capable of expression somehow as her eyes themselves, or as her full red lips. It seemed to me then, and it almost does now, that I could understand her every word if she spoke in a language I had never heard. As it was, her speech was eloquent enough to betray some faults that otherwise I should not have guessed that she possessed. What they were you shall determine.

"Oh," said she, "you brought those ladders. I dislike to make you trouble, but they will not do at all. They match nothing in the whole house except the stationary tubs in the kitchen. It was very absurd of you, father, not to have perceived that."

Having in my pocket only half of the money that had been paid to me for them, I naturally asked, "What can I do?"

"You can't do anything," said Mr. Henning. "My daughter is quite right—and yet you are not at all to blame. But the ladders certainly wont do. We cannot have yellow in the house except in a pail or a broom handle. Black would have been all right, red or blue would do, but yellow—well, we draw the line right there."

"I could stain them, or I could paint them—"

"But, don't," said the young lady. "Don't stain or paint them. Why can't you make some of walnut? That would be nice."

"I can, madam."

"He says he can, father."

"Well, then, he shall, dear," said Mr. Henning; "that is, if he wants to."

"We'll send them back to you then," said the young lady.

"Thank you, I can carry them."

"But there's no need to. We'll send—"

"Perhaps he wants to carry them, Beatrice, dear."

"Why, I might as well; I brought them—"

"Father, are you aware how absurd all this is? I say I wish—"

"My dear Beatrice, you have misunderstood. I merely wished to oblige this young man in whom I have taken a deep interest, and who appeared to want to carry the ladders back. I thought I had told you enough of him yesterday for you to understand why it se ms quite natural that he should desire this. But I withdraw. You must settle the matter with yourselves."

"Thank you, papa. Mr. Fletcher, I will see that the ladders are returned to you."

At the front door, to which Mr. Henning was so kind as to accompany me, he was in a low voice and a tone of immeasurable pride and satisfaction: "I think you will allow that my daughter was right. She is a remarkable girl. Good morning. Think over my invitation."

Time passed and my business grew. I was worth a few thousands of dollars. Then I began to think whether I ought not to marry. I determined to do so. Perhaps I ought to have advice. The thought where I was to get it did not trouble me at all. I would go to Dr. Whitfield's daughter; I did not know how else to speak or regard her. She was not a Miss, and I had only faith for thinking her a Mrs. The Whitfields and I had been friends ever since the doctor visited me in my cellar. I should have been glad to know them if I had a thousand other friends. Having no others I was wrapped up in them.

"I am getting along well in the world."

The next time you are in the neighborhood of Chatham square turn to the west down Duane street a block or two, and looking along a street that will quickly come to you, you will see the words "Big Barrack" in black letters on a white ground on the side of a gigantic double tenement. Step by step Dr. Whitfield's practice, built up with vigorous youth and by aid of an enterprising partner, who appeared to take the business with him when he died, had dwindled until toward the close of a life begun in affluence and continued only with slowly decreasing comfort he had come to live in the barracks. The mystery that surrounded the daughter was embodied in the presence of an invalid boy 3 or 4 years old.

"I will please not inquire about the child," the doctor said to me once. "His presence carries no shame with it, though much sorrow and pain."

Mrs. Whitfield, who had lost her mind under a strain of poverty, always informed me confidentially that the baby's father was a skeleton, but the doctor as often asked me "please not to mind her."

All the Whitfield household except the simple mother knew my knock. On the occasion of this visit she fell to trembling violently as I entered. I went to her and held her hand. She beckoned to me to hold down my head. I did so and she whispered: "I was thinking of the skeleton; no, you are not the skeleton."

The doctor's daughter was preparing the supper in the back room. She came in on tiptoes, shook hands and whispered to me not to wake the baby, whose pinched face, sunken eyes and white lips I saw against the pillow on the sofa. She asked me if I would come out and see her cook the supper or preferred to stay in the parlor with her mother. I followed her into the kitchen.

"Alice," said I, "I want to call you Alice—may'n I?"

"If I would please me if it would give you pleasure," and then she hesitated and laughed a little and added: "But don't insist that I call you George for I—I mean no disrespect—quite the contrary—but I really don't think I could."

"I don't see why, but I'll be satisfied for the present by calling you Alice. But then, I want to say something a great deal harder than to call you Alice. I am getting along well in this world, that is, as far as money goes, you know, and yet I am not getting along well at all—in another sense. You will laugh at me—but I want a companion. I don't know any lady except you, and she—"

"Mr. Fletcher!" her surprise and pain are not to be put down in words. She was rose red from her chin to her hair. "Have you mistaken our friendship, our present position, our hospitality, my misfortune, so far as to—. If you force me to tell you, I must let you know that I am not free. My husband is alive, though he is not sharing my home with me. How could you, oh, Mr. Fletcher, how could you have made such a mistake?" Of course, the mistake was hers, but I had what we used to call in Vermont gumption enough not to even hint so.

"We will not speak of it again," said she, perfectly placid now, and strong with the strength of a true woman's virtues; "that will be the better way."

She went into the other room, and soon Dr. Whitfield came home from his office in another part of the town. In my pensive conversation with him, he explained his wife's frequent references to a skeleton. "When I had to give up a good office and take a poor one," he said, "I brought a skeleton here along with some other traps. The old lady was weak from lack of sustenance, and came upon the skeleton suddenly in the closet. She dwells on it since."

By this time in my city career I did not cut a bad figure, metamorphosed from a mechanic into a ladies' man. Dressed newly and neatly, I was standing in Central Park close to the entrance a day or two later. I was interested in something in the roadway and did not notice a fiery and splendid horse that a lady was riding until it came so close to the curb that I leaped aside, imagining myself in danger. I looked up and saw Miss Henning. "How do you do, Mr. Fletcher?" said she. "I am glad to see you so well, and"—looking at my head, then my body, then my feet—"arranged so becomingly. Have you fallen heir to a fortune instead of acquiring one as father said you were certain to do. And have you gotten too proud to visit old friends?" After a brief dialogue she remarked: "My horse is anxious to get away, though I am not, Mr. Fletcher, and I'll wait only for your acceptance of father's invitation to call at the house. May I say that you will come? Thank you. Good-by."

At a point where the equestrian path crossed the one I was following fifteen minutes later, I heard her voice. She could not see me, but I saw her, and with her, on a splendid horse, a blue-eyed blonde man of 30, on whose hands and shirt diamonds sparkled. It seemed to me that I saw her then for the first time perfectly happy.

"Rudolph," said she as they passed me, she holding up her horse for him to gain her side, "the very cleverness that enables you to deceive the world is so great that I should think people who meet you frequently would guess the truth."

"Since nobody but you knows there is any secret," he responded, "nobody is looking for it. See how great is my trust in you. Absolutely no one on this continent except the clerks in the postoffice and some persons at one banking-house know any more than your friends do."

This was all that I heard, and this I could not help hearing.

CHAPTER II.

OUT THROUGH A WINDOW.

The canvas of Pleasure's panorama slips along in the Bowery just as it does elsewhere, even when we who would like to make the world better, if we could, are not thinking of it. I think of this because it occurred to me as I elbowed my way along that thoroughfare one night, and saw the gaping nets swallowing the little fishes, the blazing lights scorching the foolish insects and the mighty spiders bearing off their prey upon the sidewalks. In the biggest crowd that hindered me was one young woman, who laid her hand on my arm and said: "I want to speak to you. If you wont mind coming down the street a step or two out of the crowd." I followed her into a shadow, and there she continued: "What name does the man go by that I saw with you and the young lady in Gramercy Park the other day?"

She referred to the young man whom I have described as a companion of Miss Henning in a Central Park equestrian ride, and whom I had subsequently met a number of times in the Henning residence, where he was a frequent and favored visitor.

"His name is Rudolph Swensen," I answered.

"That is not his name," the young woman asserted. "Do you want to protect from harm those he knows but who don't know him?

"I want to speak to you."

Then whenever you think it would be best for any woman he is visiting that she should know how to escape harm from him, you let me know."

"Your name?"

"Write to Ella Palmer—that is not my name; Ella is but not the other—at 28 Elizabeth street. That is a lodging-house. I don't live there, but I go there; I'd get the letter. Inclose the name of the lady, and I'll write to her what I know."

"That wont do," said I. "I am not sure that I'll have anything to do with the matter at all, certainly not unless there's a strong reason why I should."

"Well, just as you like," said the outcast girl. "You will be doing right if you do, and you'll be sorry if you don't, but I don't care. I'll worry him all the same whether you like or don't like. I want to strike him when he'll know it and when it will hurt him. Oh, I'm honest—I don't care anything about doing a good turn for any of his lady friends, but I do want to hurt him, and I mean to."

This street encounter led to my gaining, in several ways, to detail which this story need not be incumbered, the knowledge that Rudolph Swensen was a professional swindler. He had operated mostly in unsentimental schemes for the transfer of other men's money into his own pocket, but had lately gone into the field of sentiment, and utilized his good looks and audacious address to recommend himself as a suitor to Miss Henning. He had led her to infer that he was a titled gentleman from Sweden, but anxious to become a claim republican in a republic. Moreover, and almost by accident, I had learned that Swensen was none other than the absent husband of the doctor's daughter. Then I deemed it my duty to acquaint the doctor of the complicated situation.

"Well," he said, "I am glad you have told me this. As a father I ought to know it, though I shall do nothing. None of us has any further interest in that miserable wretch than to see that he never enters our home again. He is of excellent family. He courted my daughter properly, in the presence of my brother and his family, while she was completing her schooling in Cincinnati. I trusted to my brother's judgment and gave my consent, but I no sooner laid my eyes on my son-in-law than I saw cunning, cowardice, treachery and vicious inclinations stamped upon his face with the unmistakable brand by which God always warns all who can read. After he had tired of Alice, at the end of three months, he exercised all the ingenuity of a devil in torturing her. At length the girl's very soul revolted, and she excluded herself from him, and now we try to hide our misery. My poor wife, through God's mercy, thinks of the man only as she thinks of a skeleton which I once had, and in her mind she cannot separate one from the other. He has never been mentioned by name in our family since he quitted it."

When I made my way through the drawing-room in the Henning mansion on my next visit Miss Henning was seated on a low stool, rocking to and fro, with a sheet of paper crumpled between her locked fingers and the knee they clasped. So absorbed was she in thought that she did not notice my presence. It seemed to me that I never had seen such a change in a person's face, nor could I have believed such a transformation could have been possible as that which in a single glance I noted in hers. She had grown ten years older in three days. The confident, proud expression that even in repose her features had always worn—the flash that accompanied every motion of her eyes—the curl that had seemed part of the fashioning of her upper lip—all were gone, and there sat a pale girl, blankly staring at the carpet, with her face contorted as by worriment and dued as if by the strain of illness. Her self-command, never before relinquished, was now so far gone that when she saw me she sprang to her feet as in alarm, crumpled the paper in the palm of her hand, and then stood nervously clutching the back of a chair, and exhibiting a hesitation, as it appeared to me, between falling into the chair or by force of will continuing to stand. Astonished, I so far forgot myself as to pause in passing her. But I managed to salute her in an approach to a natural tone and to pass into the library. Need I say that for a few minutes my old friends on the shelves failed to hold my attention, and that I took them down and put them up again, and even opened and scanned them mechanically?

What possible thing could have changed the haughty beauty so completely and so suddenly? Her father came in and I delayed looking at him, expecting him to show agitation and excitement. But the tones of his voice were full and normal. I looked, and he was the same bright-eyed, clear-skinned, plump and ruddy-visaged young old man.

Visitors made themselves heard in the drawing-room, young lady visitors, and Mr. Henning excused himself. I felt at ease again, opened a volume and leaning back in my chair and crossing my legs went to the Fejee Islands with my daring traveler. The sound of my name spoken hurriedly and somewhat sharply brought me back with a start.

Miss Henning, pale yet, and wan-looking, but with all her wonted haughtiness of mien, was standing before me.

"Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Swensen dislikes you."

"I know it," I said.

"Is it because you know something of him that is not known here—something he would not wish us to know?"

"I do not know how he could possibly think that," I replied. I never felt so thoroughly under my own command before in my life. I enjoyed the sensation.

"I have not said that he thought anything, Mr. Fletcher."

"Well, I do not see then how you could possibly think it."

"I do think it, Mr. Fletcher, and I am not mistaken; he hates you, and I am so far as I am able to read demeanor, act as if you realized the power you held over him."

"Oh, no, upon my word, Miss Henning. I beg of you not to think that. If there has been anything to read in my demeanor in connection with Mr. Swensen, it has been simply that I have known my business and minded it. Has he spoken to you as you just spoke? Does he say this?"

"Mr. Fletcher, I have not come to make explanations to you. Mr. Swensen has always acted like a gentleman and has interfered in no one's affairs."

"Excuse me, have I then done differently?"

"You are not frank; it seems to me that I ought to be met differently on the first occasion of my asking a favor from you." Her tone was most peculiar. She assumed command over me.

"What would you have me say, Miss Henning?"

"Tell me what there is against Mr. Swensen that you know and that we in this house ought to share with you."

"I know nothing."

"Nothing?" She seemed startled.

"Of my perfect, absolute knowledge, nothing."

"Then, what does it all mean?"

"I have done and said nothing that means anything."

Miss Henning looked at me as though she was completely at a loss how to act, as I sang when with one breath would go away with an appearance of having triumphed over me, with another as though she would plead with me. Perhaps this was my imagination. At all events, just then, Robert, the porter, with a low cough gave warning of his presence.

"Mr. Swensen, ma'am, wishes to thee you mostly important."

Miss Henning started at the words so that she all but jumped. There was no imagination about that.

"Yes," said she; "say that I said yes."

There was my moment of triumph. I arose and stood by her, and my tone and words were exactly suited to an honest and kindly intention. I inwardly thanked heaven that the proud beauty did not, as she might, rebuke or repel me, but seemed to understand my purpose.

"One of the many things I have heard but do not know about the man," said I, "is that he has within a few days received some money and has to invest in what his accomplices think will be a profitable speculation. That speculation is to be a wedding with a rich young woman."

"How do you know that? Could you prove it?"

As she spoke there was a violent clang at the door-bell, which was followed by loud voices, the loudest those of Swensen and Rudolph. Miss Henning moved as if to go and see what occasion of the disturbance.

"One moment," said I. "You can judge whether what I have heard is true, and so you can also weigh this, that I have heard that that marriage cannot be—under the law."

The opposite gave place to the voices of men.

"Is you heard what his really is?"

"Yes."

"Then that, at least, is true."

The voices were nearer than before. There was something in their tone. Miss Henning and I went into the drawing-room. Mr. Swensen was there, with his face the color of chalk, pretending to look at a picture. His back was toward the rough-looking men in the outer doorway. Two or three young women stood as if riveted to the floor, staring at the men. At the same instant—it was all in an instant—the detective who had called herself Ella Palmer came into the room by the lower door. She walked straight to Swensen, and, looking first at him and then at the two strangers, said: "Here he is, as I told you."

The men advanced. Swensen turned his blanched face toward them.

"We want you, Lafarge," said one of the men; "we are officers."

"You are making a mistake," said Swensen, speaking somehow down his chest. "My name is not Lafarge."

"That's all right, young feller," spoke one of the detectives, in a low, firm voice; "don't make a kick, we've got onto you; so come along."

"Oh, this is some mistake," said Miss Henning. "We can vouch for his being Mr. Swensen."

"We're onto him, as I jest told him," said the detective, "and we are responsible for all mistakes."

"This woman has annoyed me several times," said Swensen. "I can easily disprove her assertions. Let me know at what court and at what hour to present myself and I give my word I'll be there."

"This woman," said the outcast, with a sneering emphasis on the words, "has made no other accusation than that you are Alfred Lafarge, and you can't disprove that."

"Come, young feller, we aint agoin' to take board and lodging here. We're on business. Come along."

"Tell him who you are, Rudolph. Let this farce go no farther," said Miss Henning.

"What's the charge?" said Swensen.

"Come along," said the detective, swinging a pair of handcuffs so that they jingled. "You'll find out what it is. No use talkin' of such things in people's parlors."

"Get my hat, Robert," said Swensen. The negro disappeared.

"What does this mean, Beatrice?" Mr. Henning asked.

"Tell him, Rudolph."

The guilty man was silent.

"Then, I will, for surely the time for it has come. He is the Count Norberg of Sweden," said the girl confidently, "and his reason for assuming his mother's name, 'Swensen,' he has explained satisfactorily to me."

"Excuse me, young lady," said the spokesman of the detectives with politeness sarcastically simulated, "but it's for a little affair connected with the Count Norberg that we want him. [Swensen started.] The Count is dead; Lafarge we found done it. It's for the murder of Count Norberg that the Swedish Government has politely requested any one that knows him as we do for to perform this here disagreeable duty."

Robert came in and handed Swensen his hat. Miss Henning reeled and fell in a chair.

"Murder!" said Mr. Henning in a loud whisper.

Miss Ella Palmer laughed aloud so that for once my blood ran cold.

Swensen walked toward the detectives with two steps then wheeled and with a bound reached the library and with another the broad sill of the window in the western end of that room. This window looked down upon a square of pavement hemmed in on its four sides by a kitchen window, a projection of the house, a fence separating it from the next yard, and the end wall of the family stable.

Both detectives bounded after him. He strained and tugged at the window. It had a catch that he did not see. He bent himself, then straightened up and with desperate strength tore away the inch-thick top bar of the lower sash. As it gave way he slipped and stood upon the floor. One of the detectives was three feet from him then and Swensen with the rapidity of thought drew a pistol and fired. The shot missed, but while the detective paused only the

"Swensen made the leap."

shade of a second, the desperate man had reached the window sill, burst out the huge pane and was ready to leap to the ground. "Bang," went the detective's pistol and Swensen made the leap.

I saw at the same time much more than I have described—Mr. Henning lifting his daughter's limp body and trying to carry it out of the room; the negro servant, though called to aid him, darting out of the door as if beside himself with fright; the young detective, who had not spoken, pressing up close to the one who was shot at and who returned the fire; the young women huddling in one corner—two with their faces against the wall and one with her back to theirs, hiding her eyes with her hands.

The shot Swensen fired buried itself in the door by which the foremost officer had been standing. He paused, it seemed to me, as if to determine whether he had been wounded. He reached the window just as Swensen leaped from the lintel. He looked out, then looked further out, and then he leaped half way over the sill and looked everywhere—even in the air.

CHAPTER III.

THE SKELETON'S LAST VISIT.

I was astonished at the sight of Miss Beatrice Henning in Forsythe street. There was no doubt about it. There she stood, and, more surprising yet, she was talking to Ella Palmer. And then I felt grateful as I saw Mr. Henning holding aloof from the two, and talking to his coachman, but evidently with only one eye and one ear for the latter. I bowed to Miss Henning and was about to ask Mr. Henning "What in the world—" when he interrupted me.

"We're crazy; that's why we are here," he replied. "It isn't bad enough that criminals should come into my house and turn it into a shooting gallery, but we now enter into communication with irresponsible characters in the slums."

"But you are not going to see Swensen—"

"Oh, but I believe we are to be shown where he is. My daughter is set upon it, and of course I have had to accompany her."

"There is no danger where I asked her to go," said the girl Palmer. "He wont hurt a flea. He hates me worst of all, and I aint afraid of him."

Miss Palmer snapped her fingers and hissed, East Side fashion, at a boy-shaped bundle of rags, as a signal for it to approach. "Show us the rose-maker's room," said she.

"That you be," said the rags, having led us to the end of a pitch-dark hall.

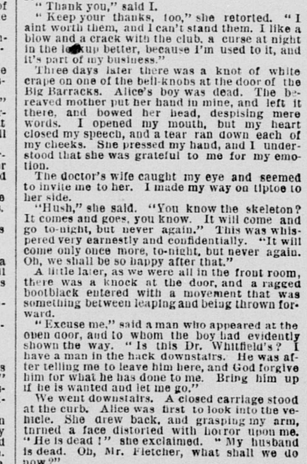
A man in the end hall-room was talking to a woman, who was moving from one apartment to another. He was cursing her. "I tell you I must have whisky," he said.

"Oh, don't talk like that," said the feminine voice. Then he cursed and demanded again, and she made no answer. We rapped at a door, and it was opened. Miss Henning swept in without leave or invitation. The blaspheming man in the adjoining room was screaming in a paroxysm of profanity, and he heard none of the noise we made. A small flaltiron shot from the door within a foot of Miss Henning's feet. I turned and saw the doctor's daughter Alice, who looked at me with a piteous expression of surprise and alarm.

"She'll show you your man," said Ella Palmer, and withdrew.

"Great heavens?" I said. "Miss Alice, you here?"

I saw as one sees without looking, a room with a bare floor and with pictures cut from illustrated papers on the walls, board boxes to the ceiling, at one side two long tables, and here and there some stools; but everywhere were roses—in heaps on the tables, piled on the mantel-piece, and in a gorgeous loop descending from the gas bracket. All were artificial, for it was



"Whisky—I want whisky."

here, as I afterward learned, that Alice Whitfield conducted a shop—all unknown to her father—for making artificial flowers. Thus she supplied the family with support without injuring his family pride.

Beatrice Henning strode into the small room, and we followed her. There we saw the face of Swensen above the quilt that covered his body as it rested on a couch. How changed it was. How the eyes glared. They accounted for his speech and manner—he was delirious.

"Rudolph, tell me what I ask you," Miss Henning said.

"Whisky—whisky. I want whisky," was his only exclamation.

"Oh, Rudolph, I'll help you. I'll have you moved. You are ill."

"I am dying," he moaned; "shot through and through. For heaven's sake give me whisky." Then followed a burst of the foulest language. Miss Beatrice quitted the room, not distracted or in tears, but with her head held high, and though her face was blanched with flashing eyes. "You will go for the police?" she commanded rather than asked of me.

"Mr. Fletcher, what does this mean—are you going—are you going for the police?" The tones were those of Miss Alice, standing before me with outstretched hands, whose fingers were pressed together as in prayer. She continued: "No one but you and a physician knows he is here. He cannot live many days—perhaps not many hours. Let him die here."

A frightful volley of vile epithets issued from an inner room. They were in all probability addressed to the woman who was defending the outlaw; but as the words fell upon the ears of Miss Henning her face became a mass of raging hate. She bounded toward the door, but was seized and held back by the doctor's daughter.

"Stop!" cried Alice. "I don't know what cause you have to wish him ill, but Mr. Fletcher will tell you the manner of his child—I mean his wife. It is for my child that I plead. Whatever you know against my husband, I know worse. Whatever he has done elsewhere is not likely to equal what he has done to me and mine. But he is dying, and I had hoped my child might live to hear his name no worse stained than it is. Let the man die here out of jail, attended as a man should be."

Miss Henning touched her father's arm. He did not turn his face. She shook his arm petulantly. Then they both went downstairs, she leading her father.

"God bless you, Mr. Fletcher," said Miss Alice. Now go away, dear friend, and may what you have seen be our joint secret."

At the end of the hall, by the street door, stood Ella Palmer with a hand in each pocket of her sacque, stamping her feet like a man and whistling.

"I have a twenty-dollar note here," I said, holding it up, "and this is only the beginning of what I will give you if you will tell no one of what you know." And I informed her of Alice's baby, and drew such a melting picture that I really fancied that she was affected.

"Keep your money," said she, "I'll not tell a soul."

"Thank you," said I.

"Keep your thanks, too," she retorted. "I aint worth them, and I can't stand them. I like a blow and a crack with the club, a curse at night in the lockup better, because I'm used to it, and it's part of my business."

Three days later there was a knot of white crape on one of the bell-knobs at the door of the Big Barracks. Alice's boy was dead. The bereaved mother put her hand in mine, and left it there, and bowed her head, despising mere words. I opened my mouth, but my heart closed my speech, and a tear ran down each of my cheeks. She pressed my hand, and I understood that she was grateful to me for my emotion.

The doctor's wife caught my eye and seemed to invite me to her. I made my way on tiptoe to her side.

"Hush," she said. "You know the skeleton? It comes and goes, you know. It will come and go to-night, but never again." This was whispered very earnestly and confidentially. "It will come only once more, to-night, and never again. Oh, we shall be so happy after that."

A little later, as we were all in the front room, there was a knock at the door, and a ragged bootblack entered with a movement that was something between leaping and being thrown forward.

"Excuse me," said a man who appeared at the open door, and to whom the boy had evidently shown the way. "Is this Dr. Whitfield's? I have a man in the hack downstairs. He was after telling me to leave him here, and God forgive him for what he has done to me. Bring him up if he is wanted and let me go."

We went downstairs. A closed carriage stood at the curb. Alice was first to look into the vehicle. She drew back, and grasping my arm, turned a face distorted with horror upon me. "He is dead!" she exclaimed. "My husband is dead. Oh, Mr. Fletcher, what shall we do now?"

I whispered to the driver a promise of money and of my company on his box if he would wait another five minutes. Then I led the doctor's daughter into the house. I told them that there would be a Coroner's inquest, and that if the body was brought into the house the most sacred secrets of the family would be made public. I volunteered to take the remains to an undertaker's shop, to notify the police, acquaint the Coroner with all the facts necessary and to manage that the existence of the widow should not be disclosed.

Swensen was buried the day after the inquest. His widow had hoped that he might be interred with her little boy, but the doctor would not, had that been done, have attended the funeral. The child was buried on the afternoon of the day of the inquest. The doctor, his daughter and I were the only mourners. The next day Miss Alice and I followed the hearse for the second time. She wept bitterly for her little boy on the way to its grave. And the next day we buried her husband; she yielded again to excessive grief. I spoke a few comforting words, and found that all the tears were for her baby boy. Even when she drew me beside her close to the grave in which her husband's body had been laid, she told me of the winsome attributes the child had possessed. I do not believe she shed a tear for her husband.

* * * * * *

I have determined upon the woman I want for a wife. I deliberately started from my father's hands a year ago to get a bride just as I had been getting my meals, my clothes and the workmen in my shop—to order. I started out philosophically and in cold blood, saying to myself that I had the years and the money and the need of a home, now for a wife! Without my knowing how it came about, or dreaming that it ever could, I have been guided to a familiar spot oft visited in the past, but always blindly. Certain bandages have fallen from my eyes and I see before me Alice Whitfield. She is just where she always was, in her home and at her work, but I see her in a new light, which makes her seem no longer simply the friend whose sorrow-laden secrets have been betrayed to me. The same person is now subordinated to something ethereal, subtle and magnetic, as if I saw her through a halo. Full well I know that it is because love is looking through my eyes and lending me his sight. I love her. Does she love me? The month of my waiting for her answer will be up to-morrow. With it will close that era in my life of which this is a history.

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The Victoria Colonist says: The sloop Annie, owned by the smuggler Holte (who was shot and killed while resisting capture) has been taken to Port Townsend where she underwent a thorough examination. Several secret compartments have been discovered in the hull, all filled with pure alcohol.

A strike of very rich ore was make recently in the old Harron mine at Auberry Valley, Fresno County. The vein is ten inches wide and pays $500 a ton.

THE CADETS AT THE BIG GUNS.

Bombardment of the "Crow's Nest" From the West Point Drill-Ground.

AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE.

Over 1000 Pounds of Solid Iron Shot Sent Whizzing Through the Air—Firing Practice by Batteries—The Most Exciting of All the Military Academy Tactics.

FOR all the drills at the Military Academy, that of the coast battery is the most picturesque and interesting. The last drill was on June 5th. The battery stands upon a low shore facing the Crow's Nest. The day was sultry. Hardly a breath of air was stirring. The sun beat hot upon the bosom of the Hudson. Its rays were reflected from the surface of the river to the shore, increasing if possible the heat of the battery. A firing drill had been ordered at 4 o'clock. Here is the picture:

The great guns stand, black and grim, near the bay washing the feet of the dark green mountain known as the Crow's Nest. Storm King is outlined against the sky beyond it. To the right, ten miles across the blue water, the glittering spires of Newburg are seen. Across the river towers Mount Taurus, and beyond that Break-Neck, as wild, rugged and ragged as when Benedict Arnold fled down the river after betraying the captured Andre.

Sloops, lazily drifting with the current, dot the bosom of the stream. In the far distance two tugs are pulling a fleet of lumber-laden canal-boats toward the Tappan Zee. The heat is intense. Crows sailing over the west shore flats emit lazy caws, and the robins remain silent in the shade. The hill beneath the battery is littered with sweltering spectators. Among them are many well-dressed ladies. They sit beneath the trees, and the play of their fans is incessant. Knots of cadets off duty are seen lower down the slope. All eagerly await the drill.

Suddenly the sharp rat-tat-tat of a drum is heard. It comes from the barracks beyond the esplanade. A moment later a column of cadets is in sight. It is the firing party. The boys wear gray jackets and white trousers. The column moves with the precision of a machine. Down the slope it comes carrying the elastic step of youth. Its discipline is perfect. With eyes rigidly to the front it passes batteries more dangerous than any coast batteries. They are batteries of loveliness—maidens, the fire of whose eyes would make the bravest of men lay down their arms.

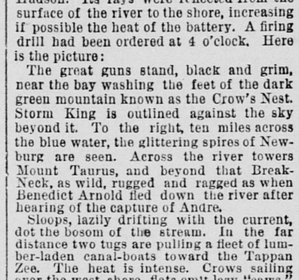
Filing to the left, the column is aligned behind the guns. At the word of command it breaks into the manual of arms, the detachment marches to its gun. There are six pieces of artillery. The first two on the right are 15-inch smooth-bores, and the third, fifth and sixth are 8-inch rifles converted. The fourth is a 13-inch mortar. The smooth-bores carry round shot weighing 440 pounds. All frown above the earthworks, black and defiant.

"Take equipments," shouts the commanding officer.

The equipments hang from the guns or are found upon the chassis, as the crescented railway upon which the breech rests is termed. In a twinkling the cadets are at work. Some mount the platforms, while others are busy below. The excavation is alive with activity. The gunner stands upon the chassis superintending the movements around him. He passes the primer pouch to a cadet and removes the cover of the vent. This he places in his own pouch. Two cadets work the screw and give the piece an elevation, and all resume their places.

"Form battery," shouts the commandant.

It means "Roll the gun back." The gunner cries, "In gear," and each detachment is again alive. Handspikes are inserted in the sockets of the carriages and the axles are unkeyed. This leaves the cannon free upon its carriage. A moment later the gunner shouts "Heave." The wheels revolve and the muzzle of the monster is drawn within the battery. "Halt," cries the gunner, and the great cannon is brought to a standstill. Like a flash a cadet throws an outlying pulley into place. It is used to lift the heavy shot to the muzzle.



His first gun.

Then comes the command "Load" from the officer in charge. There is renewed activity on the part of the cadets. Some dash to the magazine on the left of the battery. The tompion is removed from the muzzle of each gun and the sponge and rammer are passed to those on the platform. Two cadets seize it and swab the gun. They are hardly through with the job before their comrades begin to pour from the magazine. The pointed projectiles are brought out in long tin pails, while the shells are carried in three-pronged nippers like chunks of ice. In a breath the pulleys are at work. They creak as the cadets draw the missiles up to the muzzles of the guns. Here they are seized, turned into the guns and rammed home. There is no confusion. Everything moves like clockwork. Each cadet knows his place and performs his duty silently and alertly.

When the guns are loaded the command "In battery" is heard. The wheels revolve as by magic, and the snout of each piece peers over the parapet. All are thrown out of gear, so as to hold them steady under a recoil. At the order "Arm," they are raised and lowered by a ratchet at the breech, and thrown to the right or left on the chassis, according to the command of the gunner. The gunner himself sights the piece.

The friction primer is inserted in the vent and everything made ready. Then comes the order, "Detachment to the rear, march." As a precautionary measure against the bursting of a gun, the cadets abandon the battery while the guns are being fired. One cadet to each gun, however, remains. He stands upon the earth below his gun, lanyard in hand, facing to the rear, right foot forward.

The battery is now ready for work. In a clear voice the commandant shouts, "No. 1, fire!"

Flame streams