The SHIP of DREAMS

A novel

by

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To

The Folks at Home

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THE SHIP OF DREAMS

I

The Lord of the Manor

The passing of fifty years over any village in this New World of ours is apt to change the place almost beyond recognition; but the sleepy little Long Island hamlet of Meadowneck, straggling down from an elbow-like crook in the South Country Road between meadows on the south and piney forests on the north, finally to halt on the west bank of Ponsopogue River and nod across the narrow stream at its contemporary, Pepperidge Manor, had moved so slowly during the course of the fifty years that precede this story that, had you awakened from his half-century sleep one of the many that lie mouldering in the family graveyards of Meadowneck, he would have merely rubbed his eyes as he looked about and said:

"Guess I slept pretty late this morning." Then he might have added:

"What's that?" as he heard the rumble of the railroad train in the distance.

The wide, swerving sweep of meadow-land that had given the place its name, generations and generations before, still intruded itself between the village and the waters of the Great South Bay, still came curving up from the Bay along the bank of the river as far as Ponquos Landing at the end of the Old Neck Road, still remained the same flat, lonely, wild-grass-grown bit of landscape for the stars, hanging low in the heavens, to brood over by night, for stray artists to paint by day, and for the rippling winds to woo in every mood and passion. And, through the meadows, the river still flowed with as many windings and twistings, curvings and bendings, with as few signs of active trade and commerce, as it had flowed fifty years before. They seemed to be the very same slip-shod fisher-boats, eel-cars, and sharpies there at the landing, the same gray old fish-nets spread out to dry upon the grass, the same gray old fish-nets hung out to dry upon the rail-fences that went tottering up the borders of the lane.

Old Neck Road! Surely you have not changed much in fifty years I You still seem to be shut in by meadows and forests far from the strife and the life of the outside world. No one has felled one single tree in your double line of old black oaks; no one has planted new-fangled flowers in your old-fashioned box-wood gardens; you still smell of piney woods and rich, dark earth, of fresh-cut grass, of roses and lilacs.

There, overlooking the southeast meadows, the old Biggs place still stands, now one hundred and fifty years old; and what are the passing of fifty years to a house that has

begun to count time by centuries? Biggs senior has been dead these forty years, and he that was Biggs junior is now known far and wide as "Old Gol," out of respect to his settled habit of saying "Gol!" whenever anything happens, from the spilling of salt to the spilling of blood.

The square little school-house a little farther up the road was built six decades ago; but when the old folks put it up they "calc'lated that plain, red brick was well-wearing," and so it has proven itself to be! And when does a clean, high-stepping little white church, with green blinds, begin to outgrow the beauty of usefulness? Certainly not before the great goddess Fashion begins to count her converts among the congregation. The wide doors of the blacksmith shop-red, rusty, sooty old building—are closed today, have been closed, bless your heart! for nine years, for it was then that the blacksmith died, and no one has come along since to reopen the business.

And the general store! Do you remember when old Enoch Danes set it up for his son and gave a grand opening the day the lad came of age? The lad is eighty years old now, and he scuffs and shuffles along as if he already felt Death dragging at his feet; takes snuff on the sly where he used to take it publicly; wears bow-rimmed glasses, a-purpose, the children say, to peer blindly over their tops; puckers up his nose and screws up his mouth incessantly, as if he were chewing the cud of a most obnoxious reflection. He has changed pitiably has Daddy Danes, but his store remains almost the same.

There it stands pretty far back from the road in a grove of untrimmed cherry-trees, and nailed high upon the limb of the largest tree, half hidden by the branches, is the same dim, old sign, "Post Office." The building, which still shows by the arrangement of the two front doors that it is a dwelling as well as a place of business, seems to be dressed in the self-same crushed-strawberry gown it wore in the days of its early youth, and is as scantily trimmed now as it was then in the way of two meagre show-windows and a narrow, shelf-like stoop that stretches across the front of the store, and is just broad enough to accommodate a man in sitting posture, providing he is willing to let his feet rest on nothingness.

This morning in May, a little more than fifty years after a certain wedding that is still talked about in Meadowneck, an old woman might have been seen crouched up in a heap on the stoop, well to one side of the open door, her feet tucked under her skirts, her crooked, hard-working old hands delightedly busy fingering a brass ring set with a mock emerald. She mumbled and laughed over the ring with all the joy of a child playing with a sunbeam, and her eyes, a clear, bright, almost youthful blue, were wide with excitement and pleasure. Now and then the old woman would look jealously up and down the length of the lane to see that no one was coming to steal her treasure, and then sink back again with low laughter when she found that there was not a soul in sight on the Old Neck Road. Presently, however, she became aware of the sound of voices within the store, and, clasping her ring tightly in the palm of one hand, she rose

slowly to her feet and pressed close against the side of the building, peering at the door from under her lank, gray locks.

"Sha'n't have it," she mumbled to herself. "No use a-tryin'; they sha'n't have it."

Poor old Mad Nancy, with her mania for rings!

The voices within the store came nearer, and then Barnabas Fanning, the lord of Pepperidge Manor, a crooked, hunched-up old man, who bore the partly blurred yet still unmistakable signs of good birth and good breeding, in spite of the fact that he had grown sour and ugly beyond compare, appeared on the threshold, closely followed by Daddy Danes.

"It's money, money, money!" Barnabas was snarling. "Your garret's full of gold now. Going to be buried in a gold shroud, are you?"

Daddy Danes gave an extra pucker and screw to his mouth and nose, then showed his gums and cackled, although it was plain to see that his mind was bent on something more serious than the joke if joke it was.

"You leech!" growled Barnabas, looking at him from under lowering brows; whereupon Daddy Danes laughed his dry, metallic laugh again, but shifted from foot to foot a little uneasily.

"Never thought to mention it afore," the old store-keeper remarked, in a casual sort of way, "but I b'lieve Mad Nancy is a-passin' the time o day in the kitchen along with Pernelia B."

The mention of Mad Nancy had the instant effect of sending Barnabas Fanning's hand to his breast-pocket, and it made the old woman herself, who still stood unobserved towards the end of the porch, come creeping forward.

"What you a-givin' him? Hush money?" she cried out, suddenly, just as Barnabas Fanning's hand withdrew itself from his breast-pocket and laid something in Daddy Danes's grasping palm. Both men started, Daddy Danes with that characteristic screw of nose and mouth, Barnabas as if he had suddenly been confronted with the flesh and blood embodiment of a dream that had dwelt with him years without ceasing. Mad Nancy came nearer, her eyes shining with suspicion, eagerness, and avarice. Barnabas trembled as if with the palsy, and he leaned heavily on his stick.

"What'd you give him?" demanded Nancy.

“My ring? Barnabas Fannin’, where’s my ring? You promised it to me—fifty year ago”—she nodded her head in affirmation, and stretched out her and to lay it on Barnabas’s arm — “yaas, fifty year ago.”

Daddy Danes watched every look and movement of the lord of the Manor, but Barnabas thrust Nancy from him, cursed her with names befitting a dog, then, still cursing in an undertone, went down the steps and walked as fast as his age and infirmities would permit him down the Old Neck Road towards Ponquos Landing.

“He give you a ring,” said Nancy, accusingly, coming close to Daddy Danes and looking him square in the eye.

“No-no, Nancy,” replied Daddy Danes, in the tone of a father to his child. “No-no. Where’s that one with the pretty green stone I give you this mornin’? You hain’t lost it, have you?”

“Oh no!” said Nancy, holding up the fist in which she had shut the ring. “No-no. Mustn’t lose ‘em. Mustn’t give ‘em away. Imogene says I must never give ‘em away. Say, Daddy Danes, Daddy Danes” — in her earnestness the old woman took hold of the store-keeper’s striped shirt, for he rarely wore a coat, as she repeated, “Daddy Danes, have you got any sand-paper?”

“What you want it for?” asked Daddy, cautiously.

“I want to scour up my rings.”

“No-no-no-no, Nancy, you mustn’t do that. You’ll take the varnish off.”

“Yaas,” said Nancy, echoing like a parrot. “Mustn’t do that. Take the varnish off.”

At that moment there was the sound of girlish laughter and childish calling, and there came running around the side of the house a chubby, stubby little boy about six years old pursued by a girl of nineteen. The girl was clothed in red from her throat to her heels, and her wavy, reddish-black hair hung loose on her shoulders.

“Oh, ganny, ganny!” cried the little boy, scrambling up on the stoop. “Im’zene stayed talkin’ so long to tudder ganny zat I wun away, I did.”

Mad Nancy forgot her rings to catch the boy to her breast, and, holding him so tight that he could scarcely breathe, told Imogene that she mustn’t be bad to “Pup” - she mustn’t, she mustn’t.

Imogene laughed, tossed back her curls and laughed again, spoke a few words in an undertone to Daddy Danes, then, laying her hand with tender authority on the mad grandmother's shoulders said:

"Come, dear, or we'll be late to dinner, and mother was going to bake that great big bluefish, you know."

"The gate-big-b'uefish Popsy taught," said the little boy, breaking away from his grandmother to show her the size of the bluefish by stretching wide his sturdy little arms. The simple action showed that even to her small grandson Mad Nancy was but a child.

"The great big bluefish," repeated Mad Nancy, then she laughed her wild, low laugh and went quickly down the steps. "Onct somebody told me that fishes had rings in their stummicks — rings in their stummicks — rings —"

"Bye-bye, g'andaddy," called the little boy, waving to Daddy Danes, who still stood in front of his store door.

"Bye-bye," called Nancy. "Take the varnish off. Mustn't do it; take the varnish off."

And the mad old woman, the young girl in red, and the sturdy little boy went down the Old Neck Road under the great black oaks towards Ponquos Landing. Long after they were out of sight Daddy Danes stood on his stoop looking in the direction that the three had taken.

"Come p'u't nigh gittin' caught that time," he said to himself. "Lucky 'twa'n't one o' her keenwitted days."

Then Daddy Danes threw back his head and cackled, this time without restraint and with genuine enjoyment.

"Wa'n't he scared though? Wa'n't he scared!"

II

Mad Nancy

THE day was rarely beautiful—the sun shining brightly from out a cloudless sky; the solemn, silent meadows never so rich and dark a green; the river a winding ribbon of deep, sparkling blue; the woods that fringed the farther side of the stream at Pepperidge Manor, looming tall, stretching wide and dark and mysterious. Old Gol used to say of the view from the landing:

"Funny thing; I don't see no picters in it, but them air paintin' fellers come along an', gol! they says, says they, it's the puttiest river in the hull state. Accordin' to their idee, there wa'n't nawthin' in the Garden o' Eden to hold a candle to that air lonesome pine-tree down in the middle o' the medders. Gol!"

Old Gol was at the landing this morning sitting on a soap-box skinning eels; another man was in the distance spreading his nets out upon the meadow grass, two or three fishermen were painting and "puttering" up their boats in preparation for the slight increase of business that came to Meadowneck in summer-time. The Manor's new watchman, Bert Brown, a clean-set, well-built young fellow from Shoreville, had just stepped ashore and stopped to speak to Old Gol when Mad Nancy and her two grandchildren came walking down the narrow path in Indian file. Scarcely had Imogene noticed that they were observed, however, when she turned and put her arm within that of her grandmother, while the little boy darted forward and slipped his hand into Nancy's. It was done tenderly enough and as naturally as if there had been no meaning other than simple affection in the action; but Nancy exclaimed, resentfully:

"Lemme go! Lemme go! He's a stranger—a stranger! Don't like strangers."

By this time they had come near enough to Old Gol and young Bert Brown for the two men to hear what Nancy said, and Old Gol, without stopping his work of eel-skinning any more than an old woman would have stopped her knitting, blinked peacefully at Mad Nancy and said:

"He's the new Bay constable from Shoreville. He won't hurt you, Nancy."

At the words, the fire leaped to Nancy's eyes; she broke away from the gentle hands of the boy and girl and, going close to Bert Brown, demanded:

"Be you Barnabas Fannin's new constable? Won't hurt me—won't hurt me—won't hurt me! Better not! Better not! We hain't no pirates— a-takin' our own—a-takin' our own."

Bert Brown was young, and he blushed red through his tan while his eyes sought Imogene's appealingly.

"Come," said the girl, in a low, coaxing voice, taking her grandmother by the arm. "Come, dear. Never mind. Come!"

"The b'uefish'll be all gone, ganny," piped up the little boy, laying beseeching hands upon the mad creature's skirts. "Come along."

The old woman was evidently very much excited in her mind, but she allowed them to drag her to the skiff, where it lay moored to the bank.

"Mustn't let him have my rings!" she said, as Imogene put up the sail. "Mustn't let him have my rings!"

" Lemme sail her home!" cried the little boy, and, without waiting for permission, took the rope that guided the rudder into his hard, chubby little hands.

"Gol!" said Old Gol, blinking up at the young man beside him. "Them's 'um—your pirates. The crazy old woman is Pepper Oakes's mother." "And the girl?" asked the young man, shading his eyes with his hand that he might better watch the boat.

"That's Imogene, the only gal in the fambly. An' the little feller's the baby—God's Puppy, they call him—Pup fer short. Six year old and talks as if he was three."

The young man stood watching the boat for some moments longer, then, with a "So long" to Old Gol, turned and went thoughtfully up the Old Neck Road. Every now and again, however, he turned and looked across the meadows at the skiff sailing down the stream.

" The girl knows how to handle a boat," he said to himself; "also how to steer that poor, crazy old creature; and—also "—here he began to whistle low as he swung up the path—"and also how to hate a Bay watchman. 'Imogene '—it's a queer name, but I like it. Yes-yes, I like it."

Imogene stood in the stern, her hand laid firmly over that of God's Puppy, steering the boat. Mad Nancy sat on the top of a half-barrel at one side of the centre-board and mumbled unintelligibly to herself. Her eyes alone would have shown that she was unusually agitated, and Imogene, without speaking, looked at her from time to time with no little concern. Nancy's excitement increased as the boat drew nearer to Pepperidge Hall, which stood diagonally across the river from Meadowneck, about two miles farther down the stream and just at the point where the river flows into the waters of the Great South Bay. The Hall could be seen at a great distance, owing to the fact that it was a large mansion, built upon a wide, free space of upland.

“ Tell Pup,” Nancy broke out, suddenly. “ He’s old enough—agoin’ on six—tell him, tell him!”

“ Tell me what?” cried the little boy, with lively curiosity.

“Granny,” said Imogene, softly, “where is that pretty ring Grandfather Danes gave you this morning?”

Here!” said Nancy, laying her hand on her bosom. “Tell him—tell Pup! You bad Imogene, tell Pup.”

“Oo bad Im’zene,” echoed God’s Puppy, in his sweetly, strangely stumbling speech, looking up at the girl with a loving twinkle in his eye. “Tell Pup.”

“Dear heart,” said lmogene, “it is something you could not understand, no matter how hard you tried. It is a story that makes Imogene cry inside, and you would not have her cry, would you, dear?”

Mad Nancy raised her lean hands and brushed the hair from her brow. Then, looking earnestly at God’s Puppy, asked:

“Do you love Barnabas Fannin’?” The child had been taught the answer to the question as soon as his little lips could form the words, and long before he had the faintest conception of their meaning.

“I hate him,” he answered, shaking his fist in the direction of Pepperidge Hall.

The old woman laughed and hugged herself with delight, but grew solemn again as she demanded:

“Do you love the Manor, God’s Puppy?”

Nancy’s excitement struck a strong chord in the little soul that she was playing upon. and the boy fairly screamed out his answer.

“I hate the Manor! I hate that ugly, cooked old man! I hate ‘em all! Cuss ‘em! Cuss ‘em! Cuss ‘em!”

The child, uttering these unchild-like words, wrenched his hand from Imogene’s, and danced up and down with rage as he shook both little fists at Pepperidge Hall. Nancy laughed again, but lines of pain and despair came between Imogene’s eyes. She let go the tiller and, kneeling down, caught the little boy to her, murmuring soothing words.

"Tell him!" demanded the old woman. "Barnabas Fannin' give Daddy Danes a ring this mornin', or somethin'. Tell Pup! Tell him!"

Imogene bent her gaze with anxious concern upon the mad grandmother, and, seeing that Nancy had reached that state where nothing would serve to quiet her but the telling of the familiar old story, sighed to think of its effect upon the little child.

"Ima, tell me," pleaded the boy. "Oo said oo would, some time, Im'zene."

"Then, dear heart," said the girl, resuming her task of steering the boat through the windings and curvings of the river, "you cannot understand now, but you will never forget, so lean up against me and I will tell you."

The child came close and snuggled inside the curve of Imogene's free arm. The mad grandmother settled back on the barrel and watched every motion of Imogene's lips.

"Once upon a time," the girl began, in tones so low that the waves lapping against the prow and the side of the boat could be heard distinctly—"once upon a time, my darling, there was a little girl who had no mother or father, no one in the world to love her."

"Not eben a sister?" asked God's Puppy.

"Not even a sister. She could never remember a time when she did not live with a lot of other little girls and boys in a great big place that was almost like a prison in New York."

"I hain't neber been to York," said the child.

"One day a lady, all dressed up in silks and feathers and things, came to the place where the little girl lived, and she said she was going to take the little girl away off to a beautiful place in the country where there were woods and birds and flowers and the sweet, blue water.

" 'You shall be just like my own little girl,' the lady said, and, oh — all the other little boys and girls felt so badly because they were not going with the great lady, too. They all kissed the little girl good-bye, and she went off in a stage-coach—you know the chou-chou cars did not come so far out on Long Island then, for this was fifty-eight years ago."

"Yaas, fifty-eight year ago," echoed Nancy, and buried her head in her hands.

"The little girl rode with the great lady for fifty miles, and then a beautiful private carriage met them and they drove to—to—"

“Pepperidge Manor,” muttered Mad Nancy.

“Pepperidge Manor,” repeated Imogene, and then went on more hurriedly. “Dear Puppy, the great lady had told stories so as to get the little girl away from the charity home. She did not want her to be her own dear little girl at all. She wanted her to feed the pigs, and bring in the wood, and wash the pots and kettles, and work and drudge and slave from morning until night, until her little back was almost broken, and she had so little time to think that after a while she could not think quite—quite clearly—do you feel sick, granny, dear?”

“Tell him,” said the old woman, hoarsely, with her hands still before her face. “Tell Pup!”

“You know, or you do not know, dear heart, that when boys and girls—particularly girls—are growing up, they ought to have some one to watch over them and to take care of them, but this little girl had no one. Every one at the Manor was ugly and cross and nasty to her. They whipped her, dear—yes, they whipped her hard. They never let her go anywhere. For seven years she never left the Manor grounds.”

“Not eben to go to G’andaddy Danes’s?”

“No, not even there. The Fannings did not want any one to know about her. Well, after the seven years had passed, the little girl had grown into a big girl of fifteen. She had very pretty blue eyes and a sweet mouth, and she was sweet herself —poor, poor little girl! And then, after every one had been so ugly and cross to her so many years, some one began to be kind. Don’t you see how the little girl would feel, dear? The bad lady’s son was kind to her. He said he loved her, and the child did love him with all her soul.”

Imogene’s voice had grown husky. There was a look of unutterable pain in her eyes, gazing across the water and the meadows. The mad grandmother rocked herself where she sat, and moaned low: “ He promised me a ring—he promised me a ring—a ring—a—”

“Go on!” cried God’s Puppy. “Go on!”

Imogene recalled the day the story had first been told to her—how it had puzzled her, how she had failed to understand one-half its meaning, yet it had stirred her none the less deeply. She could still remember almost every word the mad grandmother had uttered, and every look that had crossed her face. So, in after years, would God’s Puppy re member all she told him now.

“There are many things you do not understand, dear heart, but sometimes, when a woman loves a man, a—a—you are not sick, granny?—her love makes her a mother—that is, a little baby comes to love her back again. And so this little foundling girl, when she was fifteen, knew that a baby was coming to her, and she told Barnabas—he was the baby’s father, you know.”

“Barnabas Fannin’,” muttered Mad Nancy.

“Do not look at granny like that, dear heart; lean back against me. Now, Barnabas wanted another girl for the mother of his children—a proud beautiful girl who had not been born a foundling— and as soon as he found out about Nancy—”

“Nancy!” echoed the bewildered little boy, staring at his grandmother.

“Yes, her name was Nancy. And as soon as he found out that Nancy was going to make him a father, he said to her—he and his older brother, Jacob—they said to her:

“‘We will take you to a great, big, beautiful tavern, or hotel, to stay until after the child is born, and then we will bring you back again; for our mother must never know.’

“So Nancy packed her clothes up into a little bundle one night and drove with the two brothers through the woods and through the woods and through the woods all night long.”

“Forty miles,” mumbled Mad Nancy—” forty miles—back an’ forth.”

“Just at dawn they came to a clearing in the woods and stopped the carriage, and Barnabas lifted Nancy to the ground and said, pointing through the trees:

“‘See, there is the beautiful tavern. Go up the steps and knock loud. They are expecting you.’”

“I wa’n’t to be skered,” broke out Nancy, suddenly, taking her hands from her face and looking at them as sanely as any one might have looked— “I wa’n’t to be skered jest ‘cause I wa’n’t ust to front doors. I says good-bye to the hosses, an’ I thanked Jacob kindly fer a-bringin’ me so far, an’ I kissed Barnabas an’ told him that he’d find me awaitin’ at the edge of the clearin’ when he come back, no matter what the weather was. Then I went. I couldn’t see fer cryin’, but it seemed to me that the tavern wa’n’t anywhar near as nice as the Manor. I climbed the steps—thar wa’ ten o’ them— an’ then I lifted up the knocker an’ pounded hard. A lady half dressed come to the door an’ let me in without a word.

“‘You’re a’spectin’ me,’ I said, an’ smiled so she wouldn’t be mad at me fer a-comin’ so suddent. She looked me over from my head to my feet, an’ then she said:

" 'We be always a'spectin' folks like you here at the poor-house.' "

"The poor-house!" repeated God's Puppy.

Mad Nancy slipped down from the barrel and cowered on the floor of the skiff, even as she had fallen and cowered on the floor in the poor-house hallway fifty years ago.

"The poor-house!" she screamed, so that her voice went echoing over the waters. "The poor-house! Barnabas! Barnabas! Oh, my God, the poor-house!"

Imogene dropped the tiller and, springing forward, used all her young strength to lift the grandmother to her feet.

"The poor-house," God's Puppy said, low, to himself, and looked hard at Pepperidge Hall, rising in stately loneliness there on the bank of the river.

"Im'zene," he called, "does g'anny mean the weal, t'ue poor-house whar G'andaddy Danes says he'd go ef he didn't hold fast to the pennies?"

"Yes, Ponsopogue. It was only ten miles, but they doubled in their tracks."

"What's that?" asked God's Puppy.

"Pup," demanded Nancy, leaning against Imogene for support, for the excitement had worn out her feeble strength — "Pup, do you love the Manor now?"

"I hate it!" yelled the child, grating his teeth. Nancy laughed and sat down on the barrel again.

"Tell Pup! Tell him the rest, Imogene. Bad Imogene!"

"Well, dear heart, they left Nancy there at the poor-house to be sick and miserable all alone while she waited for the baby to come. Then Barnabas got married to the other girl—you know, Mis' Margaret they call her now—and they went 'way over the ocean on their wedding-trip. Then in June— it was November when they drove Nancy to the poor-house—in June, Barnabas came home with his wife. Oh, you can never dream of the fuss old Mrs. Fanning made! They gave a grand, big party, and the folks came even from New York to it. They had the table set in the big hall, and the whole house was full of roses. There was even a wonderful, beautiful curtain of ribbons and rose-buds in front of each of the two outside doors. Everybody had sat down at the table, and they were having the happiest sort of a time, when, all of a sudden, the little foundling girl pushed aside the curtain of roses and came in with her baby in her arms. Granny, you are tired, dear; I will tell him some other time."

Granny clasped her two hands together and bent forward, looking intently at nothing as she took up the thread of the story.

"I'd walked all the way from the poor-house, and he was a hefty young un; I kin feel the ache in my bones now, and I can see it all as ef it was yis'day. There was the be-yut-iful hall like a garden with roses, and all the folks eatin' so dressed up; an' the bride she set so near the door I come in by that I could 'a' touched her. Barnabas he was a-standin' up at t'other end o' the table, 'way down the hall; an' when fust I see him he had a glass o' red wine in his hand, but the minute he laid eyes on me he dropped the glass an' the wine spilt out an' made a stain on the table-cloth jest like blood, an' everything was so still you could hear it a-droppin' an' a-drippin' on the floor. Everybody looks at me, an' somebody calls out to me sharp an' suddent to 'Be gone!' but I didn't care. I plumped down right thar on my knees—a-holdin' the baby tight in one arm, an' I lifted up the other to God in heaven, an' I cussed the Manor folkses an' all them as had to do with the Manor forever an' forever, as the Bible says, world without end."

Nancy's voice had sunk into a husky whisper, but now she raised it to demand once more:

"Pup, do you love the Manor?"

"I hate the Manor! Cuss 'em!" said he, the little boy who did not know the meaning of a curse.

Imogene stood at the tiller, looking hard at the Manor's broad acres. Her face was flushed and her eyes flashing fire.

"I'd 'a' knelt thar," Nancy went on, "till I saw the cuss begin to fall myself, but the baby, he begun to beller, an' then I forgot 'em all, an' I got up a-holdin' the poor young un close up agin my breast, an' I didn't care fer none o' them air grand folks; I jest sung low to him an' went out o' the hall through the be-yut-iful curtain o' roses. I sung low:

" 'Thar, thar, Nancy's poor baby, don't cry!' "

The old woman had folded her arms into a cradle over her withered bosom, and she sat there rocking back and forth, murmuring over and over again:

" Thar, thar, Nancy's poor baby, don't cry!"

God's Puppy snuggled close to Imogene, and looked at the girl in questioning awe. Imogene smiled a reassuring smile, and laid her hand on the child's head. The skiff

sailed softly out of the mouth of the river into the slightly ruffled waters of the Bay. Pepperidge Hall was left behind now, and also the old cannon which alone marked the level grave of Fort Fanning, but Pepperidge Point stretched its low and lonely length to the eastward, like a forbidding arm, across the waters of the Bay. To westward they swept as far as the eye could see —the sparkling, blue waters, with fleets of white sails in the distance and, here and there, a single sail near by. Straight ahead, to the southward, the dunes of Fire lsland Beach rose from out the blue water, glistening white in some places and emerald green in others under the glare of the high noon.

"Did the bad folkses kill g'anny's baby?" asked God's Puppy, after a long silence.

Imogene paused before she answered, then she said, half choking with pain and rage and shame:

"Granny's baby is our own little father, and that is why we all hate the Manor."

"Seven sons an' one darter," burst out the mad old woman — "seven sons an' one darter, an' they all hate the Manor. I brung 'em up so. Barnabas, he give Daddy Danes somethin' this mornin'. He give him somethin'. I see him. Ef 'twa'n't a ring, what was it? What was it? What was it?"

III

In Daddy Danes's Store

DADDY DANES prided himself on having made no very noticeable changes in the interior of his store since the day he came of age and entered into his birthright. It was as old-fashioned as old-fashioned could be, and it made you think of his wife's, Pernelia Betsy Danes's, skirt pattern, which she called her Old Reliable. Pernelia B. was postmistress, and she kept the post-office, which, in outward effects, consisted of a home-made white desk, crowned with a crown of pigeon-holes for letters, and a large cretonne scrap-basket for second-class matter, apart from the store, locked up in her spick-and-span, hair-clothy front-room. This circumstance might have seemed to reflect on the character of her husband, but when, in the eyes of his neighbors, a man has no character left at the honorable age of eighty, what does his wife's unconscious testimony signify?

"Anybody 'd rob flour-barrels would rob the dead," Old Gol was wont to say of him, as the worst possible reflection that could be made against any man; for years ago Daddy Danes used to give such scant measure in flour that all Meadowneck refused to patronize his flour-barrels, and Daddy, being forced to the conclusion that the staff of life had changed its nature in Meadowneck, had given up keeping flour in stock.

"I should think," Old Gol would say at another time," that them air barrels o' gold a-saggin' down the garret floor 'd weigh turrible hard on his conscience—ef he's got one. Gol! They say he made the most o' it a-sellin' rum on the sly long 'bout the time ol' Fannin' die o' ap'plexy. But, gol! Pernelia B., she says:

" 'Laws, what shollerness! Them air barrels is full o' wills an' things Daddy wrote when he was not'ry public.' Gol! I'd give a good deal to go through 'em. Might find somethin' that wouldn't hurt Mad Nancy. Gol!"

Yet whatever his little world had come to think of Daddy Danes during the fourscore years that had passed over his head, and however grudgingly the people put any of their hard-earned money into his pockets nowadays, the men of Meadowneck still made the old store their club-room, and rarely failed to drift in after supper to discuss the happenings of the day around the corpulent, white-girdled stove—to take their seats on the hard benches that flanked the stove, cross their legs luxuriously, pull at their pipes, and say :

"Waal, Daddy, what's the news?"

Whenever there was any news worthy of discussion the door that led into Pernelia B.'s livingroom was sure to be slightly ajar, and had you happened to visit the store on the evening of this same day in May, you would not have failed to notice that the door in

question was on an attentive crack; for there had not been so much excitement in the "settin'-corner" for fifty years, "come next month." Pernelia B.'s son-in-law, Pepperidge Oakes, had been arrested that very afternoon by Barnabas Fanning's granddaughter's new watchman.

"Things is come to a pretty pass, now, I tell you!" Heman Floyd, the youngest and most energetic man in the group around the stove, was declaring. "Things is come to a pretty pass when a man's arrested for a-liftin' his own eel-pots, now, I tell you!"

Old Gol Biggs, the net-mender, sitting on the soap-box and blinking thirty times a minute, drawled out in reply, for his tongue was as slow as his eyelids were quick:

"Cynthy hain't nawthin' but a gal. G-o-o-ol, you can't 'spect her to allers show good jedgment."

"Huuum!" retorted Daddy Danes, with an extra screw of his lips. "S'pose she is a gal, she's man 'nough to go a-lawin' it, an' to do her own speakin' to boot."

He that was called "Petticoat Eli" by his neighbors, and Elias Seaman by his wife, gurgled to himself after the fashion of giggling girlhood, then, still grinning, amiably put in his word:

"Lawsey met I can't never git ust to it, nohow. Cynthy Fannin' a woman lawyeress! Her as was a leetle gal a-runnin' around here in pig-tails a-go'n to school to Nancy's grandson and yourn, Prince Oakes, Daddy; an' so mad all the time 'cause she had to go to school to him that she tormented the life out'n him. An' Marty says, she says, says she, that 'twas Cynthy that drove Prince away from Meaderneck. 'Thar hain't no hate like lovin' hate,' Marty says, says she, though what she means I dunno."

Daddy Danes's mouth and nose did some rapid work just then, and the old man retorted with no little resentment:

"Drove Prince away! Cynthy Fannin' did. That chit of a gal. Prince hated her jest same as he hates all the Fannin's. S'pose a boy what showed his grit in gittin' an eddication 'd be skered of a half-grown gal? Why, you don't know Princey. Jest 'fore he took them air school-commissoner's 'zaminations, an' had to study nights to git ready, he ust to take a lantern an' go out back thar an lay down with his books in the grass so the mosquiters'd keep him awake. 'Lovin' hate!'—who
ever heerd tell o' sech a thing?

Daddy Danes did some more outraged snuffing, then he asserted, triumphantly:

"Prince Oakes had his name in the paper day 'fore yis'day. He's perfessor o'—o'—o' pe-dog-ody." "Lawsey me, what's that?"

“Imogene says, says she, as it’s larnin’ school - teachers how to larn scholars to larn their lessons. Now I guess the boy’s up in the world! He ust to say to me, ‘Grandaddy, I’ll show ‘em I kin do somethin’, ef pop did name me sech a fool name.’ He never could stummick that name, ‘Prince o’ Orange’—an’ she was a fust-class vessel, too.”

“G-o-o-ol!” said Biggs. “It’s more ‘n I kin understand, how a man dast to tempt Providence by a-namin’ all his young uns arter wrecks along shore. I shouldn’t never look fer ‘em to find ca’m sailin’ nohow in this here life, an’ I shouldn’t be surprised ef they all floundered in the breakers sooner or later. G-o-o-ol!”

“Oh, come now, Cap’n Golly,” remonstrated Heman Floyd; “names don’t count, now I tell you. Jest see Jim Smith’s family, for instance: there was George Washington Smith—he’s in Riverhead jail for a-lickin’ his wife; an’ there’s Napoleon Bonaparte Smith, an’ out-an’-out idjit. Now I tell you, after that, I hain’t a-layin’ no stock in names.”

Elias Seaman gently led the conversation back to Cynthia Fanning by remarking:

“I wonder what Prince would say ef he knowed ‘bout his old scholar, Cynthy, ‘restin’ his pop. Guess he hain’t kept up no very lively ‘quaintance with his folks to the Beach, has he, Daddy? Lawsey me, that’s jest like folks when they git up in the world a little. I wonder what he’d say to see Cynthy with a lawyer’s diploma, elocutin’ in a court o’ jestice, an’ a-sayin’ to us Meaderneckers what watched her grow up:

“‘Ponsopogue River belongs to the Manor. The fust feller what takes a mummy out’n it ‘thout payin’ me twenty-five dollars a year in advance'll be arrested.’ Lawsey me! Why, my grandfather —an’ yourn, tew, Daddy Danes—ust to ketch fish in the river free gratis, an’ no ’pologies to the Manor, neither.”

“Yes-yes,” asserted Daddy Danes, screwing his nose well to one side, and adding, somewhat mysteriously, “ They don’t want to forget that the river rises in that air duck-pond up to the poor-house, neither.”

“G-o-o-ol!” drawled out the blinking old netmender. “Gol! Cynthy’s a-carryin’ things with a high hand, but, g-o-o-ol! she’s been hard put tew, Cynthy has, by them air Pepper Oakeses. Don’t care ef they be your folks, more or less, Daddy Danes—did you ever know them to pay a penny on an oyster-lot or a clam-bed? But you’d think they owned the East Bay, ‘stid o’ Cuss Fannin’, or the town, or whoever Cynthy makes out does own it in the end.”

It was after the incident of the curse that Barnabas had come to be known almost exclusively as Cuss, or Curse, Fanning.

"Cuss Fannin'," retorted Daddy Danes, actually forgetting his facial twisting in his wrath—"Cuss Fannin', nor the town, neither, hain't got no more right to the East Bay 'n Nancy's folks."

It was rarely that Daddy Danes spoke so openly, and, now that the words were out, he looked as if he wished them unsaid. Old Gol stopped blinking for the space of a moment, and tried to make Daddy Danes look him square in the eye as he rejoined, with a touch of sarcasm:

"Gol! You don't say! The prop'ty wa'n't willed to Nancy, wa' it? You ought to know if 'twas."

A subdued laugh ran around the circle, while Daddy Danes scuffed down the length of the store, turned at the door, and came shuffling back again Meadowneck never could fully believe that old Colonel Fanning had hastened across the river to Danes's store that memorable day of Nancy's cursing merely for the sake of drowning his filial shame and rage in drink. The whole village still believed, deep down in its heart, that the just, stern, passionate old Colonel had gone to Danes, who was then a notary, to change his will; and yet, after Colonel Fanning's sudden death by apoplexy the next day, the only will forthcoming had been one made years before, which left the Manor property where it would have gone naturally—to the widow and the two sons.

"Now I tell you it was funny," Heman Floyd broke out, "to see Pepper Oakes a-trottin' up the road with that air young constable. The constable—he's a good feller, Bert Brown is, an' he looked as ef the job wa'n't jest to his likin'; but Cap'n Pepper, he had that funny little grin around his mouth, an' as I come up to 'em he looked me square in the eye and winked. I says: "'Waal, so long, Pepper,' says I. 'Give my respects to Square Terry, an' tell him I'll be a-comin' to pass the time o' day with him next.' "

"Oh, we'll all be thar yit," laughed Petticoat Eli. "Daddy Danes'll be kept busy a'goin' bail fer the hull o' Meaderneck. What interest you goin' to charge, Daddy?"

Daddy, screwing and snuffing again, rejoined, evasively:

"Cynthy'll go too far ef she don't look out. Thar's a limit to all things."

" Gol!" broke out Biggs, "they're land poor, them Fannin's is, an' they got to git money some whar. The chimbleys is been down even with the roof all winter. Whatever keeps them air rotten old shingles from a-takin' fire I dunno. Cynthy says she won't spend the little money she's got, an' Cuss Fannin', he's so crazy when he hain't lazy, an' so lazy when he hain't crazy, that he hain't wuth nawthin'. You know what they been a-burn in' fer firewood in them air big fireplaces all winter? An' the Manor jest alive with wood, but Cuss is too lazy to cut it. So when he begins to feel the cold in his marrers, he goes out an' lifts a rail off'n the meader fence, don't even chop it up an'

bring it in the door, but pokes the hull rail into the winder an' acrost the room till the end's in the fireplace. Then he shets the sash down onto it, an' thar's the breezes a-blowin' on your back till the rail burns away 'nough so he can haul it clear into the room. Eat up the hull fence nigh 'bout. Good thing summer's a-comin', or Cynthy an' Mis' Margaret 'd freeze to death. Gol! But one good thing 'bout Cuss Fannin' is this: he keeps our women folks from a'spectin' too much o' us. G-o-o-ol!"

"Talk about Pepper Oakes's folks!" exclaimed Daddy Danes. "They be more civilized than that air Cuss Fannin'."

"Who said they wa'n't?" asked Old Gol, with a suspicion of a smile stealing around the corners of his mouth; then, leaving Daddy Danes to sniffle-snuffle in reply, the old net-mender resumed:

"My sister Betsy is been a-livin' over to the Manor fer nigh on to fifty-three year, an' gol! what she don't know 'bout them air Fannin's hain't wuth knowin'—not that she's a hand to talk, Betsy hain't. But you know yourself how them air cousins, Cynthy an' Rob Fannin', was brought up over thar to the Manor, three miles from the nighest neighbor, an' the only thing handy to amuse 'em was all that air old truck in the house as Cynthy calls heirloams. G-o-o-ol! You can't blame the gal fer a-growin' up to think that the Manor was the fust an' the last an' the onliest thing on arth, an' in heaven above, tew."

Here Old Gol interrupted himself to open the stove door and knock the ashes out of his pipe into the low-burning fire; then, filling a fresh pipe, he went on:

"G-o-o-ol! Jest picter a little gal what should ought to be a-playin' with dolls and other jimcracks a-pokin' her nose all day long into some dirty, ragged old book, a-puzzlin' over sheepskins an' things writ two, three hundred year ago, an' though booklarners says as they spell plain United States, ord'nary folks like us couldn't read 'em no more 'n ef they was writ in Russhy. Gol! Even the very table she eat off of tasted of the ashes of her great-great- grandfather. An' she couldn't even look out'n the winder or stir her foot out'n doors but what she'd see that air old fambly graveyard. Gol! Nice place to put a graveyard—right at your front door-step! An' not only your father's and your mother's bones to remind you of the fleetin'ness of this here life, but all your kith an' kin back four, five generations. Gol! The gal ust to go out thar an' study over the writin' on them air tombstones an' then go an' set for hours an' hours an' med'tate on top o' that air old cannon whar they say a fort sot in the time of the Revulution, an' then she'd come in an' mebbe lay flat on the floor an' look over an' over old Injun deeds an' all sorts an' kinds o' things. Then, one day—it was arter Cuss Fannin' had up an' drove Rob, his own brother's grandson, out the house fer some foolish notion, an' he went way off, Lord only knows whar—Cynthy went to Yocum an' got a great big square white piece of somethin' that looked like paper-muslin, an' she turned it wrong

side out an' pinned it down to the parlor carpet; an' half the day, an' sometimes half the night, she'd lay thar a-drawin' lines on that air paper-muslin. G-o-o-ol!

"What you think she was a-doin' on? A-makin' a map o' the Manor! Gol! Betsy says the map o' Europe couldn't hol' a candle to it. She had the lines all different colors; an' the red ones, they stood for what the Manor had lost through Cuss Fannin's an' his anty-ester's shollerness.

" 'You see this here, Betsy?' Cynthy ust to say, 'an' do you see that air? Them belongs by rights to the Manor, an' I'm a-goin' to git 'em back ef we have to sue everybody an' everythin' in sight.' Gol! Them air red lines took in rivers, creeks, ponds, railroad bridges, the mill at Nor' Meaderneck what belonged to Cynthy's own grandfather on her mother's side, gov'ment houses, 'bout half the Beach, Meomogue Island, an' the Straddle Keys, put' nigh all the waters on the South Side, an' the Ponsopogue Injun Reservation to boot. G-o-o-ol!

" 'Betsy,' says I, 'she forgot the ocean.' "

The delighted Daddy Danes stretched his toothless mouth and cackled, and Gol, still blinking peacefully, resumed his drawling monologue.

"The poor, deluded gal come honest by the spirit; the Fannin's was allers high fer lawin' it. Then, all o' a suddent, she went off to Yocum one mornin' to study law with that air tow-headed Tuthill feller. Her gran'ma, Mis' Margaret, nigh 'bout dropped dead; an' Barnabas's brain, which never was much to brag on, went clean back on him, an' he says, 'Hain't no use,' says he, 'I'm a-goin' abroad,' says he, an' went a-sailin' up-stairs to the garret, where he stayed fer three weeks a-chuckin' letters out'n the winders all the time fer Betsy to pick up an' burn. They was letters, poor old Cuss thought, fer the newspapers, an' they told o' all the wonderful things he see a-voyagin' 'round the world. Wonder ef he's been abroad lately—do you know, Daddy?"

"Jest come home this mornin'," answered Daddy, screwing his nose scornfully. "But he said he was a-goin'. right back agin; Queen Victorie had sent for him."

"Lawsey me!" said Petticoat Eli. "She don't know him as well as we do!"

"But Cynthy," Gol went on, for he rarely left a story unfinished, "she kept right at it. G-o-o-ol! Snow or rain, sleet, slush, or thunder, she'd git the old roan mare out'n her stall an' ride that air six miles every blessed mornin'."

"An' she'd be a-doin' it yit," declared Daddy Danes, vindictively, "if old Jedge Brown, o' Injun Village, hadn't took a notion to help her an' up an' took her into his office."

“An’ t’other grandfather, who she’d never been allowed even to speak to, died an’ left her a little money,” added Heman Floyd. “I tell you, Cynthy’s a smart girl, an’ I’d say it if she ‘rested all Meadowneck.”

“Gol! that’s what she is ! ‘Women folks fer lawyers! Cuss Fannin’ ust to say, ‘Who ever heerd tell o’ sech a thing?’ But Cynthy says, she says, ‘The time’ll come,’ says she; an’ it has, though I never ‘spected to live to see it. G-o-o-ol! Times is changed since I was young!” And Old Gol shook his head and blinked regretfully.

“Yes-yes; lawsey me!” piped up Petticoat Eli. “We never had such late springs as this when I was a boy.”

“Times’s changed!” echoed Daddy Danes. “I should jest say they have. Why, I kin recollict the time when I ust to git ten cents fer a lead-pencil, an’ now them air school young uns ‘spects ‘em fer a penny apiece.”

Instinctively Old Gol’s eyes glanced up at the ceiling, and he thought of the traditional barrels of gold sagging down the floor above. Heman Floyd plunged his hand into his trousers pocket, jingled some change, and gently suggested to the storekeeper that he wouldn’t mind having a package of “Nigger’s Heel,” if Daddy had it to spare, whereupon Daddy Danes shuffled behind one of the counters, climbed a little step-ladder, carefully adjusted his spectacles, selected one of his many painted tin boxes, raised the lid, and, drawing out a blue paper of tobacco, remarked:

“Las’ package I got o’ that air brand. Lap Rogers an’ you ‘pear to be the only ones what smoke it, Cap’n Heman.”

“Lawsey me, Cap’n Heman,” exclaimed Petticoat Eli, “ef you hed a wife to hum, you wouldn’t smoke that air ‘Nigger’s Heel’ more ‘n onct inside the door. Marty says that fer smell, she says, says she, ‘lnjun Head’s bad ‘nough, but ‘Nigger’s Heel’ smells wuss ‘n Judas’s reputation.”

“Waal, Cap’n Eli,” good-naturedly rejoined Floyd, as he opened his paper of tobacco and out of the corner of his eye watched Daddy Danes suspiciously fingering the nickel that paid for it, “I hain’t got no wife to pick and choose my terbaccy for me. An’, I tell you, I dunno as I want one. S’pose I had the good luck to git Cynthy, now; she’d always be a-borrerin’ my pipe when I wanted it myself. “

Everybody joined in the laugh that followed except the old net-mender, who checked the blinking of his eyes with an unexpected flash and brought his foot down to the floor with an unusually energetic “ Gol!”

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“Gol!” he repeated, “Miss Cynthy’s a lady, ef she does go a-lawin’ it!”

“Waal, now, Cap’n Gol, I didn’t mean nawthin’ agin Miss Cynthy. An’ accordin’ to the papers, them air city ladies is a-gittin’ as high for smokin’ as the men folks.”

“G-o-o-ol! Times is a-changin’ fer fair, but jest as likely as not, that’s one o’ them air newspaper lies. Anyhow, Cynthy don’t smoke yit. “

At that moment the outside door opened, the bell above went ding-a-ling-a-ling, and a little boy came bashfully in, made straight for the box that stood in front of the case in which the candies were kept, climbed up on it, pointed his grimy forefinger at some bright pink confection reposing beneath the glass, and held his finger there until Daddy Danes had shuffled around to the other side of the case, when the boy whispered, confidentially:

“I want a penny’s worth o’ that an’ my mommer’s mail.”

“Be that that air Jessup boy?” called Mrs. Danes’s voice, from the sitting-room, and the lady herself pushed open the door and came bouncing in with a letter in her hand.

“Heigh-o, Johnny. Here’s a letter from Lizzie fer your ma. Posted 1 A.M. in the mornin. Liz must be a-keepin’ comp’ny down in York. She wants to look out fer them air city fellers. Folks all well? Had a dretful ax’dint in Jersey City yis’day. One man had his legs cut square off. Ef you come in in the mornin’ ‘fore school I’ll read it to you. Goin’? Waal, it is late fer you to be out. I’m ‘most s’prised your ma sent you. Now you better not eat all them air candies to-night. They’ll lay like a log in your stummick. I’d save ‘em till mornin’ ef I was you. Good-bye. Now don’t fergit to come in an’ I’ll read it to you.”

The boy, with one hand full of candies and the letter sticking in his mouth, as if he were a carrier puppy, went out rather hurriedly, and the bell jingled a lively farewell. Pernelia Betsy Danes was the bugbear of half the children in Meadowneck, and the delightful dissipation of the other half, owing to her habit of selecting all the horrors from the cheap, sensational daily paper to which Daddy Danes subscribed, and reading them to every child that entered the shop, with original comments on the vileness of mankind, the fearful dangers of this howling wilderness in which we dwell, and the frightful, far-reaching influence of Beelzebub. A timid child would go home from the store almost in spasms of terror, while the I-want-to-be-a-desperado type of boy would come out grinning like a fiend, to wake the quiet Old Neck Road with war-whoops that would have done credit to an Indian brave. Yet you must not think that Mrs. Danes realized for one moment the sinister effect of her readings on the children. Her own starved, cramped soul rejoiced in the recital of horrors, and so she believed that she was entertaining the small people in the most delightful and, perhaps, the most instructive manner possible.

Her business as postmistress having been despatched, Pernelia B. turned towards the stove and smiled her smile, which was quite as toothless as her husband's, but far more genial, upon the "setters. "

"Howdy, Cap'n Everybody. Folks all well? Goin' to the trial to-morrer, I s'pose, all of you. How d'you think it'll come out, Cap'n Gol?"

"Gol! I dunno, Mis' Pernelia B. But seems to me Cynthy 'rested Cap'n Pepper as a sort er experiment, to see ef, now that the law's give Cuss Fannin' clear title to Ponsopogue River, he an' Cynthy kin hold it."

"Now I tell you that's jest it!" exclaimed Floyd. "An' ef all Meaderneck hain't in Two Mills court room to-morrer, we deserve to lose our privileges now I tell you!"

"I'm a-goin' to shut up shop an' see the boy through," declared Daddy Danes. "An'," added Pernelia B., forcibly, "I'm a-goin' ef I have to bust my b'iler to git thar. Even ef Pepper wa'n't my son-in-lawr, I'd go jest the same, to see the disgraceful doings of that air woman lawyeress, Cynthy Fannin'."

"Lawsey me!" exclaimed Petticoat Eli, lifting his hands. "Ef my Marty was a-goin' on like Cynthy, I jest wouldn't be able to look nobody in the face."

"Whar's that air Rob Fannin', I'd like to know?" said Mrs. Danes, and Old Gol added:

"Yes-yes, sure enough; whar is he? Gol! When the boys run off fer ten years at a time, an' the grandfathers take to runnin' an ocean ferry in the garret, you can't blame the gals fer nawthin'. G-o-o-ol!

At that moment the outer door was opened again and the same little boy appeared, but this time he paused on the threshold and called, in his childish treble:

"Cap'n Golly, there's a man out here, an' he come on the last train, an' he wants you to take him over to Cuss Fannin'ses."

Captain Golly got up leisurely, and, nodding a speechless good-night to the company, sauntered slowly to the door.

"That's Rob Fannin', now I tell you!" asserted Floyd, when the bell had stopped jingling. "The station agent says that Cynthy had a telegram this mornin', an' he says he couldn't make head nor tail to it. It was signed, says he, R. F., an' it read, says he:

" 'The universe is a-movin' eastward.' "

"Waal, I think it's 'bout time!" declared Pernelia B.

IV

Pepperidge Manor

PEPPERIDGE MANOR was not the vast estate, bounded by "Maine Seas" and the Judgment Day, that had been given to one Enoch Fanning by King William and Queen Mary under the old English charter, else Cynthia Fanning would not have been setting out to sue half of Long lsland, but the boundaries of the upland had not shrunken in any degree whatsoever since the day the little foundling girl had driven, enraptured and wandering, for miles through the silence of the deep woods, and, at last, down the avenue of pepperidge trees to where Pepperidge Hall stood in stately solitude, commanding a view of both the winding river and what seemed to be the never-ending westward sweep of the waters of the Great South Bay.

Changes had, indeed, come upon the Manor, but one might as well take the blame from Providence and the Fannings in the first place by saying that if popular opinion can be trusted, they had all been wrought by Nancy's curse. They were changes that had crowded full the family graveyard, brought the reproach of barrenness upon the cradle of the Fannings, made memories of strangled hopes, of dead and gone ambitions, to haunt the halls of the mansion like the presence of never-to-be-forgotten ghosts; made—to go into such details as Barnabas had set down in his diary—made Robert Fanning's mother elope with a strolling musician when the boy was only an infant; made the only child of Barnabas Fanning's wife to pit his will against his father's, and bring the vigorous blood of the miller at North Meadowneck into the family, then die like an ingrate and leave Barnabas himself to bring up a woman lawyer! Made the crops to fail—both those of the lands and those beneath the waters; made cattle to drop dead in the fields, fences to fall, brambles and briers to run wild over the fertile lands; made the stables to totter and crumble away, and the servants' quarters, where the little Nancy had lived her dog's life, to fall into ruin, then burn to the ground; while the servants themselves dwindled down to one steady—faithful old Betsy Biggs— and one occasional, for no man-servant would stay for any length of time in the employ of Barnabas Fanning. And all this was due to Nancy's curse; none of it to Barnabas Fanning's own accursed lack of manhood—his laziness, shiftlessness, wastefulness, and, last of all, his spells of insanity!

Pepperidge Hall had been built two hundred and fifty years ago, and nothing had yet succeeded in taking away from its impression of loftiness, stateliness, and grandeur. Great pillars rose from the floors of its wide verandas to where their ceiling ran parallel with the attic eaves. Great windows, with heavy shutters thrown back amid rose-bushes and lilacs and syringas, looked out upon the heritage of the Fannings, and, like the wide-open eyes of a child, invited the whole world to come and gaze upon the mysteries of the soul within, not knowing how deep, how impenetrable are the

mysteries of a human soul, and the mystery of those generations of human souls whose earthly habitation had been within the walls of Pepperidge Manor.

There was an atmosphere of loneliness about the mansion it was impossible to escape from, and this was none the less pervasive because the whole house was filled and even crowded with rich, elegant, old time pieces of furniture. The very fact that the furnishings had come down from the long ago made the little company that now ate from the tables and sat in the chairs feel almost like interlopers. When this sensation became too great for Barnabas to bear, he went up into the attic. It had been partly responsible for the going away of Robert Fanning, who was Cynthia's cousin and the grandson of Barnabas Fanning's only brother. It had been in a great measure responsible for Cynthia's fleeing to the chilly arms of a profession. Mrs. Fanning, the hapless bride of fifty years ago, now known to Betsy and all Meadowneck as Mis' Margaret, and to Cynthia and Robert, who had never known their own mothers, as Mother Margaret—Mrs. Fanning felt this sense of loneliness and isolation more than any one else. Never since the day she saw her young husband's child at the foundling girl's breast had she felt that he belonged to her, or that the smallest portion of the Manor belonged to her. She gave him up completely and entirely from that hour, but for the sake of the name she bore before the wedding, for the sake of the little soul already promised to her keeping, she had dwelt on at the Manor, and three times a day sat down at the table opposite Barnabas, silently lifting the glass of memory and crying within her soul:

"The past: God bury it!"

She herself was like a ghost of the what-might have-been, and she wandered through the great rooms and the long halls, over the wide, dusky forests of the estate, and asked herself what was life that it should be so unreal, and if she were indeed a living, throbbing, breathing creature, or if she had died in the banquet-hall fifty years ago, and this was but her ghost playing the lady of the Manor.

Betsy Biggs alone seemed to belong thoroughly and completely to the days in which she lived, and that was probably for the wholesome reason that she was obliged to think continually on the ever present problem: What shall we have to eat?

When Robert Fanning came home after his ten years' absence, the feeling of loneliness, of unreality, met him at the very door of what had once been, and what should still have been, the hospitable hallway, and this in spite of the fact that Cynthia met him also with both hands outstretched and lips frankly raised to his. Then Mother Margaret, as slim as a girl in her white dress, as beautiful and as unreal as an angel, crowned with her crown of snow-white hair, had glided forward, laid her delicate hands upon his shoulders, and placed the faintest suggestion of a kiss on his mustache. In spite of these two sincere welcomes, Robert felt, not like a son coming back from the husks to reign in his father's house once more, but like an alien

claiming that which was not his own. Then, hanging back against the darkness of the old oak panels, he saw Betsy Biggs waiting her turn with ill-concealed impatience. The feeling of embarrassment passed, and he rushed forward to take Betsy's spare figure in his arms and give her wrinkled, blushing cheek a smack which must have made the young men ghosts chuckle.

"Gol!" ejaculated Betsy Biggs, for the "Gol" habit ran through the Biggs family. "Gol!" repeated the delighted woman. "Waal, I declare! Same old piece of sole-leather, hain't you?"

But even as she spoke, Betsy pushed him away from her in order that she might see with her own eyes the changes that the ten years' absence had wrought in Robert's face. Ah! streaks of gray about his temples, at the edge of that goodly shock of brown hair which she had combed so often; lines of weariness about the gray-blue eyes, and an indescribable look about the whole face that proclaimed the fact that Robert had indulged somewhat freely in the golden grains of corn before he fell upon the husks.

"Lemme go, Mr. Robbie," said Betsy, not without a trace of sadness beneath the lightness of her manner. "You must be hungry for the fatted calf."

Cynthia laughed, and Mother Margaret echoed the laugh in her gentle tones. Robert laughed also, but with the blood mounting his cheek.

"Where's Uncle Barnabas?" he asked; then Mrs. Fanning sighed, and it seemed as if the sigh went drifting down the hallway, to waken ghosts of sighs that lodged in every panel.

"He's up-stairs," said Cynthia, in her sound, practical way. "We'll go up and see him after supper."

Then came the supper at that small table in the great old dining- room, and from the walls a long line of ladies and lords of the Manor looked down on the three sitting there. The murmur of the sea drifted into the room, and Robert, his ears long unaccustomed to the sound, heard this murmur, like the low accompaniment of an organ, all through the chant of the conversation. The reflection of the lights in the massive old silver-service was like the twinkling of memories—memories, every one stirring the heart of Robert. In the fireplace a fire, not of fence-rails but of one gigantic pine stump, burned, and the smell of its burning was like incense to Robert's nostrils.

"You've not been cutting down the old trees?" he asked, with a touch of jealousy, however.

"No, sir!" said Cynthia, emphatically. "That one blew down two years ago. No forest on Long Island can compare with ours. Ours is a forest of Fontainebleau."

Robert looked at Cynthia and smiled. She was a large, well-formed woman, dainty and fresh in her attire, with sweet gray eyes that met your own with almost disconcerting frankness. Naturally enough there was an air of independence about her, and you could hardly conceive of her playing the part ever allotted to woman, that of the vine, while some man played the oak, and Robert had a decided preference for the clinging-vine type of woman.

Yet the memory of Cynthia's fearless kiss was on his lips, and, what was more, the memory of their parting dwelt in his mind with its last words:

"When we are married, you and I, sweet Cynthia."

Evidently, however, Cynthia was not thinking of this; her mind was full of a far more urgent matter. She had brought to the table a bunch of documents, and now she commenced to look these over while she ate, and while she also carried on an apology of a conversation with Robert and Mother Margaret.

"I am so glad, Robert, that you have come home. You can look after things a little bit here while I attend to business. I wrote you about the new watchman. He is a jewel. He arrested Pepper Oakes to-day."

"Pepper Oakes!" repeated Robert. "I thought the Oakes family was impregnable."

Mother Margaret gave him a quick, grateful look, then pretended to eat again.

"Impregnable!" echoed Cynthia, and then she pushed back her plate and launched out on a tirade against the Oakes family. She talked so fast that Robert found it difficult to follow her, and she was so positive, so convinced that her statement of the case and hers alone was the right one, that it was almost impossible not to change about all your own preconceived notions until they fitted in with hers.

Mother Margaret, with one of her faint sighs, left the table and floated out of the room into the shadows of the hallway beyond, but Robert sat still and fixed his eyes, with the faintest trace of amusement in their depths, on Cynthia. He was thinking partly of Cynthia's words, and yet, in spite of the force of her eloquence, he was also thinking how extremely pretty she looked with the color playing over her cheeks and the fire of her inward feelings lighting up her eyes. Cynthia talked on and on; she settled the Oakes family, and, leaving their case far behind, launched out on the case of the Manor versus the Universe. Gol Biggs had come very near the truth when he said that Cynthia was preparing to sue "everybody and everything in sight." So wrapped up did she become in the theme that Cynthia forgot her duty as hostess, and before the meal was finished dragged Robert into the sombre, solemn parlor, where the latest map of the Manor was indeed pinned on the floor. The girl, now fairly radiant with the

glorious excitement of riding her hobby, knelt, all unconscious of her charm, down beside the map, and catching hold of Robert's hand, made him kneel also while she pointed out this, that, and the other, which had belonged to the Manor long ago, and which she meant to bring back to the Manor in the near future. When at last she stopped talking, and paused to note the effect of all that she had said on Robert, Robert gently put his arm around her waist and said:

"Do you love me, Cynthia?"

Cynthia, somewhat abashed, laughing in spite of herself, said, in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could assume:

"Of course I do."

"Of course you do," repeated Robert, with smiling eyes. "And you remember the old promise, and will marry me when—when you get time."

Cynthia rose to her feet and looked at him as if he were something of a puzzle.

"I love you!" said Robert, and, putting both arms around her, kissed the mouth that had been hurling out such an avalanche of eloquence.

"Now, Robert, do be sensible," said Cynthia, and Robert smiled again at this woman so wonderfully wise yet so wofully ignorant. "You see," the girl went on, "I've got that Pepper Oakes case at Two Mills on to-morrow."

"Cynthia," said Robert, and whatever oaklike qualities he had came to the front now, "sit down and let me talk to you." Cynthia sat down, clasped her hands over her knees, and looked at Robert as if he were a fountain of wisdom.

"Have you forgotten the curse?" demanded Robert. Instantly whatever tendency Cynthia might have had towards playing the part of the vine vanished.

"Don't be ridiculous, Robert. A mere bugaboo story, invented by Betsy to frighten us into being good. And," went on Cynthia, with a trace of defiance that took away all her charm in the eyes of her cousin, "what if it were true? Just because a low, common work-girl chose to make a beast of herself and of my grandfather, is that any reason why we should let her innumerable family bleed us like leeches?"

Robert winced at Cynthia's words in spite of himself, and shrank slightly away from the girl.

"I am going to bring an ejectment suit next," declared Cynthia, " and oust them out of their snug harbor on the Beach."

"My dear girl," protested Robert, "do you know that in delving to acquire your fortune of knowledge you have very nearly lost the heritage of all women, which is mercy? You know very well—there is great-grandmother Fanning's diary to tell you—that Uncle Barnabas betrayed—more than betrayed—Nancy Oakes when she was an ignorant, simple-minded child of fifteen. You know that Pepper Oakes and his children, if there is such a thing as justice in the world, are as near this little Manor throne as you or I. Come, why shouldn't they occupy that miserable, God-forsaken little corner of the Manor that you call Hurricane Hollow?"

"But," cried Cynthia, "they are pirates, robbers, thieves! They overrun the place. They own the waters and the uplands. They steal right and left; shoot in and out of season; they know neither God's law nor man's."

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Robert, warming up in his turn. "Even so, how do they differ from the other baymen? Go the whole length of the South Side and you will not find one single bayman that has failed to break the laws that govern the waters. They are all pirates just as far as they dare to be. These Pepper Oakes's dare more than the others, that is all."

"All!" echoed Cynthia, indignantly.

"Yes, all! The very constable that you have after them now had constables after him last year. Ask him and see."

"You do not know Bert Brown," said Cynthia, and laughed.

"I beg you not to appear at this trial to-morrow," said Robert, earnestly. "Or, at least, not until I have interviewed these savages. Have you ever tried the powers of persuasion?"

"Powers of fiddle-sticks!" said Cynthia, then laughed again at the prospect of Robert's trying the powers of persuasion on the six men of Hurricane Hollow. "I would not touch them with the tip of my finger, or waste one word upon them; but you go, Robert! You go!"

And Cynthia laughed her confident laugh again.

But, true to his word, Robert sailed over to the Beach the next morning, cautiously anchored well to the east of the Oakes landing at Hurricane Hollow, and climbed to the top of a great dune to reconnoitre.

The sight of the ocean, spreading out from the curve of that lonely shore in all the majesty of utter loneliness, touched him more deeply than he could have dreamed. It

lay low this morning, barely purring, barely stirring in its sleep, while the mottled sky cast reflections of blue here, and reflections of gray there, all over its surface. Robert lifted his head and fairly drank in the sight with eyes and ears, with nostrils and with open mouth. Then, of a sudden, he caught his breath, and an ejaculation of surprise and delight broke from his lips, for between him and the view of the ocean had come the vision of a girl in red, riding gracefully up the side of the dune on the back of a sleek white horse.

V

The Coming of the King

NANCY was never able to remember exactly what happened after she drifted out of the banquet-hall crooning over her restless child that day, which was now fifty years ago; but she found herself, before nightfall, taken into the Danes home in Meadowneck; and there she stayed, working hard enough for her keep and the child's, until the boy had grown into a strong and sturdy youth of nineteen and married, with Danes's full consent, the twenty-four-year-old daughter of Pernelia B. by that lady's first husband. The dead man had been an intelligent, full-blooded Indian from the Ponsopogue Reservation, and his daughter, both in face and figure, bore the stamp of the race from which she had sprung. She was a brave, fearless, gigantic woman, who always acted as if she had married Pepper Oakes for the sole purpose of being a mother to him. Their children always called them "Big Mother" and "Little Pop," although Pepper's courage, when dealing with anyone but his wife, was large enough for the body of an elephant.

For a time the young couple paid rent to Daddy Danes for the privilege of living in a mean little shanty on the Old Neck Road, but as the year; went by the children came fast to Big Mother; Pepper had great difficulty in supporting them, and, to add to the trouble, Mad Nancy became so hopelessly foolish that she threatened to become a nuisance to the village. Then, after many weary consultations, the family made several wheelbarrow loads of its earthly possessions, lifted the same aboard Pepper's poor skiff, and calmly floated over to a wild and lonely spot called Hurricane Hollow, on Fire Island Beach, directly opposite Pepperidge Point, to take up its abode in a fairly respectable fisher's hut belonging to the Manor. Daddy Danes had predicted that Barnabas would not make a single word of protest, and Daddy Danes predicted true.

All these years Mad Nancy's family had used Barnabas Fanning's fisher-hut as if it were their own; had patched it up and added to it without any man's leave or license; had lived on the Manor lands without a thought of rent or taxes; had fished in the Manor waters, shot and snared and killed on the Manor estate. Was it any wonder that, urged on by Nancy's mad but eloquent teachings, they had come to look upon this as their lawful right; to feel that Barnabas Fanning would never have permitted such a condition of affairs if he had not known that it was in truth their lawful right? Was it any wonder that they were amazed beyond measure when Cynthia took matters into her strong, shapely young hands and commenced to persecute them as thieves and robbers? At first they took this as a joke, but when the climax of Little Pop's arrest came they knew that the matter had passed beyond joking. The five grown sons that were left at home polished up their guns without any definite purpose, never stopping to think that this was in itself a piratical action, and, together

with their father, boarded their sloop, *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*, and sailed to Two Mills early on the morning of the day set for the trial, although the hour was not until three o'clock.

Mad Nancy did much meaningless mumbling, took all her rings from their nest between her two feather-beds, and fell to counting them incorrectly, but with as much solemnity as if the number of rings would determine the decision of Justice Terry.

Big Mother set her firm lips with greater firmness, and busied herself with baking such substantial dainties as would make glad the weary heart of Pepper on his return from the trial.

Imogene, who always did instinctively whatever lay in her power to keep all bitterness and hint of trouble from God's Puppy's mind, took the boy into her own room and told him fairy stories.

Imogene's room, or apartment, for it had an outside door of its own, was a place strangely out of keeping with the rest of the Oakes abode, strangely out of keeping with the bleak and barren Beach, but a room whose every corner proclaimed the Oriental depths and richness, intensity and passionate possibilities of Imogene's unawakened soul. It had originally served as a cabin in that frail white yacht after which God's Puppy had been named, and which had gone to pieces almost directly opposite Hurricane Hollow; and its furnishings consisted of picturesque odds and ends that had been gathered from wrecks by the family during the years they had lived on the Beach; the walls hung with draperies that were far richer than Imogene dreamed, and which had come all the way from the East Indies only to be lost in a wreck off the Long lsland coast.

God's Puppy and Imogene sat on a quaint, old-fashioned, high-backed sofa which, if it could have spoken, might have told a history far more thrilling than any the little boy had ever heard from his sister's lips. Outside the high windows the soft,
spring rain fell gently on the sands, and murmuring low from southward came the lullaby of old Mother Ocean.

"Now, Im'zene!" said God's Puppy, "I yant to hear the story of the Yittle Wed P'incess."

Imogene was clothed in red from her bare, girlish throat to the tips of her red kid shoes, and though there was no sunshine to bring them out, the reddish lights played among the ripples of her black hair. Her eyes, very dark and very deep, yet too soft be called black, were not without a warming dash of red, her lips were a luscious scarlet, and her dark skin had its tones of red also, so that when you looked at her, and noticed not only her richness of color but also her slenderness, her lithe, untrammelled, unconscious grace, you could picture her Indian ancestors roaming, powerful and free, over their "Island of Shells."

"The story I lubb best of all," added the little boy, standing up on the sofa and putting both his hands against Imogene's breast, so that something so sweet as to be almost like pain stirred in the girl's heart, and she wondered if she could love him more if he had called her "mother."

"Tome," said the tyrant, "the story of the Yittle Wed P'incess!"

"The Little Red Princess," began Imogene, "was a very foolish little girl—"

"No-no! That ain't wight! Bad Im'zene!"

Imogene smiled, and there was a world of wistfulness in her smile. She wondered if God's Puppy would ever know that, in telling him this particular story, she was feeding her own passion for daydreams.

"Well, then, the Little Red Princess was not a green or a yellow or a pink princess, because she lived on the Beach, and once, when she was a little girl—"

"As yittle as me?"

"Yes, just as little as dear little you. She didn't have but one dress to her name, and that was just full of patches, and her mother was almost crazy wondering where she would get another dress for the little Princess to wear; and then a fairy—she was a half-bad and a half-good fairy—caused a great big storm to come up, and all the waves that came rolling in brought great big boxes—so big I And in the morning the little Princess's father and mother opened the boxes—and what do you think was in them?"

God's Puppy's eyes were as round and large as if he did not know the answer.

"Stuff to make more dresses than the little Princess could wear if she lived to be a hundred, and— now you will be surprised, but all the stuff was red. There was the glossiest silk, and soft crepe like this, and the smoothest, shiniest red cloth you ever saw. Well, that very day the little Princess's mother sat down and made her a little red dress. The Princess had never had a pretty dress before—never!—nor a dress that was brand-new, and she was so happy and so proud when she got that dress on her back that she didn't know what to do."

"What *did* she do?"

"It's very funny, but I think she cried just the wee-est little bit, and then she went and showed it to all her big brothers. She had no little brother then.

“And Prince of Orange, who lived at home then, sat studying his lessons by the kitchen fire, and he threw down the book, caught me in his arms, held me ‘way out, high up, and cried:

“ ‘Three cheers for the Little Red Princess!’ ”

“Oh!” said God’s Puppy, with a long breath of delight; then, ruefully, “Where was me?”

“You were a water-baby then, down under the big waves. Don’t you remember the story I read you?”

“O-o-oh ess!” said the little boy, curving his mouth into very solemn, delicious little puckers, and looking as if he could remember ages and ages gone by.

“Then what do you think happened the next day?” went on Imogene. “The boys went in the corner and counted over all their money, and then they went over to Two Mills and came home with a bundle all tied up with a pink string. You can never guess what was in that bundle—a pair of red shoes and a pair of red stockings!”

“Yike dose?” asked God’s Puppy, jumping down from the sofa to kneel and lift Imogene’s shapely little foot in both his chubby little hands.

“Well, not exactly. You see, they were very much smaller.”

God’s Puppy stood up, thrust out his sturdy leg, and measured his own bare, brown foot against Imogene’s shoe.

“They hain’t so ve’y big now, but I’d be ‘shamed to wear wed shoes. Boys don’t wear no shoes in summer-time.”

“Don’t wear any,” corrected Imogene. “And remember you mustn’t say ‘hain’t’; say ‘are not.’ ”

“Oh, Im’zene! G’anny says you be silly.”

“But, dear heart, you know we must do what the Prince of Orange says, and the first thing he ever wrote to me was to be careful and not say ‘hain’t.’ ”

The boy, with supreme disregard for the teachings of the absent Prince, climbed back on the sofa and said, coaxingly:

“Tell me that air jim-dandy story all ober agin.”

“Mustn’t say ‘ that air,’ dearie.”

"Oh, darn P'ince Ahwinge! I hate him!"

Imogene had much ado to keep from laughing, but she grew serious at once, and told the little fellow that he must not hate anybody on earth, which doctrine conflicted sadly with the teachings of the other grown-up folks around him.

"I kin hate the Manor, tan't I? An' dat air—I mean jest dat c'ooked, ugly old man?"

There was a deep strain of gentleness all through Imogene's nature, though where it had come from no one could have told, unless it had come down from some gentle, dead-and-gone lady of the Manor. Brought up to think gentleness but another name for weakness, the girl was very apt to chide herself for this lovable, womanly quality, so that lines of perplexity came between her eyes when God's Puppy asked his question, and to take his mind away from the subject she said:

"Shall I go on about the Little Red Princess?"

"Ess - ess! Tell me 'bout a - goin' to tool an' ev'ythin'."

"Well, when the Little Red Princess was five years old, Prince Orange said, 'She must go to school.' She didn't want to go to school a bit; she was afraid."

"Why for? I wouldn't be af'aid!"

"Well, you're a big boy, and she was just a little girl, and she was—oh, so scared that first day. But Prince, he took care of her, and wouldn't let the other boys and girls tease her; and every day after that, for a long time, Prince and I would go sailing over across the Bay, up the river to Meadowneck. And then who do you think became teacher when the Little Red Princess was about nine years old? Why, our own Prince of Orange!"

"Why don't him teach tool now?"

"He does—in a great big school in York."

"What's he stay in York fer? Why don't he tome see me? I hain't never seed him."

The sadness that ever lurked in the depths of Imogene's eyes now came to the surface, and she brooded silently for a while, watching the rain-drops coursing down the window-panes. The little boy roused her by saying:

"Waal, den, P'ince Ahwinge—is he yaller an' wound like an ahwinge? He hain't? G'anny said so! Waal, neber mind Im'zene, neber mind! Waal, den, he went away, an' the Yittle Wed P'incess was a big girl—what den?"

"She was nine years old when he went away, and though she didn't mean to be naughty, she didn't go to school much after that, because—because she was a scared-cat!"

"Why for? She hain't no scared-cat now."

Yes, "why for," Imogene? Poor Little Red Princess! After the ambitious brother had gone there was no one to shield her from the merciless, childish cruelty of her school-mates at Meadowneck, no one to keep them from taunting her because she was the granddaughter of Mad Nancy, because she lived like a barbarian on the Beach, even because she always dressed in red, and always looked as if she had stepped out of the rosy glow of some romance of the Manor. Well she remembered how Cynthia Fanning, then one of the "big girls" of the school, had, the year before her brother left, insulted and defied him slay after day, from one week's end to the other. Well she remembered how, when the brother was gone, Cynthia would pass by the little sister as if she were a wooden image or a block of stone. Never as long as she lived would the Little Red Princess forget that month alone at the Meadowneck school—never forget the relief she had felt the day she flung herself into Big Mother's arms and sobbed out the immensity of her small trouble.

"You sha'n't never go agin," Big Mother had said. "Prince has got larnin' 'nough for the hull family."

Imogene always felt that she had fallen greatly in her brother's estimation when she left the school; yet, from the far-away scenes of his own battles, Prince of Orange had found time to write her long letters of instruction and encouragement, to send her packages and even barrels of books and magazines. So it happened that Imogene, striving from the midst of her illiterate family to please its one lover of learning, had become more or less of a lover of learning herself; and although she was absurdly ignorant of any world outside her home on the Beach, outside the Manor and the little hamlet of Meadowneck, pitifully ignorant of any passions save those she herself had experienced and those which swayed her own lawless people, still, her outlook on life and her education was not half so narrow as the outlook and education of many a girl that had finished the course prescribed by the trustees of the little district school in Meadowneck.

"I think," said Imogene, at length, "that it is going to stop raining, Puppy boy."

"Oh, zen we'll go out an' see ef the Ting's a-tomin'! Tell me 'bout the Ting!"

And now they had come to the part of the story that was all make-believe, but the part that the Little Red Princess lived over and over each day—the part that made her voice caressing and tender, the part that made the color come and go in her rich, dark face, the part that made the girl draw God's Puppy very close, so close that he could hear the beating of her heart.

"The King lived in a far-away country. He didn't know anything about the Little Red Princess at all, but she knew about him, because the fairies had told her in dreams. She knew that he was great and good and big and strong; and she knew that some day he would come and find her waiting for him, and he would take her hand in his and say:

" 'Come, Little Red Princess. I make you my Queen.' And she would kneel down at his feet, and he would put the loveliest gold crown on her head. Then they would go away in a great, big, beautiful ship, 'way, 'way round the world, so he could show her everything and teach her all that she did not know, until at last he had made the Little Red Princess so great and wise that he need not be ashamed to take her home to his kingdom and show her to his people, that they, too, might crown her Queen."

The voice of the Little Red Princess had sunk very low, and her crimson cheek was pressed close against the head of God's Puppy. Both the boy and the girl had been so interested in the telling of the story—in the telling of this world-old dream of open or noticed Mad Nancy steal into the room. A sobbing sound from the old woman's lips caused Imogene to start up suddenly, to see Nancy standing there wringing her hands and weeping. Imogene was strangely shocked, horrified at this ending of her story, and, moreover, a strong sense of fore-boding took possession of the girl.

"What is it, granny, dear?"

" I lost a ring—I lost a ring—I lost a ring!"

" Oh no, you haven't, granny. Go back and count them again."

The old woman turned towards the door by which she had entered and went slowly out of the room, still wringing her hands and weeping.

"Ima says, 'Count 'em agin—count 'em agin.' But she dunno how I lost it. She's young yet— she dunno—she dunno."

Imogene shuddered, she could not have told why, and laid her head on the arm of the couch, but God's Puppy had made a discovery that set him shouting for joy.

"The sun's a-shinin'! The sun's a-shinin'! Im'zene, jes' wait a minute an' I'll git the horsey an' we'll go out an' find the Ting!"

Without waiting for an answer, he ran as fast as his short little legs could carry him to the door, kicked it open, and disappeared. Ten minutes later they were out on the sands together—he, Imogene, and the cheerful old white horse, which years before, in some solitary ramble on the Beach, had found and drunk from the horse's fountain of perpetual youth.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Imogene, once more allowing herself to play as heartily as if she were playing true.

"Up on the gate, high hill. We kin see the osun an' the bay bofe dere, an' all the Ting's boats. Oo det on Salty's back an' I'll yead him, 'tause g'anny says he's f'isky to-day."

Imogene smiled at the little boy's enthusiasm as she put her foot into the stirrup and leaped up into the old-fashioned saddle. The child held fast on the bridle, the sage old horse walking delicately, as if he were afraid of getting ahead of God's Puppy. Imogene felt her heart throb with excitement, as if after all, the dream might be coming true. From the kitchen doorway Mad Nancy watched them go slowly across the sweep of sand and start up the side of the great dune that sheltered Hurricane Hollow on the east.

The long, lank beach-grass drooped with the weight of rain-drops, the wet sand stuck in the crevices of God's Puppy's little feet; but what did he care? The sun was shining, the surf was singing low, and Imogene's King was coming at last—at last! The child broke into a song that struck him as appropriate to the occasion:

"Pussy cat, pussy cat, where hab oo been?
I've been to Yundon to see the Tween!"

There was no particular tune, but the dear, sweet little voice was running over with joy, so that Imogene laughed for very joy to hear it—

"Pussy cat, pussy cat, what—?"

They were half-way up the dune now. Suddenly the child's feet and voice both stopped short; the wise old horse halted in his turn, and, bending his neck, leisurely began to nibble at the coarse grass.

Imogene looked up in surprise—looked up the sloping side of the dune until her eyes fell upon a tall, manly figure that had appeared at the top. Her heart gave one great leap; she pressed her hand against it and whispered: "The King!"

The little boy dropped the bridle and ran pell-mell up the side of the dune, crying at the top of his voice:

“The Ting! The Ting! The Ting hab come!”

Robert Fanning, unconscious of his royal estate, came slowly and thoughtfully down to meet the child, his eye all the while on the figure in red that sat the white horse so gracefully, his mind asking itself how he could have forgotten the fact that there was a girl in the Oakes family.

“What is it, old chap?” he asked, lifting the dauntless little fellow in his arms.

“Whar’s oor c’own?” demanded God’s Puppy.

“The Yittle Wed P’incess is been a-waitin’ for oo eber since I was bawned!”

VI

The Heart of the Little Red Princess

SHE looked the Little Red Princess from her head to her heels when the King came striding down the dune with the little boy perched on his shoulder, and the King himself was a goodly sight that day in the proud might of his manhood. There was none of the weariness left in his eyes, none of the languor in his movements. He came like a conqueror. He came straight to the Little Red Princess, sitting dumb and motionless on the white horse; he passed his hand over the horse's neck, and, looking full into the Little Red Princess's eyes, he said: "I did not expect such a welcome."

His voice was low and deep, and his tones fell upon Imogene's consciousness like the touch of a lingering caress. Her shy eyes drooped shyIy, and, without realizing what she did, she, too, placed her hand on the horse's neck, as if for support, and the two hands lay there close together—Robert's full, large white hand, and Imogene's shapely little brown one.

God's Puppy, sitting aloft on the King's shoulder, ran his fingers through the silky, brown hair, fringed with white at the temples; for Robert's head was bare.

"Whar's oor c'own?" asked the child, and the King saw a blush steal from Imogene's round, girlish throat, until it found hiding in the rippled edges of her red-black hair. The King smiled to see the blush, and now his hand stole gently up to where Imogene's rested on the neck of the white horse, and he murmured: "Is this the Little Red Princess?"

Imogene's hand turned until her fingers curved upward to meet the downward curve of his, and she cried, wonderingly:

"How did you know?"

And God's Puppy, who had all unconsciously been the betrayer, sat on the King's shoulder, pounding his kingly head and crying:

"Whar's the c'own? Whar's the c'own?"

Imogene's hand fluttered quickly out of the clasp of the King's, and the King lifted God's Puppy from his shoulder to the ground.

"What is your name, old chap?" said Robert.

"Dod's Puppy," answered the little boy, without a moment's hesitation; then rattled out the lesson taught him at great pains by his proud father: "I tame on the Fo'th ob

July in a tubble fog. The Cap'n, he was a yand-yubber. Nobody d'ownded. Ebybody sabed. I went to pieces, an' Im'zene, she's dot my tabin for her woom. Ain't us, Im'zene?"

The King was evidently fond of children, for he had knelt on the sand during this recital, holding God's Puppy wriggling in his arms. Robert's eyes shone like stars, and his lips were parted in the smile that had won favor in more worldly courts than the court of the Little Red Princess.

"There, God's Puppy," said he, "run and play while I talk to your sister."

The child, nothing loath, went trudging up to the top of the dune, while the man turned to the girl and asked:

"Were you named after a vessel, also?"

"Yes; the Imogene Smith."

The girl's hand had begun to finger the bridle nervously, and Robert, quick to note this, and also that they might be observed from the house in the hollow, slipped his arm through the bridle, and, without stopping to ask leave, started slowly up the side of the dune.

"I prefer to call you Little Red Princess, if I may," said he, and again his voice was like a lingering caress. "It suits you. By Jove, it suits you!"

The Little Red Princess, surprised at his sudden vehemence, looked up quickly. Robert's head bent until his eyes were level with hers; and his eyes were very pleasant, very full of tenderness when he smiled. There was that in the smile that took the girl's mind back to her chamber of dreams, and she could see herself sitting there on the quaint old sofa with God's Puppy, and in thought she could hear her own prophetic voice saying:

"The King was great and good and big and strong, and she knew that some day he would come and find her waiting for him, and he would take her hand in his and say:

" 'Come, Little Red Princess. I make you my Queen!' "

A mist came before Imogene's eyes. She leaned forward on the horse, and her head bent so low that her face was covered by the cloud of hair.

"I am glad I please you," she said, softly.

Oh, foolish, foolish Little Red Princess!

Beneath the fluttering red crepe of her gown the heart of the Little Red Princess was calling:

“My King! My King! My King!"

VII

Dreaming and Drifting

CYNTHIA, persuaded by Robert, did not appear at the trial before Justice Terry at Two Mills, and the quietly conducted case ended with Pepper Oakes being fined ten dollars. Then did the Oakes family wax furious and let their passions run riot. If the Manor was going to refuse them their rights, they would make wrong right by stealing from everybody else. On stormy days and dark nights *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* would go coursing over the waves, and afterwards there would be told in the old store how this man's eel-pots had been lifted and that man's nets had been run, and how strange it was that the Oakes family always had more fish and eels and turtles and crabs to send to New York than any other bayman.

As the days went by, Mad Nancy became more wrapped up in her rings than ever, and for hours at a time she would sit out on the sunny sands with her lap full of brass rings, her bare, lean hands bathing in their glitter. She spoke little, and the refrain of almost all she said was:

"Barnabas Fannin', he give Daddy Danes somethin'. Ef it wa'n't a ring, what was it?"

At times a look of shrewd intelligence would come into Mad Nancy's eyes, and she would open her mouth as if the answer to the question were on the tip of her tongue; but the light would go out almost at once, and she would fall to bathing her hands in her wealth of poor rings again.

The dream of the Little Red Princess lasted for two months: through the blossom-breaking, magicmaking month of May on into the rare, sweet days of June, when wild sweet-peas clothed the dunesides in purple, and wild roses blushed in the hollows of the hills, while over across the Bay, in the Manor gardens, sweetness and beauty and fragrance ran wild among the brambles. In Meadowneck it was the same. You went down the Old Neck Road with your soul steeped in sweet odors, your heart so filled with the delight of living that you scarcely felt the plain, hard earth beneath your feet. You looked upon the winding river as if it were a marvelous blue ribbon fluttering down from the robe of heaven. You paddled up the twisted stream and went stealing beneath jealous, sheltering boughs, along the creeks and brooks that run through the Manor grounds out into the waters of the Ponsopogue. You crushed the sweet fern in your hand, and, breathing its perfume, wondered at the more delicate beauty of its less fragrant sisters; you reached up and stroked the gray beards of moss that hung from the trees; you surprised flocks of wild ducks resting on the still surface of the water; you heard coveys of birds start out of the branches and go whirring over your head. Cotton-tailed rabbits leaped high at the sight of you; squirrels, red and gray, perched on old logs and flaunted their bushy tails fearlessly in your face. Now and

then a deer would come stalking slowly through the forest, look you straight in the eye, with a look that plainly said:

“Brother, you are welcome!”

And all through you could hear the music of the waters—the gurgling of the brooks, the shoo-ah-shoo! of the Bay, the lapping of the little river waves, the deep bass of the ocean. Even the forest itself seemed to sing the same surging song of the sea.

Robert was learning to live all over again. He had forgotten that he had forgotten how to live. When he came back to the Manor he had said to himself:

“Here I am, weary of the world, no better, no worse than the average man, and before I do get worse I’ll marry Cynthia, and rear children that shall spend their lives to better advantage than I have spent mine.”

Then, lo and behold — he met the Little Red Princess, who was totally unlike any other woman he had seen, who appealed to every side of his manysided nature, who immediately put out her hand and placed a crown upon the head of this man who counted himself no better, no worse, than any other man. Robert would actually raise his hand to his head to feel if it were not crowned with something perceptible to the touch! He never found anything besides his own hair, but the feeling that there was something tangible on the top of his head haunted him almost as persistently as the ghosts haunted Pepperidge Hall. One day Cynthia started to hear him mutter:

“ ‘Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.’ ”

“How do you know?” she asked, with a whimsical smile.

“I ought to know,” rejoined Robert, and Cynthia wondered if insanity were going to run through the family.

Robert reflected that a man with a crown had no business to be leading the double life that he was leading. Of course, when he was out in the world — no better, no worse, than any other man — it did not matter how many women he made love to; but here, in his own kingdom, it was very different. He knew that he ought to tell the Little Red Princess that he was betrothed to Cynthia; he knew that he ought to tell Cynthia of his many meetings with Imogene; but, instead, he went on meeting Imogene over on the Beach, and also along the brook-sides of the Manor. Every time he came within sight of the dainty little red figure, the dreamily happy face, he would feel such a tugging at his heart as he had never felt in any other presence, and he would long to kneel down at Imogene’s feet and say, in the words that God’s Puppy had put into his mouth:

“Come, Little Red Princess. I make you my Queen.”

But she was only the princess of a little tribe of savages, and he had chosen Cynthia for his queen when Cynthia was scarcely more than a royal infant. After a while, when Imogene’s heart had become more and more closely entwined around his, Robert stopped wondering whether he could break away or not, stopped wondering whether he was worthy to wear the crown or not, and said to himself instead:

“What are these beautiful June days for but for drifting and dreaming? I will dream and drift with my Little Red Princess.”

Poor Little Red Princess! In truth, she was drifting and dreaming, but without the knowledge that all who dream must some time wake, and all who drift must some day run ashore, if not go under. Imogene was neither protected nor restrained by her own people; she had always been free to come and go as she pleased; her whims and God’s Puppy’s pleasure had been her law, and this summer she was more free than ever, for the reason that her father and her brothers were too wrapped up in the new phases of their illegitimate business to stop to ask if life had come to have anew meaning for Imogene.

Big Mother was far too busy baking and stewing to care what her daughter did so long as the girl kept God’s Puppy out of the way and attended to the family sewing, for Big Mother would never allow the Little Red Princess in the kitchen, and, having a horror of the needle herself, she thought that Imogene did her full share when she took the making of their simple garments upon herself. Had anyone suggested to Mrs. Oakes that Imogene was in any danger going as she pleased over Beach and waters, Big Mother would have doubled her fists and knocked down the informer. If anyone had said, “Your daughter is meeting Robert Fanning in secret,” Mrs. Oakes would have been as astounded as if some one had told her that Mad Nancy and Barnabas had met and kissed on the Old Neck Road. For had not Big Mother mixed the gall of hatred towards the Manor in her mother’s milk when Imogene took her sustenance at that broad breast? Was not that hatred a vital part of Imogene’s nature? Did not Imogene always have with her the little child, who, whenever the Manor was mentioned, would grate his teeth, clench his fists, and scream:

“I hate the Manor! Cuss ‘em! Cuss ‘em!”

One day God’s Puppy said this in the presence of the King, and the King was dumfounded. Imogene caught the child to her, begging him to hush, while she looked up at Robert with a world of pleading in her eyes.

“He does not know who you really are, or what he says. He is a child,” she explained, hurriedly.

“Who taught him?” demanded Robert.

“Our poor grandmother,” said Imogene; then added, almost in a whisper, “She taught us all.”

There was a moment’s silence; then Robert spoke with a frown on his brow, and his face flushed with shame.

“She had reason to teach you so. But,” he added, with fierce joy, “you do not hate me!”

That night, when he found himself alone in his room at Pepperidge Hall, Robert went up to the mirror and said to the reflection gazing sternly back at him:

“Is there to be another Barnabas Fanning— another Mad Nancy? Old man, what are you up to, anyway? The crown that she put on your head—would you lose it?”

Then Robert went to the window, and, looking across the blackness of the night to where the lights burned at Hurricane Hollow, he answered himself after the manner of the man of the world that was beneath the crown.

“Don’t bother me! What harm have I done? Lord bless me, I’ve never kissed her! She is like quicksilver to the touch. She is as far away from me—and that—as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow path.”

But for three days thereafter Robert did not go to the Beach, did not go to the other trysting-place at the brook-side. On the fourth day, however, he followed his heart and went wandering up the rainbow path once more.

He was as free to come and go as the Little Red Princess, for Cynthia was not home half the time, and she had said to him at the beginning:

“There are the guns, boats, fishing-tackle—anything you want—only don’t bother me.”

So Robert had left her to ride her hobby, taking care, however, always to be on hand whenever Cynthia was ready to draw rein, to jump somewhat breathlessly down to his level and look at him with such a longing for rest in her sweet eyes that he could not forbear putting his arm around the girl and drawing her head to his shoulder. He loved his cousin sincerely, even more than he loved Mother Margaret, and he could not be near either the one or the other without playing the lover. To both women it was inexpressibly sweet to have this “boy,” as they called him, come into their lives once more, and, had it not been for the deeper, more passionate love for Imogene that overmastered Robert, he would have been true in thought and deed to Cynthia.

July came, and, the garret glowing red-hot under the eaves, Barnabas decided that he would spend the remainder of the summer on his native shores. So Robert, together with shrinking Mother Margaret and the scarcely less sensitive Cynthia, had the pleasure of Barnabas's presence in the house and in the gardens, all over the place, from one day's end to the other. Barnabas was unusually unhappy that summer, and the only comfort that he took in life seemed to be in roaming around the white graveyard and summing up on the sides of the tombstones all the catastrophes that had come upon the Manor since the day of Nancy's cursing. At the end he would add:

"And then Nancy said, 'Barnabas shall be a beggar, with no place to lay his head!' "

After which he would wash away the memoranda and start over again, finishing invariably with:

"Barnabas shall be a beggar, with no place to lay his head!"

To Robert, who had been free from the old man's immediate influence so many years, this was uncanny, horrible. So he went more and more to see Imogene, although, when one stopped to think of it, she was the granddaughter of this miserable, wretched, fate-fearing old man.

And all the while the Little Red Princess dreamed on, catching happiness as the waves catch and reflect the light and the sunshine, never seeming to think of the days when the light would go out and the waves would be tortured by the tumult of the storm. At length Robert determined that he would be a selfish wretch no longer; he would tell her of his engagement; only before he told her he stipulated to himself he should have one hour alone with Imogene—one hour when not even God's Puppy should share in her attentions. So one day he begged her to go for a moonlight sail with him the next night, after she had put God's Puppy to bed.

"Yes," said the Little Red Princess, "I will!" and looked up into her King's face with a smile that made him feel like a monarch abusing his precious rights.

VIII

In Old Gol's Net-Shop

HAD you happened to pass Old Gol's net-shop on that same evening set for Imogene's sail with Robert, you might have judged from the dimness of the shop-light that Old Gol had company; and had you peeked through the cobweb-curtained windows you would have seen Petticoat Eli, Heman Carman, and three or four other men gathered around Old Gol.

The net-shop stood by itself under a twisted old apple-tree in the rear of the Biggs homestead, and, although the shop was no larger than Mrs. Gol's kitchen extension, that lady declared that her husband set more store by his shop than he did by the whole house. Outside the shop was a propped-up, gray-shingled old shanty; inside it bore the appearance of some sea-witch's haunt after a furious, helter-skelter sort of revel. An immense black pot for boiling tar stood beside the stove, which stove was rusty enough to have been hauled out of the deep; fish-nets of every kind and description, in every state of making or of decay, hung from the rafters, or stretched along the walls, or lay in helpless heaps all over the floor: fish-fykes and eel-fykes were piled in the corners; two or three generations of oilskins and sou'westers hung on the walls; oars, poles, oyster-tongs, and clam-tongs rested on the rafters; there were barrels, boxes, scap-nets, eelpots, fishing-rods, sail-cloth—everything you could ask for, Old Gol used to say, but a second-hand pulpit. There was a look and a smell of the water everywhere. Along the beams three lanterns hung, and whenever Old Gol worked in the shop at night all three of the lanterns would be lighted. But when he had company—the kind of company that would interrupt his work—Old Gol would gravely blow out two of the lights, leaving only the one that hung over the witchlike caldron. This would throw a circle of light around the caldron and leave the corners of the shop in shadowy darkness, as they were on this occasion.

Old Gol sat on a bunch of nets leaning against the cold, black tar-pot, smoking a leisurely pipe, and blinking with bewildering regularity All of the other men bore an air of excitement somewhat unusual for the people of steady old Meadowneck, but Old Gol looked in no way ruffled or disturbed. He was the kind of man who, when he misses a train, says, "Waal, there's another, hain't they?" You never could persuade him to appoint a specified time for anything; one hour was as good as another to him. "Got all the time there is," was one of his favorite expressions.

"Cap'n Golly," Heman Carman was saying, urgently, "don't you think it's time we was a-startin'? Now, I tell you, that storm is gittin' nearer an' nearer. Hear her a-rumblin' off there in the nor'east."

Captain Golly blinked, took a long pull at his pipe, then, lifting the stem out of his mouth, rejoined:

"Got all night, hain't we? G-o-o-ol! Moon'll go down ef we wait long 'nough."

"Lawsey me!" exclaimed Petticoat Eli. "I don't b'lieve there's a-goin' to be no storm, after all. Sounds to me as ef 'twas sneakin' off towards the Sound. Marty says that for put-her-offitiveness, there hain't nawthin' to beat men folks. 'Do you 'spose,' says she, 'that ef Mad Nancy an' Imogene an' Floranthy Oakes come around stealin' my bread every time I sot a fresh batch to cool out on the back stoop that I'd wait for a thunder-storm 'fore I'd git out the shot-gun? No, sirree!' Marty's dretful sot in her 'pinions; lawsey me!"

"Marty's like all the rest o' the women folks," rejoined Old Gol. " G-o-o-ol! my old woman says that ef she wore the pants them Pepper Oakeses wouldn't steal the bread out o' our mouths an' then set down and eat it in peace and exclusion, but g-o-o-ol! Look at Cynthy! She can't do nawthin' with 'em, neither, an' her the brain-box of the hull South Side, an' with money to hire a private watchman besides G-o-o-ol!"

"Do you know what I heard?" spoke up another man, who stood at the dusky edge of the circle. "Hy guy! I heard that Rob Fannin', he's got Mad Nancy and the curse on his brain, an' he sorter holds Cynthy back; an' then I heard tell—though it wouldn't do to tell where I heard it—I heard that one day Cuss Fannin' took Bert Brown to one side an' he says to him, he says, says he:

" 'Never mind what Cynthy says; you leave them air Pepper Oakeses alone!' Hy guy, I dunno! Seems to me, when you come down to the p'int of it, that it's the Manor's to blame more 'n them Hurricane Holler pirates. What's Cuss Fannin' mean, anyhow? Ef he feels he owes Mad Nance anything, why in thunder didn't he pension her off long 'go, so's she could of brought up Cap'n Pepper's younguns like white folks ? That's what I want to know!"

Old Gol looked reflective, and for some moments there was silence in the shop, then Biggs drawled out:

"G-o-o-ol! The hull thing's a puzzle; but I'm willin' to bet Daddy Danes knows the answer."

Here Old Gol blinked silently for a moment, then he gave vent to that expression which he always used whenever he wanted to call up the worst that he could say of Daddy Danes.

" 'Anybody 'd rob flour barrels would rob the dead.' Him an' Cuss Fannin', they know, g-o-o-ol! by Gol! them two knows."

“But just the same,” burst out Heman Carman, “that don't cut no figure with us, now, I tell you! It don't change the facts of our case. It don't bring back the fishes into our nets. It don't give us no eels to skin. Last night I had a pretty fair mess o' eels, but I says to myself, I'll jest sot 'em out in the Bay till tomorrer, when I'll ketch 'nough more to make it worth while to send the lot to York. This mornin' I went down to my eel-car, an' what do you think I found in it? One measly little jelly-fish! Now, I tell you, that's tough luck, when it takes all you kin do to make an honest livin' yourself, pertic'larly sence we've had to pay toll to the Manor every time a fish draws his breath.”

“ Them Pepper Oakeses don't pay no toll, an' they sent off forty pounds of eels this mornin', station agent says,” asserted one of the neighbors.

“What'd I tell you?” demanded the wrathy Heman. “Last night was a clear, moonlight night, when anybody'd think his prop'ty was safe. What does the town hire bay-constables for? I've heard it stated for a fact that if any of that air Injun Village constable's friends go out a-piratin' east, he'll p'int straight west. There hain't no deefer, dumber, blinder bat a-flyin' than a bay-constable.”

“G-o-o-ol! We couldn't live ef some o' 'em wa'n't bats. Might's well own up, now we're here by ourselves,” asserted Old Gol. “There's so many durn-fool laws that a-breakin' of some o' 'em is to be expected, but them air Oakeses is got to breakin' more 'n they're a-keepin'. G-o-o-ol! don't think much of that air Injun Village constable feller, nohow. You 'member, all of you, when I was bayconstable, mebbe a dozen year ago. He had the Orphan's Neck beat then, an' I had Solomon's P'int. Waal, business was sort o' slack then, an' g-o-o-ol! you didn't want to go a-snoopin' round a-pryin' on fellers you was brought up with, an', besides, it interfered with your night's sleep. But we was 'fraid the lot-owners wouldn't see it that way; so we fixed it up between us that ef either one o' us happened to be awake when any boat come a-spyin' on us, whichever it was, him or me, would go wake the other feller up. G-o-o-ol! So, one night, I see a boat comin' along, an' I knew 'twas Barny Holmes's by the shape o' the top-mast. Barny'd had extra good luck with his oysters that year, an' he was a-lookin' out for 'em. He want't trustin'' no bay-constables. I says, 'Hello, Barny,' but he never answered. 'Hello, Barny,' I says ag'in, an' he never answered. G-o-o-ol! he wa'n't never over an' above polite! I let him by, an' then I jest sailed along lookin' for my partner. He was jest where I 'spected to find him, anchored up Orphan's River, with all his sails down, fast asleep, by golly! 'Jim!' I called. 'Jim, they're after you!' An' then he bust both cabin doors open an' come a-runnin' out, barefooted, shirt open, hair tousled, a-lookin' for all the world like Billy-be-damned! But he had a half-picked duck in his hand, an' 'fore he waited to see who I was he called out, cheerful-like:

“ 'Hullo, I was jest a-pickin' this here duck.' You see he had that air bird a-layin' all ready by his bunk, 'cause he thought he'd better be caught a-layin' off to fix his supper

than a-layin' off sound asleep. G-o-o-ol! No-no! I don't think much of no bay-constable, don't care who he be."

"Lawsey me!" exclaimed Petticoat Eli, lifting his hands in horror, and wondering what Marty would say if she had heard this evidence of Old Gol's loose principles, for Petticoat Eli had seldom been placed in the way of temptation, and had never been a bay-constable.

"That hain't nawthin'," Heman Carman avowed. "You 'member when that air Phineas Brown was a-watchin' up west, an' every night reg'lar he'd sail, big as life, out'n the creek 'long about sundown, an' soon as 'twas dark he'd come stealin' back an' go home. Folks got on to him after a while, him out o' bed. After that he slept aboard his boat o' nights, now I tell you!"

Old Gol took out his pipe, turned the bowl upside down, and gently knocked out the ashes by hitting the pipe against the side of the black pot.

"How's the weather?" said he, addressing the company in general, while he slowly rose to his feet.

"Hull sky overcast," replied a man who had made many trips of observation to the door. "'Most black 'nough for devil's work."

"G-o-o-ol! Then Cap'n Pepper's on deck. Got your guns, all of you?" asked Biggs. Hereupon every one of the others walked to the door and took his shot-gun from where he had set it against the door-jamb. Old Gol fetched his own gun from among the shadows of the darkest corner, then he raised his hand and turned out the company light. A few moments later a dark, straggling line of men, with shot-guns on their shoulders, went slowly through the yard, crossed the Old Neck Road, then slipped down the narrow lane that runs across the wide meadows from the little hamlet of Meadowneck to the shore of the Great South Bay. A black frown covered the face of the heavens; there was an ominous rumbling of thunder in the distance; over on the Beach the surf was beating and pounding steadily.

IX

A Little Sister to the Storms

ALL day long the sun had looked down from a cloudless sky through hazy veils of heat. All day long the light had been scorching, blinding, glaring on the sands. All day long the Bay had been as dead and still as a huge basin of molten lead, and there had been no life manifested in the waters of the ocean, save where the line of breakers lazily, drowsily washed the shore. All day long the weather-vane on top of the flag-pole at the Manor had pointed to the north, and the little air that had stirred had been what we of the South Side call a land breeze. The river had blinked like a lazy dog in the sun, the boats had lain idle around Ponquos Landing; even *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* had not stirred from the little dock at Hurricane Hollow. Pernelia B. hung a palm-leaf fan on the belt of her apron, and unconsciously cooled herself with the thought of the long line of heat prostrations there would be in the next day's paper. Daddy Danes had so many calls for "soft drinks " that he was kept in a perspiration shuffling to and from the well; for Danes's well was his only ice-box, and he kept the soft drinks hung over the curb on strings.

Mother Margaret grieved over Cynthia's being in New York. Barnabas reflected that if he died of the heat this day he would cheat Nancy out of a part her curse, and fail to become a beggar in this world anyway. And all day long Robert chafed for fear there would not be enough breeze that evening to carry him sailing over the waters with the Little Red Princess.

The sun went down as cloudlessly as it had risen, and man and the waters breathed again. Very lightly, very daintily the weather-vane on top of the flag-pole at the Manor waltzed around from the north to the southeast, and over at Hurricane Hollow Imogene watched the moon come dripping out of the ocean with her red face partially covered with a cloud—watched the waters come to life again, rippling and dancing by the uncertain light of the moon. Then did a cloud no larger than a horse's head appear beneath the north star; then did *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* swing away from the little dock and Robert's boat come floating down the river, both waiting for the twilight to melt into the night that each might be invisible to the other. The stars crept softly out, shivering at the sound of distant thunder.

Imogene half smothered God's Puppy in good-night kisses, then held his hand until he fell asleep and left her free to go to meet the King. Robert had ventured to tie his boat to Pepper Oakes's dock, and when Imogene came tripping along with a heavy cape thrown over her arm and a jaunty little cap perched on her head she saw the King waiting in the bow of his boat.

" At last," he whispered, seizing her hand as if it were his one grip on life. "At last!"

"Why, am I so late?" asked Imogene, lightly jumping on board and quickly withdrawing her hand, for even yet the Little Red Princess was as shy as a bird with the King. "God's Puppy wouldn't go to sleep. He is actually jealous of you. He said that he would never, never tell, but you could keep me only while he dreamed 'fee d'eams.' "

"Three dreams! Dear little chap!" murmured Robert, with a low, tender laugh, as he stooped to throw off the rope. "He knows your true worth, my Princess."

Neither spoke again until the boat was under way and they were both in the stern, Robert standing at the tiller and Imogene sitting near. Clouds were 'dying over the face of the moon; there was a rumbling and a mumbling low in the heavens; there were growling little notes in the voice of the surf; every little tongue curling out of the waters of the Bay seemed to whisper:

"Something's coming, something's coming. Wait and see, wait and see!"

The soul of the waters—that soul of many shadings, of many emotions—was restless, uneasy, vaguely afraid, and into Imogene's sensitive soul those very same feelings entered; now that she was at last alone with the King, she too was uneasy, restless, afraid of she knew not what. Nor was there any peace in Robert's mind; he felt that it would certainly kill him to have to stand there within touch of his magnetic little love and yet refrain from sweeping out his arms and drawing her to him. How was he going to tell her of his betrothal to Cynthia? How was he going to be able to say good-bye?

"It is going to storm," said Imogene, taking refuge in commonplaces; but her voice trembled slightly.

"Do you care?" demanded Robert.

"Not a bit," laughed Imogene.

"My Little Red Princess is a little sister to the storms." Imogene's heart thrilled at the stress laid on the word "my," but she laughed again, tossed her head, and drank in a breath of the rising wind.

"I love the storms; I love the sea; I love the wind! Ours is the happiest household when we can feel the cabin rock with the might of the wind, when the old surf bellows and roars, and the breakers come leaping over the bank. Robert, you would be horrified if you knew what I do sometimes in a storm."

"What do you do, dear?"

"If you call me 'dear' I won't tell you. Yes, I forgive you. Well, I put on a pair of oil-skin overalls, an oil-skin coat, and a sou'wester, and go out and fight my way through the weather. It's delightful. You men can never know what a sense of freedom it gives a woman to get away from skirts once in a while. I wish I were a man."

"Imogene, I never saw a woman with so little false modesty and so much real modesty."

"Then you are not shocked?"

"No; but I am glad the day I met you did not happen to be a stormy one. It would have been a case of the Sweet Yellow Monster instead of the Little Red Princess."

"I should not have spoken to you," declared Imogene. Whereupon they both laughed, and the sense of embarrassment and restraint passed away for the time. The boat was hugging the side of Pepperidge Point, making for the mouth of the river, and both Imogene and Robert were keeping a watchful eye on the sky.

"I wonder where *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* is," said Imogene, after a while. "The boys would kill you if they caught us, and they wouldn't leave much of me. Do you know, Robert, I never hid anything from Big Mother in my life until you came, and I would not be doing this in secret now if your name was anything but Fanning."

"There is nothing wrong about this," said Robert, quickly.

"Oh no! You would not ask me to do anything 0wrong. But suppose the boys should see us. They have all gone out again to-night. It seems to me that I have never seen things as they really are before, never stopped to reason, never taken time to think. But lately I have been wondering how it is all going to end, what is going to become of them, what"—here Imogene clasped her hands tightly together—"what is going to become of my little brother, of—of us all?"

The charm of the moonlight was upon the face of the Little Red Princess; there was a note of longing in her voice that Robert had never heard before. Pity, love, and compassion almost overcame him, and he had to grip himself hard to keep from playing the traitor to Cynthia—to keep from leaning over this frail, poor, helpless little Princess, clasping her in his arms and begging her to leave all her problems to him. Still, the man beneath the King's crown made his decision neither one way nor the other, but, seeking to parry with time, answered:

"If you have never stopped to think before, do not waste time thinking to-night. Three dreams are soon over, and I may never have you alone again —never again!"

“Never!” echoed the Little Red Princess, and in the sheltering dimness of the night she put her hand against her heart, which seemed almost to have stopped its beating. “Never?”

For one moment her head was bowed low, while the ominous rumbling of the thunder drew nearer. Then Imogene lifted her face, like the brave woman was, and spoke as softly and as evenly as if she felt no pain in the speaking. “I, also, have been thinking that this must stop. No good can come of a friendship that must be secret. You have given me much pleasure—more than you can ever know, for you were not a lonely, starving little dreamer. Yes-yes; you have made me very happy, and I thank you, but suppose that, after this sail, we say good-bye.”

A sharp gust of wind came rushing over the waters, and the soul of the waters shuddered and sighed. Anger with Imogene suddenly seized Robert. He overlooked the fact that she had given him the very opening he had prayed for, and, instead of taking advantage of it, he inwardly railed at her for sitting there so quietly and talking about their saying good-bye. He even thought that, after all, he had no proof whatever of her love for him; he went so far as to think that this ignorant, innocent child might have been playing with him. Still there was enough man left in Robert to keep him silent—to keep down all the words of loving reproach that he longed to utter. Imogene faintly echoed the sigh of wind and water. Suddenly the boat and the waters were enveloped in total darkness for a moment; then came an all-revealing flash of light.

“Look!” cried Imogene, pointing towards the mouth of the Ponsopogue, out of which a sloop was stealing. “Look! It is Bert Brown!”

“Bert Brown!” echoed the thunder, and the wind came tearing over the waters in white-capped fury Imogene involuntarily seized the tiller. Robert rushed to the bow of the sloop and began to shorten sail. The rain commenced to fall in lonely, heavy drops. Then Imogene laughed, while she felt the blood coursing faster and faster through her veins.

“I love a storm!” she cried out, when Robert returned.

“Brave little Princess!” thought Robert, but he made no reply as he drew from out of the lockers two oilskin coats and two sou’westers.

“Now for the Yellow Monster!” said he, helping Imogene into one of the coats, with hands that lingered tenderly over the task. But Imogene told him that he was slow and clumsy, and insisted upon putting on the sou’wester for herself.

“That was Bert Brown,” said she. “He’s after Little Father, and he sha’n’t get him. Let me steer. I have a notion that I know where they are. Gracious, how she scuds along! Isn’t this delightful?”

Scarcely had Imogene said this when the lightning came again, and on the west side of the mouth of the river, under the lee of the Bay's shore, they saw *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*.

"They do not see him!" cried Imogene. "They are lifting Old Gol's nets, I know. Let's race with Bert Brown. They are my people. I must warn them!"

Robert tried to take the tiller from her, warning the girl from venturing across the open waters in the storm, even laughing at the preposterous notion of his helping Cynthia's "pirates" to escape Cynthia's watchman. But the savage blood in Imogene's veins was up, and she held fast to the tiller, laughed with glee, and asked Robert to rejoice in the fact that the wind was with them. Then he, too, entered into the spirit of the game, realizing that he was not without a strain of savage blood himself, feeling how it might be possible for men to glory in being water thieves, to feel their spirits rise with the rising of the wind, to live only in the life of a storm. And all the while the sloop went scudding over the angry waves like a bird flying home against the gray of a stormy sky; she dipped her wings deep into the waters; she moaned like a creature in pain. Sometimes she careened and tottered as if her strength must go, and she would fall in the midst of her flight; then she would steady herself and skim along as if fear and terror were words without meaning to her. Imogene stood at the tiller, talking to the boat as if it were a horse, urging it on, calling:

"There, there, my beauty! Bravely done!"

Both *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* and Bert Brown's boat had taken their sails down and anchored, as could be seen by the lightning flashes. But Imogene and Robert sailed on, while the battle of the elements roared about them and the rain poured down. Lightning played in the rigging; lightning seemed hurled like fiery javelins from the sky to fall in the water all about them. Now and then Robert turned his head to see Pepperidge Hall start out from the darkness, then, as darkness succeeded lightning flash, disappear once again.

He knew that Barnabas Fanning was cowering beneath the attic eaves waiting for some new manifestation of Nancy's curse; he knew that Mother Margaret was pacing the floor in silent terror; he knew that Betsy had buried her head deep in her pillows; he knew that were his brave cousin Cynthia in this boat she would be clinging to him, half paralyzed with fear. And yet Imogene—this little slip of a girl, this child who had been all gentleness and shyness in his presence until this night— stood swaying at the tiller, laughing with sheer delight. Robert realized how truly he had spoken when he said:

"My Little Red Princess is a little sister to the storms."

He had no fear for her. The lightning would never strike that dauntless figure; the waters never stop the beating of that courageous little heart. Even the thunders seemed to call with furious tenderness to her, and she called softly back again. The boat had rushed so swiftly that almost before Robert realized it they had passed across the mouth of the river, left Bert Brown's anchored boat behind, were hugging the shore and coming close to *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*. Now, in the lightning flashes, the meadowland—the flat, low, green meadowland, with its streak of white shell road—was visible.

"Look!" cried Imogene, of a sudden, seizing Robert's arm. "Look there!" For coming down the shell road she had seen Old Gol's little army of baymen. Robert's eyes were not so quick, and he had to wait for the next flash of lightning; but then he saw what Imogene had not observed, that the men all carried something over their shoulders.

"They have guns! A battle, as I'm alive!" He took hold of Imogene, and, his strength becoming, the moment he scented real danger, greater than hers, he thrust her from the tiller and ordered her to go down into the cabin.

"I shall not!" said she, but even in that moment Imogene rejoiced, like a true woman, in Robert's tone of command. "I shall crouch down so. And you pass as close as you can to the boys, calling out to warn them. They must not see me, for then they would chase us."

Already the worst fury of the storm had passed.

Bert Brown had taken up his anchors and was moving towards *The Seven Sons and One Daughter,* as well as towards that other boat which had appeared so mysteriously. The lightning came, not in furious forks now, but in slower sheets of flame, while the thunder seemed to be retreating northward. The men of Meadowneck lined up against the shore, and, at a word from Old Gol, raised their guns to their shoulders. Pepper Oakes and his five stalwart sons were busying themselves with hauling up a net that seemed a mile long, which was full of fish, and which had been carefully made in Old Gol's net-shop for himself.

"G-o-o-ol! There's two on 'em!" exclaimed Old Gol, blinking at the lightning.

"That's Rob Fannin's boat," declared Heman Carman.

" 'Tain't!" asserted another man. "It's them pirates' skiff. One boat hain't enough for their business."

"G-o-o-ol! Waal, one—two—three—fire!" drawled Old Gol, without raising his voice so much as one degree.

It was at that moment that Robert's boat came near enough to The *Seven Sons and One Daughter* for Robert to make his voice heard, and he called out:

"Look out for the shore! Bert Brown! Look out!"

The lightning laughed fitfully, the thunder moaned:

"Look out!"

Imogene raised herself where she crouched, in the bottom of the boat, and looked over the side at *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*. Then there rang out a shot—a succession of shots—and Imogene suddenly fell backward.

With the cry of a madman Robert sprang to her and lifted her up in his arms.

"Are you hurt, sweetheart? Are you hurt?"

"No, no," she answered. "No, no!" and strove to laugh and get away from him. But he let the boat drift where it would; he covered the wet face beneath the sou'wester with kisses and kisses and kisses; he called from out of the depths of his heart:

"I love you! I love you! I love you!"

And Imogene lay still, trembling in every fibre of her being, but without responding by a single motion to one of Robert's caresses.

"And you are not hurt, my love?" he insisted.

"No; I thought you were," answered Imogene, with a nervous little laugh. Then she slipped away and took the tillcr. Shots were ringing back and forth. In the lightning flashes, now grown fainter, they could see that they had drifted some distance to the west of *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*, and that some one on the sloop was raising the sails. Bert Brown's boat hovered in the distance. Through the noise of the wind and waves and thunder they could hear the shouts and cries of the men.

"I hope none of them are hurt," said Imogene.

"The sooner we get out of it the better—for you," rejoined Robert, laying his hand over hers on the tiller.

"We can go back later," said the girl.

"Ah, can we?" asked Robert, and he wrapped his free arm around the little helmsman. "Can we? Do you see that light over there, my dear one? It is Two Mills River. Do you

know what is at the head of the river? The railroad station. And do you know that there is a midnight excursion from Montauk to-night?"

" What of it?" asked Imogene; but her voice was faint, and, try though she would, she could not get away from the haven of Robert's arm.

"What of it, sweetheart? Just this. You are never going back to the Beach, dear Little Red Princess, until you go as my Queen. God forgive me, I am not much of a King, but I will try to be worthy of the crown, and—I love you! Do you love me, dear?—enough to go to New York and marry me to-night?"

Imogene did not answer; but Robert felt her heart beating swift and fast against his own.

"Do you love me, Imogene?"

"Yes."

"Then you will go!"

The storm was passing away; the rain had ceased its falling. Fainter and fainter the thunder sounded, and the moon, half weeping, half smiling, came from behind the clouds and prayed the warring waters to be at peace.

X

The Broken Dream

IT is doubtful if any man who has bathed freely in the muddy waters of life, who has drunk at the fountain of passion whensoever he willed, and counted the bathing and the drinking no sin, but rather something commendable in a man—it is doubtful if he can comprehend the purity of a pure girl's soul; doubtful if, egotist though he may be, he can realize what sort of a god it is she kneels to, and worships in holy ardor, and calls after himself! Surely, if he could comprehend, he would either lay him down and die that he might live on, a glorified being in her memory, or, at least, he would take care how he leaped down from the pedestal to set the black flag over her grave of dreams and ideals.

The train reached Long Island City at two o'clock, and Robert hurried Imogene after the crowd hurrying to the ferry-boat, then through the cabins, and out on the deserted fore-deck; and there she beheld New York for the first time—a fairyland of mystic lights. The child felt that every light was a star that she would soon grasp and hold captive in her hand, as God's Puppy caught and held the fire-flies of the home meadows. She trembled with excitement, and Robert, folding her cape more closely around her, asked if she were cold. His voice was vibrating with tenderness, and her heart swelled to hear it, but she answered, simply:

“No; I am only happy—so happy! But I do wish God’s Puppy were here. Wouldn’t he think it was beautiful?”

“We will go down and get him in the morning,” said Robert. “We will go after—”

“After we are married,” added Imogene, softly, then lifted Robert's hand and kissed it; but, ashamed of her own action, turned the next moment and leaned over the railing to watch the reflection of the stars in the water. A feeling of compassion for her innocence came over Robert, and a sense of his own unworthiness. He was ashamed of his treatment of Cynthia, ashamed that he should have any secret from Imogene; but he was resolved that Imogene should never know of the broken engagement. The boat reached the New York side all too soon for Imogene, and she asked, childishly, if they could not take the sail over again. Robert hurried her off the ferry-boat, put her into a cab, and soon the girl found herself bumping over the streets of New York.

“Oh, it’s like a dream!” she cried, and laughed a rollicking laugh, which made Robert think of the songs of the birds in the woods of Pepperidge Manor, and of one little red-breasted robin perched on a swaying branch singing joyously to its mate. He took the girl’s nervous, restless hand and shut it fast between both of his strong, warm palms.

“Oh, it’s like a dream!” she repeated. “But where are we going ? Let’s drive all night, and then—then—”

“You look like going to the minister’s,” said Robert, laughing in his turn. “You little witch! You are coming to my rooms to brush some of the sweet wildness out of your hair.”

“Oh yes I And then I’ll twist it up on top of my head, and practice answering to ‘Mrs. Fanning’ before the glass.”

“And,” continued Robert, “I shall go out the moment the stores are open and buy you a long dress. No one on earth would think you a woman. I shall be arrested for child-kidnapping.”

Imogene laughed her rollicking laugh again. She did not dream that there could be any impropriety in her going to Robert’s rooms for the remainder of the night.

“Oh!” she cried, clapping her hands. “We’ll telegraph to Daddy Danes the minute we’re married. Won’t the Meadowneckers talk!” The child had a vague feeling that her marriage would in some way atone for the fall of her grandmother fifty years before, and, in her gentleness, Imogene thought that it might even lift the curse off the Manor. The carriage was driving rapidly down-town towards the old fashioned, residential part of the city, and when at length it stopped and Robert lifted Imogene to the pavement, she was somewhat disappointed to see a quiet, silent street, with a straight, unbroken row of darkened houses on either side. The Little Red Princess had imagined herself going up a long, broad flight of steps to the palace of her King; but there were only two steps, and the vestibule was narrow and dark.

“But he is my King, just the same,” she thought, jealously, leaning towards Robert with a motion of tenderness. He put a key, jingling on a ring with other keys, into the door, turned the key, and ushered Imogene into a dimly lighted hall. He was breathing heavily, and there was a sick, strained look about his eyes. A sense of nameless fear suddenly came over the girl, and she laid her hand on Robert’s arm in a wordless little appeal for protection; though from what she wished to be protected she could not have told.

“You are not afraid—with me?” he whispered, smiling somewhat unsteadily into her face.

“No-no!” she whispered back, at once ashamed and reassured.

He drew her quickly across the hall to a closed door, which he opened with another key, then pushed her, with gentle firmness, across the threshold. The room was dimly lighted from the street-lamp outside, and the impression that it made upon Imogene

was of richness and luxury, although, whenever she tried to recall it afterwards, she could remember only the scent of tobacco that pervaded it, and how a light like the light of the moon came in through the three windows. The windows were closed, the air stifling, and the first thing that Imogene did was to slip away from Robert, run impulsively across the room, and throw open one of the windows. As she did so she noticed the little iron balcony outside and the nearness of the sidewalk.

"So this is where you live when you are in New York?" she said, leaning against the window jamb and looking out into the quiet street. She wondered at Robert's silence, but did not turn to look at him, for the coming with the King into his chamber had brought a sense of delicacy and embarrassment to the girl. She wondered if he would not go and leave her alone until the daylight came and the hour for the marriage, but she felt too shy to ask. Then suddenly the fear that had come upon her in the hall overtook her again, and she turned quickly, crying:

"Robert, where are you? My King—" Then she paused; Robert was indeed there, but the King was gone—the King was gone! For in one mad moment of passion Robert had deliberately hurled the crown from his head, cast away the royal sceptre, leaped down from his throne, and dared the loss of his kingdom in the heart of his Princess forever.

A low moan of pain broke from the lips of the Little Red Princess. She heard Robert saying " Sweetheart!" and calling her name, but his voice seemed to come from a great distance—from down the length of fifty years. She saw not only the fallen King in the dim light of that room, but she saw the child Nancy as well, lying prone Nancy carrying her baby through the woodland roads of Pepperidge Manor; she saw the outraged woman Nancy kneeling, cursing, at the bridal feast; then she saw that poor figure of a mad grandmother with lank gray hair hanging over her eyes and with hoarse voice croaking: ,

"I lost a ring! I lost a ring! I lost a ring!"

A very sickness of sorrow came over Imogene. She was not afraid; she was not moved to anger; for in that moment it was given her to rise out of herself and to look upon Robert and Mad Nancy, upon the whole world of men and women, with a feeling of pity that was almost divine.

"My Princess!" called Robert.

"Oh, God!" moaned the girl, and had she been standing with her hand on the gate-latch of heaven, and found herself lifting the lid of hell instead, there could not have been more anguish, more horror in her cry. Her hands, groping blindly, laid themselves upon some article of furniture, and, almost automatically, she pushed this between herself and Robert.

Then Imogene turned and stepped quickly out upon the narrow iron balcony, leaped lightly on to the rail, poised there for the flash of a moment, then bounded like a deer into the yard—this Little Red Princess with savage blood in her veins.

XI

The Kingdom Lost

Imogene's beautiful City of Dreams, setting its stars of promise along the river-front, had become a wilderness of unimaginable horrors to the little Beach-bred girl. She feared its lights; she knew not what evil thing might clutch at her from out of its darkness. Down the quit street she sped, looking neither to right nor left, never turning to glance back, but running on and on with that same lightness of foot that must carry her Indian ancestors, unwearied, through the wilderness of old Long Island. She knew not east from west, nor north from south, in this close, overcrowded city; but she knew that if she could see more than a mere patch of the sky, she could tell the points of the compass by the stars, for the night had become perfectly clear. She passed within a few blocks of where Prince of Orange taught in a summer-school, but she had completely forgotten her brother's presence in the city, and even if she had remembered she would not have dared to try to find him. Hew one thought was to get back to Long Island – to get home!

First the quitness and dimness of the street in which she chanced to find herself frightened her, because she had been prepared for light and noise. But after a while she came upon a brilliantly lighted square, flanked on every side by streets, cars going up and down and across, and more people walking here at three o'clock in the morning, within the radius of a single block, than she had ever seen on the Old Neck Road in her lifetime. Imogene was more afraid of the light and the life than she had been of the quiet and the darkness. She paused, hesitating, on the corner, and as she stood there a policeman came sauntering by, turned to look back at her, then, then after a moment, came close and spoke sharply.

In the excitement of her flight Imogene had thrown back her red cape, and her arms were bared to the elbow, beneath the rich crimson crêpe of her gown. Her hair flew wildly about her wild, intense little face, and the jaunty red cap looked as if it were thinking of parting with her hair forever. Her skirt reached only to her ankles, and beneath were the red stocking and the simple, childlike red shoes. The Little Red Princess, so exquisite and adorable a being in her kingdom by the sea, looked, at first glance, like a waif from stageland here at night on this busy corner of New York. But the seriousness of her purpose lent Imogene an almost tragic dignity, and the man knew, the moment she spoke, that he had made a mistake.

"I am a stranger here," said the girl, breathing quick and fast. " I want to go back to Long Island. Will you please tell me which is east?"

"Lord bless me!" exclaimed the policeman. "You ain't goin' to walk to the ferry?"

A light broke over the face of the Little Red Princess, and in spite of herself she laughed at her own simplicity, then dug one little hand into the depths of her pocket and brought forth a woefully inefficient-looking red-leather purse.

"You take the car right here," said the man, "and transfer at Thirty-fourth Street."

"Transfer?" repeated Imogene, lifting her eyes in question.

"Lord, ain't she an innocent," muttered the policeman, taking her arm and leading her out into the street. Then he asked, half hesitating: "You ain't no more 'n fifteen, be you, miss?"

Imogene's head, with its flying curls and the little red cap, lifted itself one degree higher. "I am old enough to take care of myself," said she, and at that a little growl of compassion for her ignorance came from under the policeman's mustache.

"Any friends in the city?" he persisted, kindly.

Imogene swallowed something in her throat, and her bosom swelled.

"No friends at all," she answered.

"Here is your car," said the policeman, helping her up the steps. Then he added to the staring conductor, "Transfer the kid at Thirty-fourth, east."

Imogene, grateful at being thought a child, turned on the platform to say, "I thank you, sir," and to look into the policeman's troubled face with a smile that the man kept through the night and then took home to breakfast.

"Jenny," said he to his wife, as he sopped the end of his roll into his coffee — "Jenny, I been thinkin' that if I had brains and schoolin' enough I'd write a book on the things a policeman sees on Broadway."

Jenny was too busy frying eggs to pay much attention.

"Why, I see Little Red Ridin' Hood this mornin', 'long 'bout three 'clock."

"Oh, go on, John! What you givin' us?"

"Honor bright, my dear! And she looked to me as if she'd just managed to git away from the wolf by the skin of her teeth. Poor Little Red Ridin' Hood! 'I'm old 'nough to take care of myself,' she says, and her big eyes flashed. Says I to myself, 'You've had to do it to-night, all right. I'll just hang on a bit, the wolf ain't far behind.' And, sure 'nough, the car was no more 'n out of sight before the wolf come runnin' down the

street. He stood on the corner lookin' right and left. I went up to him and says, 'Have you lost anything?' And he says—what do you think he says? He says, as gloomy as if he was goin' to his own funeral, 'I lost my kingdom,' says he, and he went acrost the square, sort o' staggerin' back and forth like a drunken man. I'd a mind to nab him. Do you 'spose he was drunk or crazy, Jenny?"

"Both, like enough," answered Jenny, carelessly.

"Well, I don't give a hang, s' long's he didn't git on to the track of Little Red Ridin' Hood. But, Jenny, I tell you I'm glad 'twasn't our Lizzie runnin' round alone three o'clock in the mornin', poor young un."

Then John Brady, policeman, proceeded to do his duty by the eggs.

XII

God's Puppy

IMOGENE'S absence was discovered when Pepper Oakes and his five sons made an uproar by coming home in the middle of the night. Little Father's arm hung limp at his side, and his second son's face was filled with fine shot. Big Mother rolled up the sleeves of her night-dress, laid fierce but gentle hold of Pepper's coat, bade Circassian open her medicine-closet, Tamerac to keep Mad Nancy quiet, and Chumleigh to call Imogene.

Chumleigh, a man naturally gentle and quiet, seeming to pursue his lawless life under protest, quietly opened Imogene's door and tiptoed over to the bed wherein she and God's Puppy were wont to sleep, with their arms wound close about each other.

"Ima! Ima! Little Red Princess!"

God's Puppy stirred slightly, sighed the contented sigh of childhood, and turned in his sleep.

"Ima! Why, good God, she's gone!"

Instantly there flashed across Chumleigh's mind the picture of Robert Fanning's sloop starting out of the darkness of the storm, the picture of the man at the tiller, and the vague, indefinite, blurred picture of a little face peering over the side of the boat from under the shadow of a sou'wester. No sooner had this thought occurred to Chumleigh, however, than he pushed it from his mind as a ridiculous fancy, and he awakened God's Puppy with words and fondlings scarcely less gentle than Imogene's might have been. In fact the child was deceived, and he murmured, sleepily, joyfully:

"Yittle Wed P'incess!"

"Pup!" began Chumleigh, more sternly. "Wake up! Do you know whar Imogene is?" God's Puppy sat up in bed and looked at Chumleigh with eyes grown wide with terror. Chumleigh, thinking that he was not quite awake, shook the little figure in its white night-gown, demanding:

"Whar's Imogene?"

God's Puppy looked all around the moonlit room in the vain hope of finding Imogene there, then he made a resolution, from which he never once swerved in the bitter days that followed. He had promised Imogene that he would never tell, and tell he would not; so he lied—for the first time in his life he told a straight, deliberate lie.

"Chummy, I don't not know whar's Im'zene. I don't not know!"

Big Mother had brought up her children to snap their fingers at the laws of man, if they chose, but never to tell a lie, and that the baby of the family told an untruth now did not occur to Chumleigh, or to any one else later. The older brother laid God's Puppy back on the pillow, and said:

"All right, Pup, you go to sleep. I guess she's gone out for a little walk."

Then Chumleigh, still with his mind intent upon that blurred picture of the little face beneath the sou'wester, went back to the kitchen to tell that lmogene had not slept in her bed that night. God's Puppy crept after Chumleigh, and the child hung in the shadows of the kitchen, trembling lest Big Mother send some one out to search for Imogene and catch her with the King. But Big Mother said that probably the girl was wandering along the Beach; she had noticed that Imogene seemed moonstruck lately, and no doubt she would soon return.

But the night passed and lmogene did not come; the next day dawned and waned and lmogene was not to be found; then night fell again, and great sorrow and distress seemed to take its permanent abiding-place in the little house at Hurricane Hollow. They searched the Beach for miles, looking with dread in every swamp and pool, tramping the surf shore in the fear of finding the body of the Little Red Princess washed up by the tide. They conceived that she might have swum across the Narrows, and so they searched and searched through the fields, the meadows, and the forests of Pepperidge Manor. They even took all Meadowneck into their confidence, and men, thinking of their own daughters, their own young sisters, went out on horseback, on wheels, and on foot, seeking for the little Beach-bred girl who had always looked and acted the part of a gentle-hearted little princess. Daddy Danes moved his barrels and peered over the tops of his spectacles in the dusty corners of his garret. He sounded the depths of his ice-box well, thinking to find Imogene among the butter-pails and the bottles. Pernelia B. grieved with an honest grief in proportion to her size, and vowed that there was no mystery in thc papers to beat it. Bert Brown made up his mind that he was in love with the lost Princess of Hurricane Hollow. Old Gol thought of his own little daughter long since dead, and he blinked with fear every time he dragged up his nets lest he should drag the body of the Little Red Princess with them. In those days, presents of eels and fish were sent over to Hurricane Hollow by the very men who had fought the men on board *The Seven Sons and One Daughter* the night of the thunder-storm.

Mother Margaret, in her home at Pepperidge Hall, grieved and mourned for the bereaved mother on Fire Island Beach, and never dreamed that any member of her family could be responsible for the loss. Some advanced the theory that Imogene had gone forth in her sleep, and walked out to her death in the ocean. Petticoat Eli's Marty

whispered that the poor, miserable little child had grown tired of living in the midst of a tribe of heathen and killed herself in some lonely hollow of the Beach. Mad Nancy vowed and declared twenty times an hour that Barnabas Fanning had stolen Imogene and spirited her away. Only Chumleigh Oakes, not daring to speak his own mind lest he accuse wrongfully and do irreparable harm to Imogene, pondered on the picture of the little face peering over the side of the boat beneath the sou'wester. It was he who telegraphed to Prince of Orange, thinking it possible that Imogene had gone to him, but Prince Oakes did not answer, and from another source Chumleigh learned that he was out of the city on a lecturing tour. It was Chumleigh who quietly ascertained that Robert's boat had been found at the head of Two Mills River the morning after the storm, that Robert was now in New York as well as his cousin Cynthia; but it chanced that Chumleigh ran across no one who had noticed Robert and Imogene in the crowd of excursionists that night they went to New York.

Tuesday had passed and Wednesday, and then came Thursday, with still no sign of Imogene. Pepper Oakes was suffering agony with his wounded arm, but greater agony in his mind. Stingray, the second son, scorned to speak of his scarred and aching face while the family was in such trouble, and neither would stay at home. Both went abroad early and late in search of the Little Red Princess.

God's Puppy scarcely spoke a word in those days to any human being; but he would have fallen sick with his sorrow, and with the weight of his secret, if he had not been able to talk matters over with the old white horse. Thirty times a day the little fellow would drive the patient beast up to the top of the great dune, and there they would stand while God's Puppy shaded his eyes with his chubby little hand and searched the waters for the King's sail, and the old horse lifted his head and seemed to search also with his great, mournful brown eyes. Every time the child went up the dune he went with hope in his heart, and every time he reached the top despair would settle down upon his little soul. When he went up for the last time Thursday afternoon the day was already dying, the blue sheen was lifting from the waters, and one white sail after another was skimming homeward across the Bay. The Seven Sons and One Daughter was not in sight; even the skiff did not lie at the landing, for Mad Nancy had stolen off in that shortly after dinner. God's Puppy knew that the King's boat was nowhere near. Then thc brave little child lifted his voice and wailed aloud, so that the horse was startled, and, being a creature of fine perceptions, he lowered his head, looked God's Puppy fondly in the face, then stuck his nose against the child's little bosom and whinnied softly. Whereupon God's Puppy sat plump down in the grass and encircled the beast's head with his arms. Strangely enough, it was not of his loss that the child spoke then, but of the deceit that preyed upon his mind.

"Oh, Salty, Salty," he sobbed, "I told my Big Muwer a wicked yie. She says, 'Pup, do oo know whar's Im'zene?' an' I says, 'Muvver, I don't not!' an' I knowed it was a wicked yie, but I says, 'Muvver, I don't not know!' Im'zene, she's done way way off wid the Ting, an' she's fordot me an' oo dear; but I hain't a-doin' to tell on her—I hain't a-doin'

to tell on her! If she wanted to leabe me an' oo an' do off wid the Ting, let her do! Hain't zat so, Salty?"

Salty withdrew his head in order to nod Yes three times, then he began to walk slowly and sadly down the side of the dune. God's Puppy tumbled to his feet and trotted after the horse.

"Salty," said he, as he caught up to the beast's head, "I wish I was a horsey like oo, 'tause horseys don't hab to tell yies to their muvvers; horseys don't hab to do to bed all ayone in the dark—dey hab the mooley cow wiz 'em—an' if dey wake up in the night an' ky for the Yittle Wed P'incess, dey don't hab no g'anny to tome in an' w'ing dere hands an' ky harder'n oo do. Is oo, Salty? An' oo hain't dot ust to habin' the Yittle Wed P'incess wash oo face in de mornin' an' tomb oo hair an' tiss oo when oo fall down to make it well, an' lubb oo higher 'n the moon effy minute in the day, hab oo, Salty?"

Salty made no sign in answer, but nosed down into the grass and nibbled thoughtfully.

"If oo was ust to all dat air, Salty," said God's Puppy, with a sigh bigger than himself, "oo wouldn't teep on a-eatin' g'ass all the time!"

The horse, seeming to resent this insinuation of callousness, broke into a jog-trot, so that God's Puppy had to run to keep up with him.

"Wait a minute, Salty," he called, "I want to ask oo somefin'." And the horse stopped directly and waited until God's Puppy was again beside him, when Salty bent his head until his chin touched the little boy's shoulder.

"Do oo fink, Salty?" whispered the little boy, as earnestly as if he believed that Salty could answer by word of mouth. "I yant to ask oo if oo fink dat dat wicked yie I told Big Muvver will make any diff'ence to Dod, 'tause I'm Dod's Puppy an' Im'zene said dat Dod 'd allays take care ob me. Do oo fink it '11 make any diff'ence?"

God's Puppy drew back and regarded the horse with deep anxiety, but the horse had never joined any church; he had only lived a simple, honest life on the Beach, so he lifted his head high and shook it with a most decided negative.

"Bully for oo, Salty! 'Tause I'm a-doin' to det in dat air woe-boat an' do an' yook for Im'zene an' the Ting, an' I hain't af'aid, 'tause Dod'll take care of His Puppy boy."

The child actually started for the dock, but the little boys of this world make very big plans only to be frustrated by the mothers that Providence has set over these same little boys. Big Mother's voice came hallooing from the house at that moment, and God's Puppy, ever an obedient youngster, went ruefully into the house for supper. He

and his mother sat down at the long table and looked down the long line of empty places to one place in particular where the Little Red Princess used to sit, shedding the gracious light of her presence upon the company. God's Puppy was very much afraid that his mother would ask him that question again, and so he buried his face deep into his bowl of milk, and peeked up furtively every now and then at his sad-eyed mother. But Mrs. Oakes did not say a word; she sat there eating nothing herself, and failing to observe that God's Puppy did an alarming amount of choking. He had never noticed before that Big Mother's hair, hanging in old-fashioned curls about her face, was almost as pretty as Imogene's. He had never seen the busy woman sit so still before, never seen that softened, suffering look about her eyes and mouth, and he had never realized how large, how immense her bare arms and her blue calico lap looked—almost as if she could take all the little boys in the world, set them on her lap, put her arms around them, and still have room for more. God's Puppy slipped softly down from his place at the table, stole around to his mother's side, folded his two hands upon her knee, and looked up into her face. The next moment he was in the blue calico lap, the world-wide arms were around him, and he was kissing one tiny spot on the broad surface of Big Mother's face. "You're the only baby I got left now," she said, coming nearer to sobbing than she had been in twenty years; and that seemed so ridiculous to God's Puppy that he laughed a doleful little laugh.

"My other baby's dead!" moaned the woman. "My only little girl!"

God's Puppy stroked his mother's face compassionately, and longed in his heart to cry out:

"Muvver, I told a wicked yie. The Ting, the Ting, he wouldn't let her det deaded!" But the child was influenced by that feeling of loyalty to Imogene and "the King," and he would have cut out his tongue before he told one word of the wonderful monarch; but he was only a child, and he actually grew white under the strain he had imposed upon himself. Suddenly the mother rose to her feet and set God's Puppy on the floor. She clenched her fists and shook them both in the direction of Pepperidge Hall.

"I feel it! I know it! It be Cuss Fannin' agin —the Manor—Cuss Fannin'—the Manor!"

Then the strong woman broke down, and, flinging herself into a chair, laid her head on the table and fell to sobbing with silent, terrible passion God's Puppy watched the helpless shaking of her shoulders for a moment, then the awe-struck child stole on tiptoe out of the room—on tiptoe down the narrow stoop. Once out of Big Mother's hearing he broke into a run, and went as fast as his legs could carry him down the grass-edged path to where the sharpie lay moored to the dock.

"I'm a-doin' to b'ing her back, muvver," he kept saying to himself. "I'm a-doin' to b'ing her back, muwer, dear. An' den nebber tell no yies no more."

The Meadowneck boats had all flitted to their harbor in the Ponsopogue. Against the western horizon were two or three sails, showing as dusky and dim as the wings of a bat. The sun had drawn all its color-sails into the haven of the west; the stars were appearing one by one in the sky, like watch-lights on the great ship of night. The little child lowered himself into the row-boat and pushed off, waving his hand to old Salty, who had appeared on the shore and was neighing with almost human alarm. The boat, surprised at finding itself afloat without an oarsman, swung around aimlessly for a few moments; then it headed northwest, and commenced to drift leisurely in the direction of Two Mills. While the little light lasted, God's Puppy was not the least afraid, and even after night had fully fallen he was kept up by the certainty that, sooner or later, his little boat would find itself rubbing noses with the King's yacht. Then after a while the little fellow began to yawn. It was his bedtime—the hour when Imogene was wont to take off one little garment after another, and then cover the dear, warm little body with good-night

"I'm s'eepy!" said the child, and stretched himself, thinking how very unmanly it would be to fall asleep while he was out looking for the King. But the waves were singing a soothing lullaby; the rocking of the boat was like the rocking of Imogene's arm-chair when she held him in her arms telling him bedtime stories. "Oh, I'm s'eepy!" murmured the child, then laid him down in the bottom of the boat and went to sleep as peacefully as if he were in Imogene's own bed at home.

But when he awoke—and he did not sleep long—it was in fear and terror. The night seemed so awfully dark. The waters were growling, not crooning softly as they had been, and the rocking of the boat was no longer like the bedtime rocking of Imogene's arm-chair. God's Puppy remembered the old rule that Imogene had laid down for him: if a little boy wakes up in the night, frightened at the loneliness and the darkness, he must shut his eyes and say his prayers to drive the bad fairies away. God's Puppy put his hands before his face, where he lay there on his back, and shut out the vision of the cloud-caught stars, and he prayed aloud, bravely, steadily, without a break in his voice:

"Now I way me down to s'eep,
I p'ay the Yawd my soul to teep.
If I s'ould die before I wake,
I p'ay the Yawd my soul to take."

He opened his eyes and, rising to his feet, looked around as if expecting a miracle; but there was the same dark, desolate sweep of waters—the same rocking of the boat. Then the old, old rule of boyhood came to help him out: when you want to defy the demons of fear and loneliness, just open your mouth and whistle. God's Puppy opened his mouth, but he could not whistle for the wretched sobs that choked him. Well, then, he would sing. He curled his little hands over the edge of the boat there where he stood in the bow, and, lifting high his little head, he sang:

"Onwa'd, Kistan so-olders,
Marchin' as to wa-ar,
Wid the koss ob Jes-esus,
Doin' on before—"

The waves laughed hideously. From over across the Beach-hills. the sound of the surf came mournfully. Over all that mighty sweep of waters the great battle of wind and waves against man and man's handiwork was raging; all through the world, the world-old battle of man against himself and man against God was going on; and here alone in his little boat this tiny little David aimed his single stone of courage in the face of the Goliath of the waters, and sang:

"Onwa'd, Kistan so-olders
Marchin' as to war—"

Mad Nancy came drifting home an hour after dusk to find God's Puppy gone, and her daughter-in-law scarcely less mad than was she herself. Then, as it drew near to midnight, Pepper Oakes and his five stalwart sons came tramping into the house with God's Puppy resting his sleepy head against Chumleigh's shoulder.

Big Mother held out her arms speechlessly, and God's Puppy crept within their generous shelter. No one of all that company spoke while Big Mother felt each of the little limbs, kissed the knees and the feet and the breast, the eyes and the rose-bud mouth of her baby.

"Where did you find him?" she asked at last, hoarsely.

"In the sharpie, off Solomon's P'int, lookin' for Imogene, an' a-singin' at the top of his voice," answered Pepper Oakes, with his hands before his eyes.

Chumleigh turned on his heel and went out upon the stoop. He was weighing one event against another. The picture of the little face beneath the sou'wester was becoming more distinct; he was almost ready to swear that it was Imogene's.

"Damn Rob Fannin'!" he growled, under his breath. "Damn him!"

And there was murder in Chumleigh's heart as he spoke.

XIII

Reckoning with Cynthia

WHEN Robert realized what had happened— that he had thrown the ignorant, beautiful, and, in all probability, penniless child out upon the mercy of the streets of New York, the child who knew nothing of any place in the world except her home on the Beach, the Manor, and the little hamlet of Meadowneck—he went almost insane with remorse and with the fear and the dread of what might befall her. For the remainder of that night he walked the streets in search of Imogene, and all the next day and again the next night, and for another day and night. He scarcely took time to eat; he did not sleep at all. He visited all kinds of places— police stations, houses of evil repute, and even the morgue. On the third day he cared no more about himself than he cared about the devil, and then he made up his mind that the problem was too much for him; he would go to Cynthia and confess, beseeching her to use her woman's wit to find Imogene. He was too full of terror for the Little Red Princess to have any room for pity for Cynthia; too full of remorse towards Imogene to stop to think in what light Cynthia must now regard him. He blurted out the whole story, almost jealously taking the entire blame upon himself, the blame of the secret courtship, the blame of the elopement by night.

"Here at last," murmured Cynthia to herself, "is a man who does not say, 'The woman tempted me.'"

They were sitting in Cynthia's New York office, a tiny place almost filled with a great desk, the one window looking out upon a sea of house-tops. Cynthia looked cool, calm, and fragrant in her plain white gown, but as Robert went on with his story a red spot appeared on either cheek, and Cynthia's bosom rose and fell with agitated frequency. Robert was positively gray in his pallor; his hair was dishevelled; his eyes betrayed the sleepless nights, and ever and again his voice would break. At last he stopped and looked with mute appeal into Cynthia's clear gray eyes, but the girl's eyes drooped; a sigh as faint as Mother Margaret's ghost-like sigh escaped her lips. She turned in her pivot chair until her back was to Robert and her face to the window. Then Robert rose out of his selfishness and understood something of what was going on in this proud girl's mind, whether she had ever truly loved him or not; and he sat a picture of humility and despair, waiting for her to speak. When Cynthia turned about there was a misty softness in her eyes, and she smiled with great sweetness as she looked at her cousin. Then she began to speak; what she said Robert never remembered, but she uttered no word of reproach; she did not speak of the broken betrothal. Instead, she talked of her humble rival, the Little Red Princess, and as she went on Robert realized that Cynthia was not the cold, bigoted, narrow woman he had thought her; that although, as a daughter of the Manor, she might hate the Oakes family, yet as a true woman she could not do other than love a sister woman in distress.

“And so you sought to build your happiness upon this?” Cynthia was saying when Robert recovered from his astonishment to understand her fully. “A summer’s dream. You took this child, whose life and training had been as different from yours as if she had belonged to another planet, into your keeping, feeling sure that the love you bore each other—if love you call it—would level all distinctions, would make your nature fit into hers and hers into yours, as if God had made you for each other. I am not saying she is not as good as you —probably she is a thousand times better. I will even believe that she is innately a lady, and that in six weeks you could fit her to take her place among the ladies of the Manor; although, had you indeed married her and left this story untold, I should have said, ‘Poor Cousin Robert! Now for his awakening!’ Her mother was the daughter of an Indian; her father—shame be it to us!—was born of shamefulness, in the county poor-house, yet you call her a princess. Are you a king?”

Cynthia’s voice trembled with anger, and such was the flashing of her eyes that Robert could not meet them.

“You,” went on Cynthia, “were born of a long line of aristocrats; you have received every advantage that travel and education can offer. This little girl—God pity her!—has lived almost as wild and untrained as a savage on the Beach. Yet what happens when you come together? What does the King by birth the moment he finds himself alone with the Princess of the Oakes tribe but shock all her delicate sensibilities, forget the story that has been drilled into her from the time she was a babe, throw himself down from the throne she had made him out of the trust and love and faith in her heart, and become a creature on a level with the beasts I Did you think”—here Cynthia rose and lifted her hand for her hat where it hung above the desk—”did you think, Robert, that it was well to enter into married life telling a lie at the very start, taking what you get with the certain knowledge that, dared you tell the truth, it would not be given you?”

Then Robert knew that at last she had referred to the broken troth with her, and still he sat with his hands clasped and his eyes down, in spite of his fault very boylike, very lovable in his wretchedness.

“Come,” said Cynthia, going softly to him. She bent over his bowed head with a motion that was altogether motherly, stroked his hair, and for one moment laid his head against her bosom.

“Forgive me!” murmured Robert, kissing her free hand in that old, sweet way she so well remembered.

“Forgive me,” said Cynthia. “I have been at fault as well as you, dear. I—I—” and here Cynthia’s fingers again lingered over Robert’s hair — “I love my cousin very much. I know now that there has never been anything else.” That faint sigh came from her lips again, for if her great heart was not bruised, yet had her great pride been sorely

wounded. When Robert had risen and they stood with their faces on a level with each other, Cynthia was the calm, cool, resolute woman once more.

“Come! We will go to her brother, that selfish, black old Prince of Orange. He is a shining light in the City Summer-school of Pedagogy. Who knows? She may be with him.”

“I had thought of that,” said Robert, drawing back for a moment.

“Come!” said Cynthia, imperiously, and he followed her out of the office.

XIV

Prince Oakes

PRINCE OAKES had returned to New York only an hour before and had not found time to look over the pile of letters on his desk, had not seen the telegram from Meadowneck that had been carelessly thrust among his correspondence. And when he was rid of the pressing duties that had awaited his return he did not attack the heap of letters, but flung himself into his easy-chair instead, and opened a magazine he had bought on the train at an article headed, "Pioneer Women Lawyers."

His room was plain and severe, though there was the evidence of the love of books everywhere, and on the walls there hung a few evidences of the love of pictures also. His windows looked out on Washington Park, where the thirsty trees drooped in the dry heat and the summer wind stirred lazily. But it was not of the bare and lonely room that Prince Oakes thought, nor of the heat-waves beating down upon the park outside. He was brooding intently over the page of the magazine, over the sprightly, winsome, yet dignified and demure picture of Cynthia Fanning in cap and gown—the picture of his rebellious old pupil in that little district school at Meadowneck, where he had first found for a certainty that he had been born a teacher.

Should he ever forget those days of struggle and discouragement, when he all but starved his body that his mind should not starve for want of books — when he plodded stubbornly onward and upward in the face of the contempt of the whole community, and, above all, the contempt of this Cynthia Fanning?

In those days he had been filled with resentment against the whole scheme of the universe; he had hated his very name, Prince of Orange. He could not look his father or the poor, foolish grandmother in the face without calling, in the depths of his soul, his own curses down upon the Manor, and down upon all that bore the name of Fanning. Then one morning Cynthia came tripping into the schoolroom to taunt him and to flaunt him with all the impertinence of a precocious girl of fourteen, and he told himself that, more than all the rest, he hated this Cynthia, and he swore within himself that he would conquer her insupportable pride. But as the days went on, each one bringing its battle with Cynthia, and each one made vividly alive, as he now remembered, by those very battles, a change had come into his feelings towards the girl, and such a change as made him turn all his warring forces against himself. For Nancy's grandson had fallen in love with Barnabas Fanning's granddaughter! Could anything be more monstrous, more insane. More ridiculously tragic? It was the very refinement of torture to that proud, serious, silent, black-browed boy of twenty; and he fought and he fought and he fought, but he could not conquer his miserable love for that insolent, aristocratic child whose family had so shamefully brought his family into existence.

He had lingered on at Meadowneck, loath to go, loath to stay, not knowing which were the worse, the five school-days of each week with their mingling of bitterness and sweetness, or the lonely breathing-spells of Saturday and Sunday. Then came that day when he had ordered Cynthia to turn her face to the wall, and she had stood through the long hours—twice as long to him as they were to her—in the corner, and made not one single sign of penitence or weariness. Then the going of the children with their slates before their faces to hide their giggling, and he and Cynthia left together. His desire to go and put his arms over the shoulders of the girl had almost mastered him, and, in spite of all his effort, he could not make his voice either steady or severe as he said:

"Miss Fanning, I am waiting for your apology."

The girl had turned around at that and looked him in the eyes. Instantly there had flashed across his mind the thought that in just such a manner as this must Cynthia's great-grandmother have stared at Nancy that day of the cursing. Then Cynthia's look had changed swiftly, and with cruel, mocking laughter she had swept almost to the floor in that courtesy he was never to forget.

"Your servant most humbly craves your pardon, most gracious Prince of Orange!"

Before he had quite grasped her meaning she was gone, and he was left alone to lay his head down upon the desk with mingled fury and humiliation. His resolution to leave Meadowneck was made that very afternoon, not because Cynthia had cut his pride to the quick, but because he was afraid that she would strip him of every vestige of pride he had by discovering that he loved her. And so he went away.

Ten years ago! And the old, foolish love was with him yet, although he had never seen her face since he left the little district school. By that token alone he knew that books were more or less a failure, and not only books, but ambitions gained and honors given as well.

The clock on the mantel struck the hour, and then into the room there floated the chimes of a church near by, where service was held every afternoon.

Ding—dong! Ding—dong!

The picture of the clean, high little meetinghouse on the Old Neck Road came before his mind, and all of a sudden Prince Oakes felt an intense, an almost irresistible longing not only for Cynthia, but also for Meadowneck—its still, shady lanes, its deep, fragrant woods, the winding river, and the changeful Bay. And on the heels of this came a longing for the smell and the sight of the ocean, a longing for the once-despised little home on Fire Island Beach, for the freedom and the wildness of the life there. His sister Imogene—sadly neglected, he feared—what kind of a woman had the dainty

little red-bird become? How did she compare with the woman whose face was pictured on the page of this magazine? If Cynthia looked like that, then she had changed indeed, or, rather, had come forth a sweet and noble woman from behind the child's implike mask of the days of long ago.

There was a knock on the door, and Prince Oakes, without looking up from the magazine, said "Come!" with not a little impatience. The door was thrown open, and Prince Oakes, surprised at not hearing the familiar footsteps of the servant about the room, looked up. He rose with the magazine now clutched in his hand and stared at Cynthia Fanning. She stood in the doorway, majestic as a statue in her plain white dress, but with her presence exhaling fragrance like a flower, and her eyes filled with womanly sweetness and courage. The love that he bore the girl leaped up, almost choking, almost blinding Prince Orange, but the natural gentleman that dwelt in Mad Nancy's grandson helped Prince to come forward, hiding his amazement and greeting Cynthia with simple courtesy. It was not until then that he noticed Cynthia's companion, and the two men bowed to each other.

"No, thank you, I will not sit down," began Cynthia, and her voice was as cold and hard as her eyes were sweet. "Do you know where your sister is? No! Why don't you? Of all the selfish things on the face of this earth, there is nothing to compare with an ambitious man!"

Cynthia looked around the bookish room with withering contempt, and the poor Prince followed the direction of her eyes with helpless bewilderment. Cynthia did not give him a chance to speak, but rushed on, following her womanly intuition, which told her to humble this proud man before she allowed him to pass judgment upon the Little Red Princess.

"All these years that you have been striving and struggling to make a name for yourself, what did you suppose your little sister was doing? While you were educating your own mind until mind became more than matter to you, who do you suppose was looking after your sister's mind and soul? How dared you, who alone of all that family possess appreciation of refinement and culture, leave that child to grow as wild as a gorgeous pink marshmallow over there on the Beach? You knew her daintiness, her tenderness, her gentleness—did you think she would grow into a coarse, simple, animal woman, and give herself to some rough, illiterate bayman, and settle down to baking and scrubbing, washing and ironing, for the rest of her days? Had you ever taken the trouble to look after her, you would have known that she was a dreamer, an idealist. What did you think was going to become of her dreams and her ideals?"

"What—?" began Prince, resolutely, and looked to Robert for assistance, but Robert was leaning against the mantel, with his head bowed upon his hands.

“What—?” began Prince Oakes again, interrupting the persistent flow of Cynthia’s tongue. Cynthia went on, her cheeks reddening, her eyes flashing, until at last Prince of Orange caught some sense of her meaning.

“Who is the man?” he cried out. Then Robert turned where he stood at the mantel, saying:

“God forgive me! It is I.”

Prince Oakes looked him over from head to foot, and exceedingly great was the bitterness in Imogene’s brother’s black eyes as he muttered:

“History repeating itself; the Manor once more.”

Robert came forward and struck the table with his clinched hand.

“I swear by all that is sacred that I meant to marry her!”

“Keep your oaths to yourself,” said Prince, throwing back his shoulders. “The word of honor of a Fanning—who would trust it?” Then he remembered Cynthia, and, turning quickly, murmured:

“Not you—not you! Forgive me!”

“You are wasting time,” coolly rejoined Cynthia.

“Go find Imogene, and remember” — there came a break in her voice and a mist over the true, gray eyes — “remember that we are all miserable sinners.”

“I am going to Meadowneck,” said Prince ~ Orange, hurriedly beginning to gather up the papers on his desk. “She is not in the city. She is hiding somewhere near home.”

“But how could she get there?” demanded Robert. “I believe the poor child had not one cent.”

“You may search the slums,” said Prince, bitterly. “Some one must, I suppose, but I am goin’ out on Long Island by the next train.”

“It is a pity you had not gone before,” retorted Cynthia, putting her hand in Robert’s arm and drawing him away.

“Her arm to that scoundrel,” thought Prince Oakes, “and she would not offer me her hand.”

But at the door Cynthia turned and looked back at Prince Oakes. The Cynthia of the school-room, the Cynthia of the law courts, the Cynthia of the swift, merciless tongue had vanished, and there stood a Cynthia of sweet, dewy eyes, a Cynthia of tenderly beseeching manner, a Cynthia of such greatness of soul that she could forget all that was small and petty, and, holding out her hand to Prince Oakes, say:

"You will be gentle with the girl?"

Before Prince could find an audible answer, Cynthia was walking down the stairs with Robert. Her hand was no longer within her cousin's arm; she walked with her eyes set straight before her, and with her thoughts wandering back to the time of her maliciously gleeful fights with the school master.

"I was a little beast then," she thought. Then with a start she brought her attention back to Robert. Something in her cousin's face made her pause on the hallway and lay her hand on Robert's shoulder.

"Wake up, my dear. You are not walking in a dream to your certain destruction. You are about to leave this city to whom it belongs—the police and the detectives. You are coming home with me this afternoon, and Mother Margaret shall tuck you in your bed to-night. Robert, I will not take 'no' for an answer. What good would you do Imogene lying in a hospital or shut up in a lunatic asylum?"

A curious, painful little laugh broke from Robert's gray lips as he answered, almost like a child:

"But you will let me come back to-morrow?"

XV

Don Quixote

IN the dark of the early morning the waiting room in the station at Long Island City is apt to be almost deserted. The candy-booth is swept bare; the boards are down over the news-stand; the fountain-head of wisdom who sits through the day behind the barred window of the information bureau is home sleeping off the memory of the last idiotic question he has been made to answer; the ticket-seller nods drowsily over his duties and gapes behind his hand; the policeman stands at his door with eyes wide open and wits fast asleep.

When Imogene came off the ferry-boat after her flight from Robert, she stole into the station by a door other than that watched by the unwatchful policeman and slipped into a seat in the farthest corner of the waiting-room. Then, for the first time since the moment of the falling of the King, she took one long, grateful breath, and looked around with a small degree of confidence. Some distance from her, on the other side of the ticket-booth, were five or six people lounging silently in their seats, 1ooking as if life and waiting for trains were too weary for words. Beyond the row of seats, up and down the length of the room, under all the tickless time-table clocks, a short, smooth-faced, very fat, very dignified man, in a blue uniform, was marching sedately up and down, with his hands behind his back.

Imogene, with another sigh of security, drew from the depths of her pocket the little red-leather purse, and began to take stock of its contents, laying each article on her lap.

First, a red ribbon that had slipped from its binding-place on her hair; next, a stump of a lead-pencil—certainly neither of these would take her far on the Long Island Railroad. Then a wad of notepaper, scribbled closely with the words of a poem that she had been committing to memory in the poetry of her love for the King! The girl sighed and bent farther over the open purse. Then, for the first time that night, the tears gushed to her eyes as she drew out a tiny tin-type picture of God's Puppy. There he stood, the dear, abandoned child, looking very reproachful because his collar was too tight, but affecting Imogene as if he were there in flesh and blood accusing her of having bound her heart-strings too loosely about his tender little being. Forgetful of the other silent waiters in the station, Imogene put the pictured face against her lips and kissed it remorsefully. Then she took out a few coins and commenced to count them as if they were precious jewels.

"Where do you think you're goin', little girl?" said a mild, gentle voice, and Imogene jumped, frightened into trembling by the sight of the very fat, very dignified, very smiling official before her. She shrank back into her seat and made no answer as she quickly crammed her possessions back into the purse, for, since the King had thrown

off his crown, she had looked upon every man who approached her with extraordinary terror.

The fat man smiled genially, and looked as fatherly as only a fat man can look. His mouth was smaller than Imogene's, and he had eyes as little as a pig's. He looked as stupid as a donkey, but as Imogene watched the smile playing about the small mouth, the kindly twinkle in the piglike eyes, she lost much of her fear and relaxed her tense little figure somewhat.

"Lost your tongue, eh?" went on the man, with his exuberant good-nature, and Imogene wondered if all city women were so old in comparison to country girls that she, with the weight of her nineteen years, must be thought a child.

"No, I haven't lost my tongue," she answered, and a tiny, humorous smile played about her mouth.

The fat man gave a little laugh that wrinkled his face, as a waft of wind ripples the broad surface of a placid lake.

"Been to a party?"

The Little Red Princess grew very serious again and looked down at the tips of her red shoes.

"No, I haven't been to a party."

"Oh, I thought maybe you'd been to a masquerade or something. I went to a masquerade one night last week. Let me see. It was Wednesday. 'Member how cool it was Wednesday night? I went as—as—ahem—Don Ke-oxy! Ever heard of him? Only rig that would fit me."

lmogene gasped, and a musical little gurgle escaped her lips.

"Nobody knowed me. I had the greatest fun foolin' the girls."

And again the broad surface of the man's face was stirred by a gentle laugh. Imogene had lost all fear of him, for it seemed to her that this plump

Don Quixote was more of a child in his way than she in hers; however, she did not propose to spend the remainder of the night listening to him.

"Will you please tell me—" she began, leaning forward earnestly, with her hands clasped together.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” rejoined the fat man, with the nearest approach to haste that he could assume, even if this whole world was on fire and he was anxious to get out of it into the next. He marched off, calling, in a voice totally unlike the mild tones he had used in addressing Imogene—a voice that seemed to come from the bowels of the earth—a voice that seemed to shake the roof of the almost empty station:

“Train for _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ __ and Babylon!”

A handful of people came rushing through the station from ferryward and disappeared behind a swinging door. The fat man marched up and down beneath the tickless time-table clocks with footsteps as light as a cat’s and a voice as loud as the sorrows of the world, repeating the same refrain:

“— and Babylon!”

Imogene hastily took out her coins and counted them correctly—not half enough to take her to Meadowneck, but perhaps enough to land her in Babylon. She flew across the room to the fat man, and he was so surprised to see the quiet little girl spring into activity that he stopped short, and the sleepy ticket-seller wondered if the wheels of the world had stopped going around.

“What is it, my dear?” murmured he of the great voice, with a kindly smile.

Imogene thrust her coins into his hand.

“Will that take me to Babylon? If it will, please, please buy me a ticket; and if it won’t, buy me a ticket anywhere—anywhere!”

The fat man’s mouth stopped smiling; his little eyes grew very grave.

“Sure you’re doing right?” he demanded.

“Sure!” replied Imogene, with such strength of conviction that Don Quixote, without another word, marched up to the ticket-window and called for a ticket to Babylon. Imogene never knew that he had to ask to be trusted for five cents.

“There, my dear,” said the corpulent knight, and laying the ticket in the girl’s hand he took hold of her arm, led her through one of the swinging doors, passed her by a lean young fellow who stood at a gate, then said:

“That’s your train, my dear. Plenty of time, plenty of time.”

Imogene turned to him with a quick, altogether princess-like impulse of appreciation, and held out her hand. Then she smiled such a smile as she had given the policeman on the busy corner in New York.

"If any one should come looking for a girl in red—" she began.

The man gave her a keen, piercing look out of his piglike eyes. He was in love with a girl of fourteen who had black hair and black eyes, and he meant, by all that was great and tremendous, to marry that girl the day she became eighteen.

"If any one comes around spyin' after a little girl in red," said he, and again his little eyes and little mouth smiled, and the broad surface of his face seemed about to break into ripples —"I'll lie like a trooper!"

"Oh, thank you!" earnestly exclaimed the truthloving Little Red Princess.

"All aboard!" called out the conductor.

Imogene felt herself lifted up the steps as gently as if she were a baby; then, as she sat down in the train and looked out of the window at the smiling but secretly perplexed fat man, she realized that her faith in human nature, which had been destroyed in one fell swoop by her King, had been partially restored through the medium of a gigantic policeman and of a simple-minded fat man who depended upon his superhuman voice to make a living.

"Hello!" said the gateman to Don Quixote, when the train was drawing out. "Flirting with the girls again, old slab-sides?"

The corpulent gentleman looked the chaffing gateman straight in the eye with a glance that would have quelled a wiser man; but the lean young gateman laughed and poked the fat man in the area that covered his far-away ribs.

"My, but you're a devil with the women!"

This home-thrust was too much for the vanity of the fat man. He smiled once more with his little eyes and his baby mouth; but as he moved away he muttered to himself:

"I'll lie like a trooper, you bet!"

And, three days later, lie Don Quixote did—to Robert Fanning, who looked as if he were wretchedly drunk, though he was not; to Prince Oakes, who glared villanously from under his black brows, as if he would gobble up the Little Red Princess, though he meant only to take her in his arms and say, "Forgive me!" And, last of all, our good

fat knight, with his heart growing a little fainter, lied to the majestic Cynthia of the sweet, gray eyes.

XVI

The Red-leather Purse

IT was a newspaper train going out with the first edition of the great New York dailies, and it stopped at every place that had been honored by the Long Island Railroad with a railroad station, so that so much time was taken up by the journey that the train leaving Long Island City one hour after this one started reached Babylon two minutes after the arrival of the newspapers. Babylon prided itself on being a wide-awake village—so wide awake that whenever the name of Meadowneck was mentioned everybody laughed, exclaiming:

"That dead-and-alive down-east place!"

Babylon boasted of hotels and summer cottages, and a quiet, decent suburb where any man worth less than a million was regarded as very poor— very poor, indeed! But Babylon had her workaday inhabitants as well, her simple villagers, who lived in comfortable, simple cottages on thickly shaded lanes, and it was down one of these streets of the common people that Imogene wended her way in the blush of that lovely July morning. The girl had found a place in the station where she could put her hair into some semblance of order, wash her tired face and grimy little hands, and shake some of the dust of travel out of the crimson folds of her dress. Outwardly she bore a brave appearance; inwardly she felt a lack of support, a sinking under, which could be dignified by no other name than hunger. She wanted something to eat. The smoke was drifting up from the kitchen chimneys; there was a smell of coffee in the air; a burly bayman passed Imogene, whistling on what she knew to be a full stomach, and carelessly swinging his pagodalike dinner-pail. She felt a desire to snatch the pail from his hand, and she felt that at last she understood what the mad grandmother meant when she said at meals:

"Don't leave nothin' on your plate; you may want it some day."

Imogene had been so excited the day before that she had left her entire supper on her plate, and she wanted it sorely now. Presently she came to a grove that appeared to serve as a public picnicground, and she turned into this, half hoping to find some remains of a luncheon in the discarded paper boxes thrown about; or perhaps, somewhere in the shadow of the trees, a sheltered vine of black berries. She felt very like a thief as she stirred the boxes up with a stick, and now and then she would look at the adjacent house to make sure that no one was watching her. There was no food in the boxes, not a sign of a berry, not even a wintergreen anywhere. Imogene was so discouraged, so thoroughly tired out, that she sat down at one of the rough board tables, threw out her arms, and laid down her weary little head. The reddish-black curls fell over her ears; her cape loosened itself from her shoulders and slipped to the ground. The nape of her neck showed between the parting of the curls for Imogene

had cut her dress with unconscious artistic skill, so as to leave her throat free and bare. Overhead in thc trees the birds jabbered and chattered about this crimson-clad creature, until they concluded that she would make a worthy motif for an improvised opera, and all their voices swelled into a burst of melody. Presently a little girl came out of the kitchen door of the house on the other side of the fence, and, catching sight of the red figure in the picnic-grove, stepped along the twisted limb of a quince-tree until she could reach the top of the fence with the tip of her toe, then skipped upon two pickets and dropped over into the picnic ground.

"Oh! Look at the pretty red shoes!"

This exclamation was the first notice Imogene had of the child's approach. The Little Red Princess lifted her sleepy head and smiled at the little girl. Then, thinking that she detected in the child a resemblance to God's Puppy; Imogene held out her hand invitingly. The child drew back with a coy, flirtatious movement.

"I wish I had a pair of red shoes."

Since the journey to New York, which had taken her among people of the great world outside Hurricane Hollow and Meadowneck, Imogene had become convinced that her manner of dressing was not suited to a woman of nineteen, and she had become strangely sensitive on the subject of the red shoes, so that now she moved her feet uneasily as she answered:

"Dearie, I should be very glad to give you these red shoes if they would fit you; but you see it wouldn't do for me to go barefoot here in Babylon, would it?"

No one had ever spoken in so soft and low a voice to the little girl; no one had ever taken it for granted before that she was a miniature lady with the power of reasoning. This new treatment fascinated the child; she came close to Imogene and nestled into the shelter of the girl's arm.

"See, dearie," went on the gentle Imogene, feeling that whatever she might do for any child would be done for God's Puppy. "Here is a little red purse. Would you like that?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the child, seizing the purse delightedly. Imogene had to explain that she would have to take the contents of the purse out and put them into her pocket, and, for some moments, above the voices of the birds sounded the voices of this woman-child, Imogene, and this little daughter of a bayman. Presently the child touched Imogene on a point that brought her physical needs sharply before her mind.

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"No. Have you?"

"Yop. Oat-meal. I hate oat-meal, don't you? Some things about summer I like—hammocks and huckle-berrying; but I like winter best, on account of the pancakes. This summer," went on the child, swinging her legs against Imogene's dress-skirt, but looking up into Imogene's face with a quiet, sad, far-away look in her eyes — "this summer has been a very sad summer to me anyway, my cousin Willie and my white cat died. He had one blue eye and one pink one."

"Elsie! Elsie!" called a sharp, shrill voice from over the fence. "Elsie Green, come right straight home or I'll break your neck!"

The child, not in the least alarmed by this threat, threw her arms around Imogene's neck, kissed her cheek swiftly, then slipped from the girl's lap, and with a "Bye-bye; thanks for the pocket-book," went speeding across the grove, over the fence with a wonderful hop and a skip, and then into the branches of the quince-tree. Imogene rose with a sigh of weariness and walked slowly through the grove to the street. She knew that she could never carry out the purpose in her mind unless she had some thing to eat, but she could not ask the possessor of that shrill, sharp voice for food, nor could she beg the little girl to help her. However, Imogene had not reached the house on the farther side of the grove when she heard footsteps running after her. She turned around to see a thin, hard-worked-looking woman with the red pocket-book in her hand.

"Be this yourn?" demanded the woman, stopping in front of Imogene and thrusting the purse into the girl's face as if it were an evidence of blackest guilt.

"No; I gave it to a little girl named Elsie," answered the Little Red Princess, with disarming gentleness.

"How much is it worth?" demanded the lady of the shrill, sharp voice.

"I gave it to her," repeated the daughter of Pepper Oakes, with the blood slowly mounting to her cheeks.

"Very kind of you," snapped the woman, with asperity. "Very kind! But my young un don't take nawthin' from nobody. Elsie's sot on this here pocket-book. I been a-promisin' to buy her a red-plush pocket-book when I go to the Riverhead Fair. This hain't nawthin' but leather; but I suppose mebbe it cost fifty cents. Seein' it's second-handed, I'll offer you a quarter fer it."

Imogene laid hold of the fence-pickets—she was so weak and faint—and she laughed until she cried; for with Imogene's misfortune had come a blessed sharpening of her sense of humor. But necessity bade the girl to sharpen her wits also and to lay down her pride. She managed to gasp to the bewildered and outraged woman standing there

holding fast to the pocket-book and to her bargain that she could have the purse and welcome if she would only give her something to eat.

"Why, you poor young un, you! You poor, poor young un, you!" exclaimed the woman. As if by magic, all the sharpness and shrillness went out of her voice. "Come right along; I had a hull bowl of oat-meal left over this mornin'."

And so it happened that while Robert was going through such agony of spirit as he hoped could await no one on the farther side of the grave, Imogene sat down on a comfortable little bench on a honeysuckle-shaded porch, and ate oat-meal and cream with such evident relish that the little girl who loved pancakes opened her eyes and mouth wider and wider with astonishment. Then the lady of the soft heart and sharp voice made Imogene go through a catechism, as to who and what she was, where she had come from and where she was going. In the midst of this the little girl, as if perceiving Imogene's reluctance to talk about herself, yelled out:

"What's-yer-name? Pudden-tame. Where-d'you-live? Down-the-lane," and so on, until she had finished the childish doggerel. Imogene was seized with another fit of hysterical laughter, which so disgusted the woman that she went into the house and left Imogene to finish her breakfast in peace.

"Little girl," began Imogene, when they were alone, "do you suppose I could beg a sail to the Beach? Is there a ferry?"

"Yop; goes out after ten 'clock train; but I don't b'lieve you kin beg no sail o' Cap'n Halsey."

"Then I shall steal it," said Imogene, with the calmness born of despair.

"That's pretty talk to talk before my young un," broke out the sharp, shrill voice again, as Elsie's mother reappeared in the doorway. "Anybody 'd know you was brought up on the Beach, though nobody 'd suspect it to look at you. Here, now you take this here quarter. The pocket-book's worth it, an' I don't count the oat-meal an' the cream, 'cause they'd soured, anyway. We don't keep no ice. Now you take this here quarter an' you go down this lane until you come to—"

And so the good woman of the rough exterior went on giving directions for the straight and simple route to the Bay and to the wharf from which the ferry sailed for Fire Island Light. There were tears in Imogene's eyes when she kissed the little girl good-bye—tears of grateful wonder over the fact that, although the King was dead and more than dead, human kindness had not died out of the world.

"There!" exclaimed the woman, in consternation, after Imogene had been gone a full hour. "There!" she exclaimed, addressing a steaming pie that she was taking out of the

oven. “I forgot to ask that young un what time she ’spected to git home. I might hev put up a little lunch for her. An’ she promised to send my Elsie a pair o’ red shoes, tew. Why, a pair o’ shoes like hern cost—why, lemme see; how much do they cost?”

XVII

The King's Grave

AT twilight, Imogene, having crossed the Bay and reached Fire Island Beach that morning, came to one of the half-way huts of the life-savers, and, sitting down upon the sand, leaned her back against the side of the shanty and looked out over the sea. The water had taken on that deeper blue shade it assumes before it turns into the gray of dusk; the sky, which had been a soft, baby blue all through the day, turned deep also, until it was almost like sapphire, except where a ruby glow in the west testified that the heavens had not yet forgotten that their sun-king had passed that way. The breakers came rolling in, lazily yet stupendously, and with a moaning, mourning sound. The shelving white shore of the surf ran, bending out like a crescent, to the west, until it seemed to go dipping after the sunset into the sea; to the east, until it seemed to pause, waiting on the threshold of dawn. The bluff above the surf shore, on whose crest stood the half-way hut, stretched as far as the eye could see, a companion to the shelving, white surf shore Beyond the bluff there was that tumbled confusion of dunes, with their sands a restful gray-white in the twilight, and their coarse growth of grass a dark, restful green. On the farther side of the dunes, beyond the narrow strip of salt meadow, lay the Bay. Not a sign of a human habitation for miles; not a sound save the rustling of the wind through the grass, and the sobbing, sobbing of the sea.

Far in the west there shone faintly, like an early evening star, the Light of Fire Island—that light which shines steadfast from one year's end to the other, the first to welcome voyagers from over the broad sea, the last to bid those bound outward, God speed you on your way. There it shines at the mouth of the Inlet, as welcome as the lights of his own cottage to the bayman steering from out the heedless waters of the ocean into the home harbor of the Bay; there it shines, warning from danger, guiding to safety, beckoning, forbidding in turn. And who thinks of the human hand that tends the steadfast light? Of the tired feet that climb the spiral stairs? Of the human mind that grows dull and apathetic with watching alone through the monotonous nights, waiting alone while the surf beats upon the shore?

Imogene thought how ugly a structure the black-and-white light-house had looked to her when she landed not far from its base that morning, and how beautiful the beacon-light seemed now, gleaming in the distance. It was as if a night of sorrows were bringing out from an ugly human shape the lovely light of a superhuman soul.

The deep blue of the waters grew into a chill, dark gray; the rose-colored memory of the sunset faded from the western sky; the heavens took on a blue tone deeper and yet more deep, and then the stars came pricking through. Under the shadow of the wing of night the restless surf kept moaning and mourning, while the stars looked down

from their heights, seeking to find a steadfast mirror on the surface of the waters wherein they might view their own reflection.

Imogene took the cape that she had carried on her arm through the heat of the day and folded it over her shoulders. Eight miles had she walked that day along the heavy sands, and there were still ten miles between herself and home. When she started from Long Island City she had fully expected to be able to reach Hurricane Hollow this night; but she had over-estimated her strength, and now she knew that she must soon refresh herself with sleep, while those who loved her in that humble home she had left so thoughtlessly must lie awake and worry and wonder.

"I have been a wicked fool," said Imogene, aloud.

In her effort not to think of that unbearably painful subject of the King, the Little Red Princess began to recall the incidents that had befallen her since she leaped down from the balcony in the King's palace. How the policeman had cared for her with gruff compassion; how the plump Don Quixote had taken her for a helpless infant; how the lean, hard-working bayman's wife had given her a breakfast to keep the food—God bless the creature's kindly deceit!—from spoiling; how—and here Imogene frowned at the recollection—a roving-eyed young man in a sweater had annoyed her with his attentions while crossing the Babylon ferry, and even after she had reached the resort near the foot of Fire Island Light; how the city children playing there on the sands had stared as she passed; how a group of men had turned and looked and muttered, "By Jove, but she's a little stunner!" How she had fled as fast as she could from the resort of the strangers there at the light, and how, about four miles beyond, she had hurried through the more refined summer settlement at Point o' Woods; then she had drawn a long breath, and thanked Heaven that for the greater part of the way she would now be alone with the sands and the sea.

Here, on the Beach she knew so well, there was no danger of her having to ask for food; over on the Bay side she had taken off her shoes and stockings, and waded in for clams and oysters; on the hills she had picked blackberries; at the deserted life-saving stations she had found wells from which she might drink; along the surf shore she had come upon so many sea-scallops, evidently washed up in last night's storm, that she could have raked them up in basketfuls. And she had eaten in true savage style, and rejoiced in so eating; but now she was tired beyond further endurance, and not daring to sleep out-of-doors by the dampness of the sea, she must needs go into that dingy half-way hut and lie down upon a bed of dried meadowgrass that had been the resting-place of strangers. She laughed ruefully as she thought of it—the dainty, brave Little Red Princess! And then, stifling a yawn, she rose to her feet and said good-night to the sea.

"Good-night, dear sea," she whispered, softly. "The King is dead. I loved the King ,and he is dead. His grave is not beneath your waters, it is not beneath the poor old earth.

His grave is here"—she laid her hand on her heart— "and, oh, it hurts to carry a grave there! Good-night, dear sea. When all the kings of the earth are dead, and all the women of the world have buried them in their hearts, you will still be here, poor, poor, weary old sea!"

She pushed open the door of the hut, and, going within, lay down on the bed of hay, with her cape thrown lightly over her. If the soul of the sobbing sea came and listened over that pallet it must have heard the Little Red Princess sigh; heard her weeping softly until she fell asleep.

They say that the Beach is haunted from one end to the other; that, when night falls, one spirit issues from this dune and one from that, one creeps from under the stone that guards his golden treasure, one strange-looking fellow goes racing over the sands after the pirate that robbed him of his head, one comes dripping out of the sea, another comes rushing down on the wings of the wind. There is shrieking and moaning and sighing together with such horrible sounds as have no human name. But if the ghosts came, none of them disturbed the Little Red Princess. Only, with the rising of the moon, a great white snow-owl came fluttering from his home in some cedar-tree, and, perching on the roof of the half-way hut, sat there the whole night through, like a white sentinel guarding the bedchamber of the Little Red Princess.

Number One, of the Bleak Hill Station, had shot the snow-owl's mate, and the poor lady-bird now sat on a make-believe tree in a red-and-green plush parlor in Shoreville, while her lonely lord mourned on the Beach and called:

"To whoo—whoo—whoo—whooo!"

Imogene heard his calling in her dreams, and it seemed to her the passionate, lonely call of the King:

"Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?"

XVIII
Mad Nancy's Red-bird

THE stars got lost during the night, and as the sun came up it was to find itself wading through a sea of sullen gray clouds. Imogene felt strangely unrefreshed by her heavy sleep, strangely averse to feeding her strength with the sea-food that she had eaten with such relish yesterday. The weariness that dragged on her limbs was as heavy as the weight of grief in her heart, and, in spite of her determination to get home as speedily as possible, she found that those marks on the Beach which served her as mile- stones seemed prodigiously far apart. To her dismay, she was obliged to sit down frequently to rest. To her the day seemed the hottest, most enervating sort of a day possible ; but had she come upon a looking-glass, she would have known by the vivid flush upon her cheeks, the strange, unnatural glitter in her eyes, what was the matter with Imogene. One by one the hours went by—the long-to-be-remembered hours—and one by one the miles dragged along. She passed the second life-saving station to the west of her home; she passed two different pavilions that catered to the thirst and to the hunger of the South Side's summer visitors; but it was as yet too early in the day, even if the weather had not been so dull, for any city folks to be lounging on the sands. Then about eleven o'clock it began to rain, in one of those light but dreary and drenching drizzles. Imogene kept on with dogged determination, her mind set on one purpose alone—to get to Hurricane Hollow. She did not stop to question how she would be received; she did not stop to wonder now if she had been grievously missed; except by the unconscious testimony of the weight upon her heart, she did not so much as think of the King. She must get home —she must get home! And then the great heat would pass away; her head would stop its swimming; her wet, clinging garments would fall from her, and she would lie down in that clean, white bed, while God's Puppy stole his little fingers within the clasp of her hand. The cape thrown over her arm grew so heavy that it fell of its own accord upon the sand and Imogene's freed arm dropped to her side, but she did not miss the cape.

At last she cried aloud with joy to see the flagpole of the Two Mills life-saving station in the distance; after that was passed there would be but two miles more to travel. New courage swept her up, and she leaped forward like a tired young horse at the voice of his master. On she ran for perhaps the space of five minutes; then something happened to her foot and she fell in a heap on the wet sand.

When she sat up, her face was white with pain and her hand wrapped close around her ankle. When she stood upon her feet she tottered and all but fell down again.

"Good Heavens!" she said to herself. "I cannot have sprained it!"

Her ankle sprained or not, the pain was excruciating, and the Little Red Princess found that she had to accept the escort of a stout stick that lay among the driftwood upon thc shore before she could hobble onward.

“Come, my new friend,” she said to the stick, “and help me to look like Curse Fanning. He hobbles just so.”

“Do I look like Curse Fanning?” she asked, a moment later, and laughed—this little woman with the fever in her mind, the nameless aching at her heart, and that call for physical endurance that was swelling her ankle.

The red spots came back to her cheeks, her lips grew like a blood-red rose, her eyes still sparkled like magnificent diamonds, and, in spite of the dreary clinging of her wet garments around her, the Little Red Princess looked more 1ike a merry little mimic hobbling along than like a woman in great pain. Every now and then she changed the sigh of anguish that rose to her lips into a brave but hysterical laugh.

“You and I,” she kept saying to the stick, “you and I, my new friend, will get to the station before we give it up. You and I, you and I.”

The flag-pole that had first attracted her attention stood out white and clear in the gray of the slanting rain, but Imogene marvelled to see it swaying back and forth, back and forth all the time, like the mast of a boat rocking in a storm.

“You and I,” she repeated, steadying herself on the stick. “You and I.”

The life-saving stations all dispense with their crews through June and July, but the keepers go on duty at night. Now it chanced that Captain Hunting, of the Two Mills Station, having business at his Meadowneck home in the shape of nursing his sick and perhaps dying wife, sent his son, Simple Simon, to spend that night in his place on the Beach. Simple Simon did not know that his mother might be dying; he had seen her lie abed so much that he did not wonder to see her lying there now so white and still. He said: “Good-bye, mom; don’t hurry up, now,” and went down to the landing to beg Old Gol to sail him over to the Two Mills Station.

Old Gol set the keeper’s young substitute off at the little station-dock, and then went sailing thought fully home, blinking down at the waters almost all the way for fear that he should see the body of the lost Little Red Princess come floating down on the tide. Simple Simon walked through the rain and the softly falling dusk, up the cross-meadow path, under the stunted wild-cherries, past the men’s small cottages, until he came to the life-saving station and the steps that led up to the door that opened into the keeper’s room. He carried an immense basket of provisions in his hand, for, although Simple Simon was only an overgrown, stoop-shouldered boy of eighteen, he had the appetite of a giant with eighteen stomachs. The basket was heavy, and he set it down on the lower step, and, straightening back his shoulders, looked sagely up at the roof of the little porch. A low, faint moan came to his ears, and observing that there was nothing on the roof that could be moaning, Simple Simon let his eyes fall

until they rested on the floor of the porch and upon a girl's figure lying prone, face downward, with arms thrown forward.

The boy sprang quickly up the steps and turned the little red figure about until the face was visible; where-upon the Little Red Princess opened her eyes and smiled. So she had smiled at the policeman; so Don Quixote; and as her smile had stirred their hearts, so now it stirred the not unkindly heart of the foolish boy.

"You and I," murmured the Little Red Princess. "You and I." Then her eyes closed, and she sank back against the foolish boy with a sigh of content.

"Me and you," said the foolish boy. "Me and you."

He looked down at the girl as if she were an angel that God himself had laid in his arms; he lifted her tenderly as if the same God had said:

"She is human and you are her father."

Then he unlocked the door and took the Little Red Princess into the office. In-doors it was almost dark, and although he held her so carefully, meaning to lay her down on the lounge, the boy let Imogene's foot strike against the desk as he passed, and with a cry of pain the Little Red Princess woke up.

"Where am I?" she cried, with such terror as she had felt fleeing down that dark street in New York. "Who are you? How dare you touch me?"

She struggled out of Simple Simon's arms, and, holding one foot in her hand, made her way upon the other until she reached a chair.

"My foot!" she moaned. "Oh, my foot! The pain is very dreadful. My new friend, why don't you help me? You and I! you and I!"

Simple Simon, who had paused in the middle of the room, helplessly hurt and bewildered, now came and knelt at the feet of the Little Red Princess.

"You're silly, poor thing!" he said. "Very silly. You can't help it, an' we must be kind to silly folks. Let me see your foot. You be Mad Nancy's girl. I didn't know you at first. Poor Mad Nancy she's silly."

He lifted up the lame foot and laid it gently on his knee. To Imogene this was all a part of a dreadful dream; every now and then she would have moments of wide-awakeness, but when the boy took her foot in his hand she was dreaming.

“It’s a very big foot—so fat and big it’s busted its shoe,” said the foolish boy. “Let me see the other.”

Imogene’s healthy foot, slim, arched, with dainty ankle, was taken into the foolish boy’s hand.

“Your feet hain’t mates. Poor, silly Mad Nancy! Your feet hain’t mates.”

“Oh, the pain—the pain!” moaned the Little Red Princess. “The pain is very dreadful. It is dark in this room. Robert, why don’t you light a lamp?”

“That’s so! Simple Simon, why don’t you light a lamp? Then you can see her foot better.”

He put her feet softly down upon the floor, and with much fussing and fumbling managed to light the brass lamp that stood on the centre-table. Imogene sat blinking at the light, holding her lame foot in her hand and moaning. “‘She’s hungry,” said the boy, and straightway went out-of-doors for the basket of provisions.

“I think,” said Imogene, looking up with her unnaturally bright eyes as he re-entered — “I think, Mr. Stick, that if you cared anything about your new friend, you would help her get her shoe off. It hurts. It hurts very much.”

Simple Simon set down the basket of good things and again went to kneel before the Little Red Princess and take the swollen foot on his knee. He began to unbutton the shoes—those simple, childlike red shoes that Imogene meant never to wear again

“I take my little sister’s shoes off every night. Simple Simon won’t hurt you,” he said, with grave remonstrance, for Imogene had commenced to shriek.

“Cut it! Cut it!” she implored. Oh, where are my wits? I am as foolish as you! Have you no knife? Cut it!”

Simple Simon whipped a great jack-knife out of his pocket, opened the blade, and inserted the tip between the red shoe and the red stocking. Imogene sat still and rigid, frowning in the effort to collect her thoughts, but she was safe with the foolish boy. He was murmuring:

“Oh, you poor thing! You poor, silly thing! Why didn’t you tell me your ankle was sprained? I sprained my ankle onct. I had to sit with my foot up forty-nine years, and everybody come to see me. Mother—she’s abed now—she said, ‘Let the kittle bile, an’—’ ”

He stopped of a sudden and rushed out into the mess-room, to come back five minutes later grinning in a congratulatory way.

"The fire was all built. I jest only had to light it an' put the kittle on. Why didn't you think of it before, silly thing?"

The Little Red Princess had turned her chair about until she could reach the table, then laid her head down upon the cool blue-and-white cloth and fallen asleep. Simple Simon could hear her long, irregular breathing.

"It is dretful to be so tired," he whispered to himself. Then the boy went back to work at the shoe. He cut at the kid until the shoe fell off. Without a blush, for his heart was as pure as an infant's, he cut the red stocking from knee to heel and threw it on the floor. All the while the Little Red Princess was moaning as one in a wretched dream.

"Poor foot!—all black and swelled up. Simple Simon so silly not to know they was mates. So glad he sprained his ankle onct and mother put it in hot water—so glad he knows where pop keeps the white rags. Simple Simon, bind up Mad Nancy's red-bird's foot."

And so the Little Red Princess sat in the lifesaving station, only two miles from home, fast asleep, with a gentle, pure-hearted, foolish boy nursing her lame foot, while the whole family in Hurricane Hollow, and half the able-bodied men in Meadowneck, went forth to search for her—while Robert Fanning roamed in sack-cloth and ashes over the streets of New York, seeking his lost kingdom.

That night Imogene lay in her damp clothes under a patch-work quilt on the lounge in the station office, and the boy stretched himself on the floor in the mess-room and listened to the moaning of the surf on the shore, the lashing of the rain against the windows. The next morning, which chanced to dawn clear and crisp, Imogene sat up long enough to drink some coffee, to eat a biscuit; and then she fell into a troubled doze, which lasted until noon. When she woke up the foolish boy was gone, and her wits had in some measure returned. Going to the telephone, she rang the bell in the hope that by some chance some one would answer and agree to carry a message to Hurricane Hollow, but the stations all along the Beach were empty that day at noon. She stumbled against the boy's basket, and fell to eating like a famished creature. She knew that God's Puppy and the others at home must be well-nigh frantic by this time, and she vowed to herself that she would find some way of getting home, if she died in the attempt. Her friendly stick of yesterday lay upon the floor; she picked it up, and, opening the door, went out upon the office stoop, with one of her feet attired in its red shoe and stocking, the other bound round with enough rags for four sprained ankles. The station stood on a sloping piece of ground, and over the tops of the low, wild cherry-trees she could see the Bay sparkling in the fair noontide, and white sails lazily floating along its surface. She could see the farther shore, green with the

meadows and black with the forests that lay to the south of Meadowneck, but dotted farther westward with the houses, the church-spires, and the two wind-mills of the village of Two Mills. They all seemed so near—almost as if the intensity of her longing could throw a bridge across the water, and carry her away from the foolish boy to a place where sane people could help her home. Simple Simon rose from his seat on the lowest step of the porch, and, bounding up to her, exclaimed:

"Silly girl! You can't walk alone. Lean on me. I set still an' kept my foot up as high as the Christmas-tree. You be a-shakin'. You be a tremblin' like a leaf. There, there, I'll carry you back."

Simple Simon had been sitting there looking out over the Bay, wondering if his mother had got up yet; wondering, without any discontent, why Old Gol had not come over in the skiff as he had promised to come this morning. The lad did not know that his mother was dead, and that the living members of his family had concluded that it would be best to leave Simple Simon where he was—safe enough, and not unhappy, for he loved to be alone—there on the Beach until after the funeral, when they could tell him that the weary mother had gone rest in a place where there would be no need for her to "hurry up!"

Imogene protested that she did not wish to be carried back into the station; she wanted to sit on the step beside Simon and ask him to do something for her.

"Anythink—Simple Simon would do anythink but go an' leave Mad Nancy's little red-bird."

Imogene frowned and looked at those sails—so white, so beautiful, so far away. If they were only nearer she might succeed in signalling to them from the dock.

How did you get over, Simon? There isn't so much as a sharpie at the landing."

Simon told her, and they both searched the waters in hope of seeing Old Gol's skiff. Then the girl said, with a bitter little laugh:

"Old Gol will be coming ' 'long 'bout four or five 'clock; to-morrer er next day. G-o-o-ol! Don't make no diff'rence, I guess. Got all the time thar is!"

Her mimicry of Gol Biggs's voice and manner was so perfect that the foolish boy laughed loud and long, for to him it did not make any great difference when Old Gol came; the provisions would hold out for some time yet.

"Listen to me, Simon," said Imogene, with a swift change of manner, leaning forward and looking straight into the boy's eyes, as she often looked at Mad Nancy when it was

necessary to fix the old woman's attention. "Listen to me. You are a good boy. You like Mad Nancy's little red-bird, and so you will walk over to Hurricane Hollow for her—"

"Pirates at Hurricane Hollow," interrupted the foolish boy. "Simple Simon's afraid."

"Do you call me a pirate?" demanded Imogene; but he only repeated:

"Simon's afraid."

Imogene began again:

"Simon, look here. To-day is—it must be—Thursday. Monday night I went away from home. No one knew that I was going. No one knew where I went. Suppose you had been away from home three days, and your mother did not know where you were."

"Mother's abed," said Simon, his lip trembling. He turned his eyes away from Imogene's eyes, so beautiful, so compelling in their earnestness.

"You be dretful pretty for a silly girl," he half whispered.

"I will go myself!" cried Imogene, and, starting up, hobbled off the stoop and dragged along the sands until she fell from pain and weakness. The foolish boy ran to pick her up, crying, pitifully:

"Poor, silly little girl—so silly!"

Imogene laughed at her own helplessness, then cried, with her head against Simple Simon's shoulder. Growing drowsy again, the Little Red Princess fell asleep.

XIX

No Roses for Barnabas

ON a fair summer's day the outlook from the Manor graveyard is very peaceful, very quiet and beautiful. No sounds of life are apt to come from the stately, lonely mansion of the living. If the graves have a voice, it calls only, "Why fret thyself?" The fields and the meadows, clothed in their living green, speak to the eye alone of rest and of quiet; from the wide forest, plumed with the tops of the pines, there comes no sound that calls above the low, monotonous voice of the sea. The stones all stand with their faces to the sunset—to the sunset and to where the waters of the Ponsopogue flow out into the waters of the Bay, with a halting and a confusion that may be like the futile attempt of the River of Life to flow back between its own accustomed banks before it is swept into the sea that lies beyond the sunset.

The graveyard is fenced around with a white, iron fence; the gate, sinking under the weight of its years, stands half open. So full is the graveyard that you wonder if any place can be found in it for Barnabas Fanning when his life also shall have come to an end. This Thursday afternoon, while Imogene was trying to get some good out of the good intentions of Simple Simon, the mortal man Barnabas himself was there in God's Acre, passing from stone to stone, reading one inscription after another, and bending frequently to write with a lead-pencil in a shaking hand some addenda of his own to the inscription.

Two stones flat upon the earth mark the graves of Enoch Fanning and his wife—and Enoch Fanning was he who first came over the sea to establish him a princely manor in the heart of a savage wilderness. Could he come back this day he would not marvel at the changes in the stately mansion, would not marvel at the lordly loneliness of the great woods; but to find out how had fared his race and what changes had been wrought in it by the centuries, he must needs have wandered back to the family graveyard. Enoch's epitaph is blurred and indistinct now; it lies in a mist of green moss; but Barnabas, who had read it over and over as a child, still remembered the quaint words:

"Pause, stranger, and consider how brief is the span of life; how endless the stretch of eternity.
"Stranger, pause and consider: a span of pleasure, an eternity of repentance."

"Old fool!" said Barnabas, and passed that grave by. Then, as if struck by a new thought, he turned and looked back at the fallen stone. "Not a fool, but a hypocrite," quoth he. "I'll swear that you, too, betrayed your handmaiden. How do you know that you are not you and I am not thou?"

Having made this wise proposition to the man who had been sleeping under the stone for two hundred years, Barnabas passed on to the tall and graceful monument that marked thc graves of his father and mother, and it was here that he began to write. Paying no attention to the graven inscription, he wrote with his black lead-pencil under Colonel Fanning's name:

"Died of apoplexy, day after Nancy's curse."

He crept around to the mother's side. His mother had been the proud woman that brought Nancy from the charity home in New York, and the woman who, on the day that Nancy humbled the family to the dust by her public disclosure, wept tears of blood over the stain that had come upon the Manor.

"Died June30, same year. Broken heart. Nancy's curse," wrote Barnabas.

Then, without looking up, he dragged himself along to his brother Jacob's grave. Jacob had been the one who proposed the plan of taking Nancy to the poor-house, and on his tombstone, there being already the record of his drowning in a mighty storm just outside Fire Island Inlet, Barnabas wrote only:

"Nancy's curse."

And so the scowling, crazed old man went on from stone to stone, attributing every death in the family for the last fifty years to Nancy's curse. On his son's stone, the stone of that son who had died of malignant diphtheria in his twentieth year, he wrote:

"Cursed be Nancy's curse! My son my only son!"

When he came to his son's wife's grave he wrote nothing, but only laughed scornfully. For after her husband died, and the little Cynthia had been born, the daughter of the miller had pined away in the uncongenial atmosphere of the Manor, and on her weary death-bed she had bidden the hated Barnabas to write on her stone:

"Killed by family squabbles."

And Barnabas, never loath to record a bitterness, living or dead, had so caused it to be written. He came upon another stone, a new, substantial gray monument, on one side of which was engraved Mother Margaret's name, with thc date of her birth given and the date of her death bare; while on the other side, his, Barnabas Fanning's, name was written in the same manner. There was no epitaph beneath his name save one that he had scrawled in pencil yesterday, and which was now partly washed off. He knelt close to the stone and wrote carefully over the dimmed lines:

"And then Nancy said: 'Barnabas shall be a beggar, with no place to lay his head.' "

The old man straightened himself, and, sighing, looked up, and there was Mad Nancy herself leaning over the fence, watching him with mad intensity.

"Whar's her grave?" she demanded. "Whar'd you bury Imogene? I come to see her grave."

Barnabas rose slowly, his hand seeking the stone for support. When he spoke his voice was thick with fear.

"I didn't know that Imogene was dead, Nancy. Are you sure she's dead?"

Nancy leaned her elbows on the fence; tears were falling unnoticed from her wide, blue eyes.

"I knowed that you killed her. I said all along, 'He's got her.' Which is her grave? I want to lay down an' die on her grave. I run away an' took the skiff when none of 'em was a-lookin'. It's lonesome on the Beach without my Leetle Red Princess. Whar'd you bury the Princess?"

Barnabas measured the distance between himself and the gate, the distance between Mad Nancy and the gate also; but even as he looked, and wondered at his chances of getting away from her, she began to creep slowly along the fence.

"Cuss Fannin'," she said, with a note of wistful pleading in her voice, "I hain't never asked you a favor afore—not in fifty year. Whar'd you bury her? Be this her grave? Or that? Whar'd you bury her?"

Then Barnabas began to reason with Mad Nancy; he told her that he had not seen Imogene, he told her that if Imogene had been buried in the graveyard there would be a fresh mound of earth, and here there was nothing but dead grass and a net of brambles.

"I know whar she is," Nancy broke in, suddenly. "You laid her out in the big hall, thar behind the be-yu-ti-ful curtain of roses. I want to see her laid out thar so fine. Take me to see her, Cuss Fannin'. Take me to see her!"

An eagerness to convince Nancy that he knew nothing of Imogene, that she had no need to curse him afresh, took hold of Barnabas Fanning. He came hobbling on his cane out of the graveyard, and went hobbling at Nancy's side across the field, over the lawns, and through the old-fashioned garden. Through that same garden, filled then with the blossoms of lavish June, the child-mother Nancy had come with her baby

fifty years ago; and up those same steps the wronged little woman had walked while the sound of laughter came floating across the veranda from out of the banquet-hall.

"The roses hain't thar now," muttered Nancy to herself. "The door's wide open."

Barnabas looked at her out of the corner of his eye, and when she paused on the threshold of the magnificent old hall, he cried, in a loud but trembling voice:

"See, Nancy! She isn't here. Look all around. I haven't seen your Imogene. I would not hurt your Imogene."

Nancy looked around as she was bidden, but there were curious new lines among the lines that age had drawn across her brow. She muttered to herself incessantly as she passed slowly around the room wherein she had not stepped for fifty years; and it was not of Imogene that Mad Nancy muttered.

"The table was set so—best silver—best everything. The fireplace was full of red roses — roses everywhar. I smell 'em. Do you smell 'em, Barnabas? Poor Barnabas!" Suddenly she looked at him, and perhaps for one moment Nancy rose to great heights and saw what sort of a hell the wretched man had been floundering in all through the long years, for her look and voice grew tender. "Poor Barnabas! thar hain't no roses for you now anywhar."

Barnabas pounded with his stick on the floor. "Come into the parlor. You'll see she isn't there. This way!" He beckoned wildly with his cane.

"I know—I know," muttered Nancy, still walking slowly and looking around at every step, as one walks and looks for changes on coming back to the home of one's childhood.

"Hurry up!" cried Barnabas, irascibly. "Hurry!"

Nancy went into the parlor, and there, her manner swiftly changing, she darted across the room to where the long, wide, gold-framed mirror hung between two windows. When as a little slave-girl she had been used to coming into the parlor to wipe up the hearth, or to do some drudgery, that clear mirror had always drawn her, creeping timidly and with many a backward glance, lest some one should discover her straying from her work—had drawn Nancy as for over two hundred years it had now been drawing the less humble daughters of Eve and of the Manor. Once, when she stood there looking at the reflection of her plump, pretty figure clothed in its tattered gown, at the reflection of the face that Barnabas had declared so pretty, he himself had come stealing behind her and kissed her where she stood. And she had blushed to think that the mirror saw and reflected the action.

Wise old mirror! How many other kisses have you seen and kept secret? Barnabas was a man and he remembered not the day of the kiss before the mirror, but Nancy remembered, and she called him to her with a gesture that the trembling old man could not resist.

"Stand here! Lemme see how we look together now!" she said, and the mirror called out across the room:

"Nancy is waking up. Barnabas, beware!"

Once more they two stood before the glass. Time had wrought great changes in them. Time had refined Nancy, brutalized Barnabas. In the old days he had been as straight as a reed, happy, smiling, debonair, while she had been only the little kitchen drudge, hanging trembling on his every look and glance. Then they had looked so ill- assorted that Enoch Fanning's mirror must have frowned and said, "It is wrong!" Now they seemed not an ill-mated pair. It was the man who deferred to the woman now, who hung trembling on her every word and glance. He was bent and twisted and ugly, with a hideous fear stamped on his face. She was straight and slim; she looked as if her dwelling in madness all these years had been dwelling in a realm higher and not lower than this world. His dress was the dress of an untidy old man; she wore a cool blue-and-white calico gown, and a white sunbonnet hung over her shoulder.

"What do you see in the glass?" asked Mad Nancy.

Barnabas turned his head and glanced around, then whispered as he faced the glass again: "I see the true lady of the Manor."

Nancy did not hear him. She was answering her own question:

"I see a leetle baby a-laughin' in its father's arms, an' a-ketchin' at itself in the glass."

"It is I," moaned Barnabas.

"It is my baby, who never came here, but crawled on Daddy Danes's doorstep. What do you see next, Barnabas Fannin'?"

A wretched fascination drew Barnabas closer to the glass; he clutched his stick hard and peered at his own reflection from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. Now he began to speak, ad he spoke so rapidly that he made no pause wherein he might catch the meaning of Nancy's mumbling.

"I see a boy in his first boy's suit. His father comes and swings him up and says, 'There, my little man!'

“I see the same boy grown to sixteen, and he stands here saying good-bye to the old glass, goodbye to his boyhood, for he is going away to college. The carriage waits outside the door; the horses paw upon the ground. The same carriage that takes him away brings back the foundling girl from New York.”

“Oh, the be-yu-ti-ful woods! The be-yu-ti-ful woods!” sang Nancy.

“He comes again. There is some one hanging on his arm, some one smiling up into his face My love, ‘tis Margaret. Mother says that day, ‘If Nancy were only black instead of pink and white, I might give her to you and Margaret for a wedding gift.’ ”

“A weddin’-gift,” moaned Nancy.

“She comes again,” cried the old man, and his voice rose high and shrill. “She is all in white— my bride! My Margaret! I shall be a good man now. The past is dead. My love! My Margaret!”

Nancy—the Nancy of the long ago stirring her to action—laid her two hands on the madman’s shoulders and forced him down upon the floor. Rage was beginning to kindle in her wide, blue eyes. Barnabas did not seem to notice, but knelt where she had thrust him before the mirror and went on:

“And now what do I see? The Colonel in a passion. It is the morning after Nancy’s curse. Jacob and I, we face him together. He calls us blackguards and scoundrels. He says that he casts us off forever; we are no sons of his. His will is made. He holds it in his hand. He roars, he shouts, he curses, he foams at the mouth. Suddenly he grows black in the face and falls down upon the floor. I kneel and lift his head, while Jacob runs to the door, calling, ‘Mother!’ ”

Barnabas paused. He laid his hand on the gold frame of the mirror and leaned his head upon his hand. One might have thought that he was praying. Nancy watched him, and, as she watched, the mad look slowly faded out of her wide, blue eyes. She stretched out her hand and touched Barnabas on the shoulder with the tip of her forefinger.

“What was it you give Daddy Danes that mornin’?”

Barnabas turned slowly and looked at her, his own face grown white to the very lips. But Nancy’s moment of clear-sightedness had passed, and now she croaked:

“Ef ‘twa’n’t a ring, what was it?”

The color came slowly back into Barnabas’s face. He rose to his feet with some realization and some mannish shame of the scene he had just been enacting.

"You see Imogene is not here," he said, with forced composure. "Come, Nancy. If you're not satisfied, I'll take you all through the house."

"The hall—I love the hall best. I lost a ring thar onct."

Barnabas shuddered. With deliberate cunning he considered how he might inveigle her out of the house and down to the landing, away from him and the Manor.

"Let's go out and look around the old fort. Maybe she's sitting on top of the cannon."

Barnabas smiled at his own shrewdness; but Nancy said, abruptly: "One black night, out by the old cannon, do you 'member what happened, Barnabas?"

"Good God! Is there nothing you can forget?"

"Yaas—yaas," moaned Nancy, but not in answer to his frenzied question. "I lost a ring—a ring."

They were now in the hall. Barnabas would have drawn Nancy out by the door nearest the parlor, but she walked the length of the hall to that door whereby she had entered upon the wedding-feast a half-century ago.

"The table set so," she muttered. "All the fine folks dressed up so grand. The bride so near the door I could 'a' tetched her with my hand. Roses everywhar. Thar hain't no roses now for you, Barnabas."

Nancy paused in the doorway and looked back into the rich old hall. Barnabas, who had been following her, paused also; and now there was that in Nancy's face which made him cover his own face with his hand. Nancy did not kneel as she had knelt fifty years ago. She stood on the threshold of the hall, with the garden and the blue sky for her background where once there had been a curtain of white ribbons, of pink and white rosebuds. She stood still, with her hands clasped and her eyes lifted to heaven, and low and clear she spoke, as if she were praying alone:

"Cuss you, Barnabas Fannin'—your sons an' your darters, father and mother. Cuss you, Jacob, an' your hull race. May your darters—"

She grew confused, stumbled in her speech, then looked down, and her eyes fell upon Barnabas Fanning. The most abject terror was in his glance. She cried out, with her fingers piercing into the flesh of her hand:

“I cuss your whole life forever an’ ever. I cuss you here an’ I cuss you when you lay out thar whar you buried Imogene. You think the time’s gone by an’ the cuss won’t come true; but I tell you now that you shall be a beggar yet, with no place to lay your head.”

“Nancy!” cried the old man. “Nancy, take back your curse. Think of the fifty years—the horrible, horrible years! The curse fell upon father and mother; upon Jacob and his family; it fell upon my son. It turned Margaret from me. Nancy, Nancy, I will not die, I will not die until you take back the curse. Take it back—take it back, Nancy!”

“No roses for Barnabas anywhar—poor Barnabas!” Once more she reached the heights and looked down with pity upon him in his self-made hell. “I will, I will lift the cuss!” Then her madness came upon her again, and her cunning. “But no, I won’t, not till you bring back Imogene—my Leetle Red Princess so long gone away. An’ I want a ring—a plain gold ring—solid gold—not brass, with green and yaller stones in it like Daddy Danes keeps; but I want a plain gold ring; round an’ fat, like you put on the hand o’ the bride when—”

Nancy turned, and, lifting her hands, laid them upon the jamb of the door and rested her head there while she began to cry softly.

“I’m sorry for the bride,” she murmured, between her gentle sobs. “Sorry—yaas, sorry!”

A light breeze came stirring through the hall; it lifted the locks of Nancy’s gray hair; it touched the hot face of Barnabas as it passed. He crept forward and laid his hand on Nancy’s shoulder. The action was so gentle that his own grandchild would not have known Barnabas then. Nancy lifted her head and turned about. She did not look at Barnabas, but folded her arms into a cradle and crooned:

“Thar, thar! Nancy’s poor baby, don’t cry!”

The tears were streaming down her own cheeks There was a sound in the upper hall like that of a woman’s sobbing, but neither Nancy nor Barnabas heard. He seized hold of Nancy’s arm in the effort to fix her attention

“I cheated you! I robbed you! I, the father of your child. Fifty years is a long while to be accursed and to carry a secret in addition to the curse. It burns me up. I can keep it no longer. Listen to me, Nannie, dear. I will make it good, I will tell the secret, if you will only lift the curse, if you will only let me die in peace. Nannie, Nannie!”

Nancy was still nursing the baby that had been a babe a half-century ago, but was now a man of fifty, and the father of her grandchildren.

“Thar, thar! Nancy’s poor baby, don’t cry!”

Barnabas thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a small, stained, old, leather-bound book.

"Here it is, Nancy," he cried, holding the book before her eyes, which were still brooding over the babe of fifty years ago. "This tells it all—take back your curse!"

"I want a ring; you said you was a-goin' to give me a ring. I don't want no books!" said Nancy, sullenly, as she dropped her arms. "I want a plain gold ring like the bride's."

"See! Look! Listen to me, Nancy! Here is that which will buy all the rings you want. Half the Manor is yours and half Margaret's. The book tells you; the will is in Daddy Danes's barrel, and I am what you made me by your curse—beggar, with no place to lay my head."

Nancy seized the book with a wild chuckle, opened her dress, thrusting the book into her bosom, then turned and ran out of the house, still chuckling like the mad woman that she was:

"A barrel full o' gold rings—I knowed it—I knowed it! But I don't want but one—only one plain, solid gold ring."

XX

The Wedding Ring

NANCY paused beside the old cannon, and, shading her weak eyes with her hand, looked at the two figures coming up from the river-side. The afternoon train was in, and Cynthia and Robert were making their way back to Pepperidge Hall. The dauntless Cynthia had drooped on the way home, and now her chief desire was to fling herself into the hammock under the trees and rest. But the coming back into the country of his Princess had put fresh, nervous strength into Robert, so that it was Cynthia who went listlessly on to the Hall, and Robert who paused to see what could be done for Mad Nancy. At first Nancy would have nothing to say to him, gentle and kind though his manner was, but she stood there backing up against the ancient cannon, clutching the bosom of her dress wherein that wonderful book was hidden, and puzzling Robert by gazing steadily down at his hand.

"Granny, dear," he persisted, "you must have had some good reason for coming here. Tell me what it was. Let me help you. Is there anything in the world I can do for you, granny?"

In his own tortured mind he could hear her answer: "Bring back Imogene!" But this was not what she said. She stretched out her lean hand and touched the ring that he wore on his little finger, crying out: "That's mine! Give it to me!"

Robert bit his lips, and, holding up his hand, looked at the ring. It was the wedding-ring that he ; had bought the morning after Imogene ran away—the wedding-ring he meant to put on Imogene's finger the moment he found her, no matter where that might be.

"I will give you anything in the world but that. It is not mine to give," said Robert.

"You stole it. You stole it from Imogene."

"Then will I give it back to Imogene, and to no one else."

"Is it a weddin'-ring?"

Robert nodded" yes. "Nancy unfastened her dress and slipped her lean hand into her bosom; then, to Robert's surprise, brought out a stained, old, leather-bound book.

"He said that this would buy me a ring—all the rings I wanted, but I don't want but one. I've wanted just one for fifty year. Everybody give me a ring. I said when I met folks, 'You hain't got no ring, hev you?' an' then they'd go an' fetch out a glass ring or a rheumatiz ring, an' then everybody'd say, 'Why don't you wear your rings, granny?' I

didn't want to wear that kind of a ring. I wanted to wear a weddin'-ring like Mis' Marg'ret—a weddin'-ring—a weddin'-ring." She put one shaking hand before her eyes and began to cry in her soft, quiet way, all the while clutching the book in the other hand. "Onct of a dark night, right here by this here old cannon, Barnabas said as I should be his wife and wear his ring; an'—an' then I lost my ring before I had it—ask Barnabas. Now here by the old cannon I find my ring. It's on your finger. Give it to me—my weddin'-ring—my weddin'ring."

She was still crying, with her hand before her face. Robert leaned over the mad creature and began to stroke her gray locks. Her words stirred him deeply, but not so much for Nancy's sake as for the sake of the Little Red Princess. He was thinking of the night he drove her from him, realizing at length how, in that single moment, this poor grandmother's whole life must have passed before Imogene.

"Granny, do not cry. The ring is yours. Take it and wear it. Let me put it on your finger. It fits you, granny, as if it were made for you, and I think it was. Do not cry. Do not thank me. It comes as a gift from Imogene."

The ring gleamed on Nancy's lean, rough, bony finger. She cried and she laughed. She held her outspread hand before her face, feasting her eyes upon the ring; she kissed it passionately; she kissed it reverently. Then she seized Robert's hand and kissed that also. Overcome with his sense of guilt and shame, he tried to snatch his hand from her, but that only served to make Nancy drop the book and close her two hands over his.

"Bless you, Robert Fannin'! Bless you! Barnabas is a beggar, with no place to lay his head. The cuss is all on him, an' with them as lies in the graveyard over thar. Bless you! Mad Nancy blesses you because you found her ring."

She dropped Robert's hand, and, beginning to sing softly to herself, walked down the slope of grass towards the landing. Robert sat down on the cannon and covered his face with his hands, but looked up in a moment when he heard Mad Nancy calling.

"I thought he'd buried her over thar," she said, smiling, as she turned about and pointed to the graveyard. "But she's a-comin' back to her granny. The ring told me so. Good-bye, Robert! Good-bye!"

Robert again buried his face in his hands. He sat there on the old cannon while Nancy put up her sail and went floating homeward, singing as she went—while the old book with the story between its leaves lay unnoticed at his feet.

XXI

The Day of Reckoning

UNDER the shadows of the great woods of Pepperidge Manor the day dawns, noontime comes, and the day fades again; but here it is always twilight until there falls the blackness of the night. Now a golden twilight, and now a deep, dusky twilight, but ever twilight still. It is the forest of old Long Island, the forest wherein the Indian ran wild before the white man began to covet his wide possessions; it is the forest which Enoch Fanning first saw more than two hundred years ago, and pronounced: "Very good; therefore will I take it." The trunks of the trees rise up like gigantic columns; far overhead their branches intertwine like the arms of brothers, and their voices sing the mighty song of their brotherhood. Here their feet rest in a carpet of pine-needles; here they stand ankle-deep ferns; there beneath their shadows grows the wild flower, breathing up its tribute of perfume. No sound of the woodman's axe comes loud and clear; no human voice breaks upon the stillness no human feet rustle through the drift in the narrow road, save the limping, nervously brisk old feet of Barnabas Fanning.

Scarcely had Nancy stepped off the veranda than Barnabas left the hall and the house, passed through the gardens, down the avenue of pepperidge-trees, and entered into the twilight of the woods. It was down this same narrow road that the carriage had started on that November night so long ago when Nancy, with a vision of a "grand and beautiful tavern" before her eyes, went to the county poorhouse. Barnabas had not forgotten; he remembered so well that sometimes he thought that he was not walking alone through the shadowy daytime, but driving by night with Jacob and the little Nancy. He walked hurriedly, did Barnabas, as walks a man with a distinct purpose in view, and never once did he turn to look behind or to see what might be stirring in the woods. Birds sang over his head, squirrels and rabbits darted daringly across his path; he heard yet did not hear the barking of a fox in the distance. Once Cynthia's tame white deer came stalking out of the woods and walked for a space beside the old man, but, wearying of his silent company, bounded back into the woods again. Barnabas noticed neither the coming nor the going of the deer, but walked steadily on, while the twilight of the woods slowly changed from golden into dusk. A clear, cool brook came babbling across the road and ran beneath an old log that served as a foot-bridge. Barnabas kneeled upon the log, and, dipping his curved hand into the water, raised a drink to his lips. His hand trembled so that half the water was spilled upon his clothes, and he had to drink several times before his thirst was satisfied.
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"A beggar's draught," he said; then, raising yet another handful of water, began to bathe his face. "The beggar's wash," quoth he. He wore no hat, and he did not stop at bathing his face, but let the cooling water pass over his head also.

"The beggar's brain is heated with fifty years of thinking," muttered Barnabas.

He rose and continued on the way. A blackberry-vine, laden with its ripe fruit, chanced to strike his eye, whereupon he stooped down and absently began to pluck and eat the berries. When he felt satisfied he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and, lifting his face to the tree-top roof above the road, said: "I thank Thee, God, for the beggar's meal."

He had not given thanks so consciously, so reverently, in all his threescore years and ten, and scarcely had he said these words than he laughed and cursed beneath his breath.

Deeper and deeper grew the twilight; the night fell, and still he had not passed out of the Manor grounds and reached the public road. He looked around him, and, seeing that he was passing through a grove of pines, bent his crooked back and gathered a heap of the fallen needles into a gravelike mound there in the middle of the road. Then he laid him down on the bed of pine-needles, and, closing his eyes, muttered:

" 'And Barnabas shall be a beggar, with no place to lay his head.'"

It had been a long walk for the old man. He fell asleep as quickly as a child, and, as evenly as a child's, his breath came and went, while in his chamber at Pepperidge Hall the great mahogany bed which had been his father's and his father's father's before him waited through the silent hours of the night. When Barnabas awoke the blackness had gone from the forest, and a silver twilight was sifting down through the tops of the trees. The surf-like voice of the forest was softly sighing, softly sobbing, beneath the light of the moon. On that November night of fifty years ago that same moon had floated over the top of the forest; there had been the same soughing of the trees. A whippoorwill had called as one was calling now.

"Nancy, don't cry," whispered Barnabas, and, rising to his feet, passed on.

He was no longer the bent, haggard old man walking alone through the woodland, but a young scion of a lordly house seeking to bury his past by one infamous deed in order that his future might be without shame or stain. He felt not the earth beneath his feet, nor the loneliness that surrounded him, for he was sitting on the luxurious cushion of a carriage and his hand was clasped tight in that of the foundling girl.

She cried; it was very annoying how she cried. She talked; her language and her words jarred upon his ears. She flung her arms around him and clung to him passionately; was it for her embrace that he had sold his birthright?

"Drive faster!" cried Barnabas, walking alone in the moonlight.

He passed beyond the pines and came to the spot where tall pepperidge-trees lined the road. Here the light was clearer, and it was here that on the November night of fifty

years ago the multi-colored autumn leaves lay deep in the roadway. “How the leaves cling to the wheels! I never saw them cling so before. These November nights are damp. It is as light as day. How they cling, and how their colors show! Nancy, you are a poet; they are ‘like fairy young uns stealing a ride.’ ”

Babbling, talking constantly, on and on the old man went, while the highest branches of the forest watched the waning of the moonlight, the chill, creeping in of the dawn, and then the rosy promise of the daybreak showing in the east.

At daybreak Barnabas, walking more slowly now, and with halting steps, came out of the woods of Pepperidge Manor and into the highway. Here the silence was almost as deep; the road, if not as narrow, still quite as sandy; but the great woods had given way to a younger, scraggy growth of oaks, whose leaves had been turned by the summer’s sun into a hopeless brown. There was no one in sight the whole length of the road, but presently Barnabas came upon a cabin by the roadside which gave out a sickening odor. It was here that a father and son lived without the care of any woman—lived in such dire neglect that they were known throughout the neighborhood as the Two Dirty Tims. The younger Dirty Tim came to the door as Barnabas was passing. Tim had not shaved or cut his hair since New Year’s Day, but Barnabas did not see the dirt and hair upon his face; he saw the steaming tin cup that Tim held in his hand. Barnabas Fanning, of Pepperidge Manor, walked into the yard and hobbled humbly up to the man that stood in the doorway.

“Will you please give a poor beggar-man something to eat?” said he.

Dirty Tim, the younger, glanced at Barnabas with no show of curiosity or surprise; then he turned and looked back into the cabin, shouting with all the strength of his great lungs:

“Pop, here’s an old tramp wants my coffee.”

“Waal, give it to him,” roared out a voice from within. “Thar’s more in the pot.”

Young Dirty Tim had heard much of Barnabas Fanning, but, business rarely taking the lord of the Manor along this road, Young Tim had never chanced to see him before. If the father had come to the door he would have ducked his head to Barnabas and said that fine folks took strange notions, and Barnabas would have received his coffee just as he was receiving it now. The bareheaded old man took the tin cup, with its smeared sides and its steaming contents, from Dirty Tim’s hand, and then, going a few steps from the door, sat down upon the grass to drink. Presently Young Tim, who had turned into the house, came again to the doorway and threw a broken half of a loaf of bread to the beggar sitting in the yard.

Oh, could the old servant, Betsy Biggs, have seen Barnabas then! She would have dashed the unclean food from his hand and marched him homeward like a naughty child. But at that moment Betsy was setting the table in the panelled dining room; setting it with heavy old silver, and quaint, egg-shell china. She thought that Barnabas had "gone abroad" again, but hoped that he would come back in time for breakfast to save her the trouble of trudging up the stairs to set the meal outside the attic door.

Barnabas drained the tin cup of its last drop and left not a crumb of the bread untouched. He rose to his feet, and, going to the doorstep, put down the tin cup and called across the vacant threshold:

"Thank you, sir!"

A low rumble came as an acknowledgment from in-doors, and then Barnabas set his face to the street. Two little foot-passengers were coming down the road now, a whistling boy, with bare, brown legs, and a little maid, with her legs bare also. The girl had a face like a flower, and hair which seemed to have caught in its tangles the sunshine of all her five summers. The boy stopped whistling at the sight of Barnabas, the little girl shyly pressed closer to the boy's side, and both the children edged over across the road. Barnabas followed them, with a strangely pathetic motion of appeal.

"Why are you afraid of me? I would not hurt you," he said. As the children paused at the sound of his voice the old man laid his hand on the bonny head of the little girl.

"Poor little babe, with all your woman's life before you!" His voice was broken and tender. Hearing it, Margaret would have remembered how he had pleaded outside her closed door the night she locked Nancy's betrayer out of her room and out of her life. The child looked up at the old man with her eyes full of timid wonder.

"Poor little babe! You are coming some day to the Garden of Womanhood. There will be white lilies in your garden, the pure, the fragrant white lilies. Tend them well, little maid. There will be weeds also; but worry not about the weeds. They will never choke your garden. And deep in the heart of the garden—so deep that you may not know it—there will be budding the red rose of passion. God planted the rose: be not ashamed of it. But God curse the man who tramples down the white lilies for the sake of snatching the crimson rose!"

His hand slipped from her head; the child, with all her bashful wonder turned into awe, placed herself behind the boy and peeped over his shoulder at old Barnabas. The man took the boy's head between his hands, not with the gentleness he had shown the girl, but roughly.

“Let me look at you! That is well; a straight and honest glance. You are going up the Hill of Years now. What you gather going up you will have to carry coming down. They will tell you that fate is fickle, my boy. It is the fairest thing in the world. Over there lie my father’s acres; here, the beggar’s road. Hatred I leave behind me; hatred I carry with me. It is an awful thing to grow to be an old man,” he whimpered, as he let the boy go. “An awful thing to be an old man; a beggar in purse, a beggar in love.” He walked on, forgetting the children, mumbling as he walked.

Now there was a road other than this Main Country Road at his hand. It cut into the oak wood, was narrow, choked up, gray and desolate. Of their own accord, his feet seemed to take this road. He muttered:

“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.”

The two frightened, awe-struck children had found their voices and their power to move. They ran after the old man, calling, in shrill, friendly voices:

“That’s the way to the poor-house!”

When they had said this three times Barnabas caught the meaning of their words, and turned and looked at them with almost courtly dignity.

“You are mistaken,” he said. “It is the way to a magnificent tavern where they will take in the beggar with no place to lay his head.”

The boy whispered something to the girl, and they ran back to the main road. But old Barnabas had taken a fresh hold on his stick, and once more turned his face towards the poor-house.

XXII

"To my Princess"

IT had been arranged that whenever the Little Red Princess should come home, a signal should be raised from the top of the great dune, and on Friday morning, when Barnabas Fanning was making his way to the poor-house at the command of nothing in the world save his own fearful conscience, and Robert was riding back to New York, there to renew his search for the lost Imogene, a white sheet fluttered from the top of a pole that had been erected on the great dune solely for that purpose. *The Seven Sons and One Daughter*, watching from the distance, turned its nose towards Hurricane Hollow, firing off guns of victory as it came; all the old enemies of Pepper Oakes who chanced to be on the water stood up in their boats as he passed and waved and shouted and called hurrah!

Then from over the meadows, for the morning was very still, there floated the sound of the old churchbell ringing joyfully. One hour before, it had tolled out the burial of Simple Simon's mother, but now it rang like a wedding-bell.

Cynthia, pricking up her ears, asked Betsy what that might mean, and when Betsy, who knew everything, told her, Cynthia ran out-of-doors, and with her own hands raised the flag and then the colors of Robert's yacht from the high flag-pole at the Manor. Straightway she rushed to the landing and went across the river to telegraph to Robert. When she came home Betsy told her that, having become alarmed by the fact that Barnabas had taken neither his supper nor his breakfast over the gang-plank into the attic, she had opened the door and found all Europe empty. Cynthia went out on horseback, telling Betsy to go over to Meadowneck and hire two men to search the woods for Barnabas. And for money, the two men started to search with careless, contemptuous jokes at the expense of Curse Fanning. Yet these same men had hunted for Imogene with their hearts in their mouths and their commercial instincts in abeyance.

Yes, Imogene had come home. Big Mother, setting her lost daughter's room in order that morning, had gone to the door and, shading her eyes with her hands, looked sadly out to the glimpse of the ocean's blue that showed between the dunes. God's Puppy came and clung to her skirts, looking up for one glance of love. He had felt Big Mother's limbs tremble, heard her gasp, then heard her say:

"Look, Pup! Be I a-dreamin'?"

Then Pup had looked, and they two had run, laughing, crying, stumbling, to meet the Little Red Princess riding slowly homeward on the back of the old white horse.

"Oh, Salty! Dear old Salty!" cried Big Mother.

“Oh, Salty, why for did oo go widout me?”

They both spoke Salty’s name, but they both thought Imogene’s.

Imogene sat bareback and astride, and she leaned far over the horse’s neck, with her face white and strained, and not one single word on her lips. Her eyes spoke for her, however, and they were eloquent of pain, of remorse, of love and thanksgiving. When the wise old horse halted Imogene lifted her arms to Big Mother, and Big Mother’s arms wrapped themselves around the girl, lifted her from the horse, and then held her close, while Big Mother’s feet carried her into the house.

“What ails my baby-girl’s foot?” was Big Mother’s first motherly question.

“Sprained—Wednesday. Hurts dreadfully. I came as fast as I could, but Salty seemed to know it hurt.”

Big Mother asked no more questions She merely laid Imogene across her lap as if she were a baby, and began to unbind the foot gently. But God’s Puppy took hold of Imogene’s head, and, putting his mouth against her ear, whispered: “I nebber told, Im’zene!”

The girl smiled up at him with a look of unutterable love; then God’s Puppy kissed her blissfully, and, still with his little hands fondling her rumpled hair, asked aloud how Salty had found her.

“I was in the lookout over at the life-saving station watching for somebody. And I saw old Salty roaming around as if he was looking for somebody. Then I made Simple Simon go and catch him.”

“Simple Simon!” began God’s Puppy.

“Thar, Pup, don’t ask her no more questions. She’s sick. You go watch for the boat and tell them to sail right back to Two Mills for the doctor.”

“Blessed Big Mother,” murmured Imogene, closing her eyes. “Wicked Imogene, to go and leave her. “

Big Mother, with the tears gathering in her eyes, pressed her lips to Imogene’s. “Never mind that, my baby-girl. You have been away; nobody cares why, now that you be back agin. Prince Orange has been to home, but had to go back to York agin. He said to tell you that he knowed all about it an’ it was all right, an’ he left a long letter for you. It’s thar under the match-box on the shelf. You kin read it when you git alone.” Big Mother’s large, tender fingers were unfastening Imogene’s dress. Her eyes

told her that the dress had been soaked in rain, and her heart told her that the girl lying like a baby across her lap was no longer a child of dreams, but a woman of sorrow. Nevertheless, Big Mother smiled and kissed away the tears that sparkled on Imogene's lashes. And Big Mother said, as softly as any lady mother could have said: "Don't talk, my baby-girl. I thought the sun had gone down, but it's a-shinin' brighter 'n eve' in the sky."

Mad Nancy had been roaming over the dunes to the eastward all the morning, and she was the last of the whole family to come home to greet Imogene. Imogene lay on her white bed, looking out of the open door across the sands. Mad Nancy waved the others out of the room, shut both the doors, and with every sign of secrecy and triumph showed Imogene the wedding-ring upon her finger.

"I found it' I found it' I found it agin!" cried the old creature. Imogene roused herself and sat upright in the bed.

"Why, granny, it's a wedding-ring!"

"Yaas, a weddin'-ring. Chummy says, 'Whar'd you git it?' Pepper, he says, 'A-takin' what's your own an' a-stealin' rings be two diff'rent things.' I didn't think my son 'd say that to me. They all got me in the corner and they says, 'Whar'd you git it? You must take it back.' But I shut my hand like this, an' I shut my mouth like this, an' they didn't dast to tech me. Chummy, sometimes I think he knows. He looks at me so queer like."

"Tell me, granny, dear. Where did you get it?" pleaded Imogene, frightened lest Mad Nancy should indeed have stolen the ring.

Mad Nancy looked all around the room, at the closed doors, at the open windows; then, bending close to Imogene's ear, she whispered: "I'll tell you. He gave it to me."

The color flushed Imogene's white cheeks. "Who is he?"

"Robert Fannin'. I see him with you one day. You didn't know granny seed you, an' I never telled. "

Imogene sank back on the pillow, the flush gone from her cheeks, and even her lips turning white.

"I never telled. I never telled."

"And, granny, you never will tell?" whispered Imogene. 'Because—because they might hurt him.

The old woman gave a cunning glance at the kitchen door and nodded. “Yaas. Chummy, he’d kill him. Yaas—yaas.”

Imogene shuddered. The King was dead, yet she wished no evil to befall him who had worn the shape of the King. “Let me take the ring one moment, will you, granny, dear?” Although the King was dead, Imogene spoke wistfully. Nancy took the ring from her finger, protesting at the same time that it should never come off for any one else—never for any one else. Imogene, with a hasty, timid movement, slipped the ring on the third finger of her left hand; then, as quickly and as shyly as she had put it on, slipped it off again. The King was dead, but the touch of his ring upon her finger had thrilled her through and through.

“Be you a-laughin’ or a-cryin’, darlin’?” suddenly asked Mad Nancy.

Imogene held the ring between her thumb and her forefinger, turning it over and over as she was turning over and over a certain subject in her mind. Presently, however, she brought the ring close up to her eye and looked intently at some words engraved on the inside.

“To my Princess.”

With a swift, almost savage motion, Imogene thrust the ring at Mad Nancy, crying: “Put it on and never take it off again.” Then Imogene turned and buried her face in the pillow.

“Bad Imogene,” said Mad Nancy. “She’s cross. She’s a-cryin’. Bad Imogene!” The King was dead, but when Imogene was left alone she threw out her vacant arms with a passionate gesture, and whispered:

“ ‘To my Princess! To my Princess!’ ”

She thought that Robert had taken this way of asking her forgiveness, of trying to explain, of seeking to call her back to him.

“No, no,” she moaned. “The King is dead"

XXIII

The Turn of the Wheel

SATURDAY night was the busiest time of the week in Daddy Danes's store, for then it was that the good-wives of Meadowneck sent their husbands or their children to buy sufficient provisions to last until Monday. To be sure, Daddy Danes had been known to unlock the store door for some belated customer on the Sabbath day, but he never would take the money for such purchases until Monday's sun arose, and there was a fastidious reluctance on the part of all Meadowneck to be in Daddy Danes's debt even over-night, though the sum were no more than the price of a pound of sugar.

So Daddy Danes had to put some spring into his shuffle on Saturday nights, and sometimes he had to call Pernelia B. from the other side of the Door of the Attentive Crack to help him.

This Saturday evening they were both in the store, and the store was more nearly crowded than it had been at any time since its more prosperous days before folks began to call Daddy Danes a "skin." And everybody that came in had something to say about Curse Fanning's going to the poor-house.

"Did you ever?" Pernelia B. would say, holding the scoop above the scales. "[Three pounds an' a quarter, wa'n't it?] Yes-yes. I was over to the poor-house this afternoon. I simply couldn't stand it. Beats anythink I ever read in the papers; an' Mis' Munsel, the matroness, is second cousin to my brother's wife, you know. [Shall I tie it up separate?] She's got a real pleasant room on the front o' the house, an' we set down an' had a cup o' tea. They give the paupers that dretful cheap black tea jest onct a day, that's all; but we had the best mixed. Well, she says Cuss Fannin' come a-walkin' up the steps 'bout half-past ten yis'day mornin'. She'd jest happened to look at the clock in the hall the minute 'fore she see him. [Yes-yes, Mis' Baker; I'll git your mail in a minute. The Cap'n sick? Oh, gone west a-clammin', eh ?] Waal, she says he jest come a-walkin' in a-smilin' like a baby, an' she didn't know him from Adam, 'cause she hadn't never seen Cuss Fannin', nor nobody else over to Ponsopogue, sence he took to spendin' most o' his time in Europe. They ast him his name, an' he smiles jest as sweet as you please an' he says:

" 'Nancy Oakes. You be a-spectin' me?'

" 'Yes - yes,' they says, sorter humorin' him when they see he was sorter simple. 'We be always a-spectin' folks like you to the poor-house.'

"Now hain't that funny? Them's the very words they used to Nancy when she come to the poor-house fifty year ago. She's told me many a time. Then, a-seein' he was all

tired out, and kinder grimy with a-walkin' through the dust, they took him upstairs an' give him a bath. Hy, guy! What Cynthy said when she heard that, I dunno! It beats anythink I ever read in the papers. [Here you be, Cap'n Eli. Fourteen cents. Folks all well?] Lemme see; whar was I? Oh, yes-yes. Waal, then they showed him to his room. You seen them poor- house rooms—whitewashed board walls, not even a crocheted mat on the floor, a pesky, leetle iron cot, somethin' all over the room what calls out: ' Poor-house! Poor-house! You pauper, you; you're a-livin' on the county Poor-house! Go hide your head!' "

Pernelia B.'s voice rose so high that she gained the attention of the whole room, and purchases were forgotten. Even Daddy Danes stopped shuffling about and stared at his wife. He had dreamed hideous dreams of going to the poor-house all his life long, and now his lips were trembling with emotion as well as twisting up into their accustomed pucker.

"Waal, he went to his room an' he sot down on the bed.

" 'Looks familiar, don't it?' says he. 'Ef you'll excuse me,' he went on, as polite as he

ever ust to be when he was young, 'I'll lay down. You see I been fifty year on the road an' I'm tired now. But I'm very thankful to be here. I slept in the woods last night on the bare ground.' Then he sorter muttered: 'A beggar, without no place to lay my head,' an' then went fast asleep.

"They woke him up dinner-time, an' he went down-stairs an' eat his dinner along with the rest o' the paupers. You seen them air tables in the dinin'-room, hain't you? You seen the benches they set on, hain't you? [I declar, thar's Cap'n Golly.
Folks all well?] You seen them air tin spoons an' black-handled knives, an' dishes as

looks an' feels like bleached-out iron? They happened to have bean-soup yis'day, an' I guess, from all accounts, that was 'bout all they did have."

"What'd they want the knives for, then?" demanded Old Gol. "Look out thar, Pernelia B., or g-o-o-ol! you'll be arrested for a-slanderin' the poor-house."

Pernelia B. grinned appreciatively and went on, for there was no stopping her when she was once started.

"Lemme see, whar was I? I declar, it beats any think I ever read in the papers! Oh, who do you think he sot next to at the table? That air one-eyed tramp who ust to hang around here summer an' winter until folks couldn't stand it no longer an' got the constable to put him in the poor-house. He poked fun at Cuss Fannin', 'cause Cuss he had such good clothes on, an' he offered to swap vests with him, 'cause he didn't have no vest of his own. But Cuss jest set thar a-smilin' like the innercentest baby, an' he

turns to that air poor old Mis' Newton, what her darters turned out-o'-doors last March, an' he says to her, too polite fer words:

" 'This here is a magnificent hotel, hain't it?' An' poor Mis' Newton, she jest wiped her eyes an' says:

" 'Do you think it's better than a-dyin' by the road-side?' "

Silence fell in Daddy Danes's shop. Mrs. Danes's own eyes were dim. Old Gol blinked fast, then muttered: "Poor old Cuss!"

Simple Simon came in and told the company in general that his father had given him five cents to spend exactly as he pleased, and he was going to buy nothing but peppermint-drops—all peppermints.

Everybody smiled with kindly pity on the boy tonight, and there was not one joke cracked at his expense. Pernelia B. opened the door of the candy-case and began to count the drops as she lifted them up with her fingers and let them fall, one by one, into a paper bag. Daddy Danes gave six peppermint-drops for a cent, but when Pernelia B. had counted thirty she glanced hastily but defiantly at her watchful lord, and then deliberately added one more peppermint-drop before she handed Simple Simon the bag. When asked later on why she did so unprecedented a thing, she explained:

" 'Poor boy,' I says to myself — "poor boy! When your father's dead an' gone or married to a stepmother, what's a-goin' to keep you from the poor-house? Who knows,' says I, 'that these here hain't the last pep'mints you'll ever git, Simple Simon?' So I jest chucked in an extry one."

Pernelia B. never forgot her husband's answer. He had sniffled and snuffled in his usual way, and she had set her lips close together and made up her mind, figuratively, to fasten up her ears also; but Daddy had said, reproachfully: "Why didn't you make it two?"

When you spoke of the poor-house, you struck Daddy Danes on his tender point.

After Simple Simon had left the store and passed out of hearing, Mrs. Danes resumed her story:

"Waal, twenty-two minutes after three—Mis' Munsel had jest happened to look at the clock—Cynthy Fannin' come a-tearin' in the yard on horseback. She flung the reins down, jumped onto the ground, an' run up them air steps to the front door as if the divil was after her.

" 'Whar's my grandfather?' she cried. 'How dare you keep my grandfather in this here place?' Then they knowed that they'd been a-ent'ainin' angels unawares, an' they was some scart fer fear Cynthy 'd take it to law. She's that high fer a-law in' it. But she didn't give none o' 'em time to answer. She spied the stairs, an' up the stairs she went a-racin' an' down them air long, gloomy halls. She stopped at the first door that stood open, an' it happened to be Cuss Fannin's. Thar he sot on that air camp-stool in front of the winder, an' his head was in his hands.

Now Cynthy's got her good p'ints an' Cynthy's got her bad p'ints, but temper hain't one o' Cynthy's good p'ints. She was mad clean through. She's the proudest thing on arth, and when she see her grandfather a-settin' thar in the poor-house, she laid her hand heavy like on his shoulder, and she cried: " 'Gran'pa, what do you mean? Git up this minute an' come home with me!'

"Cuss turned 'round an' looked at her. They say you'd never know him now, he's jest like a lamb. He can't live long that way, it's no use a-talkin'. He jest looked at her with that innercent, baby look in his eyes, an' then he turned back to the winder. He very likely thought as she was one o' the lunatics what run loose aroun' the poor-house. Then Cynthy broke down an' she knelt on the floor beside him an' put her arms aroun' him, an' says: " 'You will come home, gran'pa?'

"But nawthin' she could do 'd make him budge. He jest sot thar a-lookin' out the winder. Then she says: 'Treat him well! Treat him well! I'll pay you fer it!' An' she went a-ridin' off home fer Mis' Margaret.

"Waal, they have supper up to the poor-house afer they do their chores, but 'fore Cynthy come back, supper-time come 'round. Mis' Munsel says that with her own hands she went an' fixed the beautifullest meal o' victuals fer Cuss Fannin' you ever see. Br'iled spring chicken, toast, peaches, an' cream—an' you know how dear peaches air this year. An' she put it all on a waiter with a napkin under it, an' a napkin over it, an' a napkin fer Barnabas to eat with; an' then she went herself and carried it up-stairs. Hy, guy! He wouldn't tech it. He says, says he, 'I'm a pauper, an' I want poor-house victuals. Woman,' he says—that's what he called her — 'Woman, d' you think I be a thief to take what belongs to Nancy?' "

A subdued murmur ran around the circle. Daddy Danes snuffled, and, readjusting his spectacles nervously, tried to catch Pernelia B.'s eye, but the innocent woman went on: "Then he says, a-gittin' polite agin, 'Excuse me, madam,' an' went down-stairs an' sot down to the table agin betwixt Cross-eyed Bill an' poor Mis' Newton. An' he eat mush and milk fer his supper, happy an' a-smilin' all the time, an' he didn't have as much as one napkin. But Bill never ast him to swap vests with him then.

"Miss Munsel an' the doctor an' ev'rybody else was scared to death fer fear Cynthy would come back an' find him a-eatin' supper along with the reg'lar ones; an'—it beats anythink I ever see in the papers—that's jest what she did. Rob, he was along tew. He'd come on the afternoon train—what's he a-runnin' back and forth to York all the time fer, I wonder?—and thar was Cynthy, Rob, an' Mis' Margaret. They tried to keep them out of the dining room, but Cynthy, she talks hard wifh her tongue an' smiles sweet with her eyes, an' the men-folks let 'em all go into the dinin'-room. Mis' Munsel says you could 'a' heard a pin drop when them three come an' stood in the door. Every one o' them air poor critters looked up from their mush an' milk to the Fannin'ses in the doorway, an' then they all turned an' looked at old Cuss. He hadn't stopped a-eatin'. He hadn't even looked up, but when he see that everythink was so quiet, he jest lifted his eyes an' he looked square at Mis' Margaret. Thar she was — poor Mis' Margaret! I always said she was more like an angel 'n a woman. No matter what I've said agin them air Manor folks, you never heard me say a word agin Mis' Margaret. She had a little black bunnet a-top her white hair, Mis' Munsel says, an' her white dress as spic-an'-span as if it had just come off the ironin'-board. She always looked the lady from er head to her heels. I saw her fall overboard onct, an' when they hauled her up she was jest as much a lady as when she went over. They say she hain't never spoke an extry word to Cuss Fannin' since the day Nancy cussed the hull caboodle, fifty year ago."

"That's so," spoke up Gol Biggs. "G-o-o-ol! Betsy says that betwixt that air man an' wife a-livin' in the same house thar was a hull ocean o' bad feelin'."

"It beats anythink I ever read in the papers," reasserted Pernelia B. "Waal, when Mis' Marg-ret see him a-settin' thar so ca'm an' mild an' innercent amongst all them air poor-house critters, she made a little cry an' sorter swooped acrost the room, thar before them all she leaned over Barnabas put her arms around him an' drew his head up a her breast, an' she says, says she: " 'I turned away from you fifty year ago, Barnabas, but I turn back to you now. My husband, come home with me!'

"Barnabas got up—he'd finished his mush milk, anyway—an' sorter pushin' Mis' Margaret away from him, he says—oh, so polite, but oh so decided: " 'Excuse me, madam, I hain't got no home,' he says. 'Take me away from here an' I shall be a beggar, with no place to lay my head.' Nancy's very words. I never see anythink like it in the papers.

"Nobody could tell from the way he acted whether he knowed Mis' Margaret or not. They got him out o' the dinin'-room by hook or crook, an' then they all set on him in the hall. Robert went for him. Cynthy went for him. Mis' Margaret begged an' begged, with her face a-growin' as white as her dress. He wouldn't budge. They tried to carry him like a baby, but then he begun to scream, holler. His hull cry was that if they took him out of the poor-house he would have to go a-beggin' from door to door; an' he was scart to death. Then the doctor, he come forward an' he says, says he: " 'It won't be fer

long, anyway, an' I won't answer fer the consequences if you make him go away. The kindest thing you kin do,' he says, 'is to go yourselves an' leave him alone. He will be well took care of, an' he will be happier than he's been in fifty year.' Yes-yes, he told 'em that right out.

"So they all went off to the Manor an' left him, an' thar he is yit, a-wanderin' 'round the poor-house, happy an' a-smilin', as long as they give him poor-house grub an' treat him like the paupers. Cynthy's a-payin' double board for him, but Cuss don't know it. He's in the poor-house, an' thar acrost the river is the hull Manor a-flowin' with milk and honey."

"Poor Cuss!" For the first time in all their lives they pitied the old lord of the Manor, and yet Barnabas Fanning had at last reached that point in his life when there was no need to pity him. His remorse, his cares, his secrets, were all left behind, and he was happy in the poor-house.

"Poor old Cuss!" They shook their heads sadly. "Poor Mis' Margaret, mebbe she's been a little hard on him!" They shook their heads doubtfully.

"Poor Cynthy!" Here they laughed with tolerant pity.

"A-winnin' law-suits right an' left. A-claimin' the hull arth for the Manor. Things a-goin' so smooth for her that she must 'a' begun to think she was God A'mighty; an' then for the head o' the house to jest git up an' walk into the poorhouse. Whatever possessed him to switch off from his Empories an' Queens in Europe an' go to the poor-house? Why did he do it?"

A number of voices had asked the question, but Gol Biggs alone answered:

"A-takin' Mad Nancy to the poor-house so long ago had been a-preyin' on his mind for fifty year. G-o-ol! What other reason could he 'a' had?" Old Gol stopped blinking long enough to give Daddy Danes a look that seemed to pierce through Daddy's tough, wrinkled skin. Daddy Danes cleared his throat with a loud noise; he shuffled across the room with his nose and his mouth twisting.

"Who was it that asked for a pound of butter some time ago?" he quavered, then went shuffling out to draw the butter-pail up from the depths of the well.

Pernelia B. began to measure out a quart of beans for baking. Old Gol blinked up at the ceiling, which was supposed to sag with the weight of those traditional barrels of gold in the loft above.

"Hush-money," said Old Gol, softly, as if speaking to himself.

“What ‘d you say?” asked Pernelia B., looking up from levelling off the measure of beans.

“I was jest a-sayin’, g-o-o-ol! Cuss Fannin’ must ‘a’ took some wonderful secrets off to the poor-house with him.”

“I don’t doubt it,” rejoined the unsuspicious Mrs. Danes. “An’ they’d beat anythink you ever read in the papers, tew. Here’s your beans, Cap’n Heman. Folks all well?”

XXIV

The Ship of Dreams

THIS Saturday night was a still, starlight night 1 Over on the Beach the sound of the surf was soft and like a lullaby. The shadows of sleep lay thick on the sands; now and then a star fell in the heavens, and the other stars blinked to see it fall then went on with their silent watching. Prince Orange, who had come from New York on the evening train, and Imogene sat just outside the door of her cabin-room. Within, God's Puppy was sleeping. Imogene sat in a comfortable old steamer chair, with her lame foot, swaddled to huge proportions, placed high upon a stool. Her healthy foot was bare and showed white under the starlight. Prince sat on the sands beside her, with his back against the cabin. Imogene's greeting to the brother, who alone of all the family knew her secret, yet to whom she was almost a stranger, had been shy and proud, while Prince himself had felt a sense of embarrassment and clumsiness.

"Oh, for a woman's intuition and delicacy!" he had thought. He had waited until he could be alone with Imogene, determined to make the most of such delicacy as he did have before broaching the subject of her tarrying away from home.

“Little Red Princess,” he began, very tenderly, when to his dismay the Little Red Princess turned upon him with startling fierceness.

“Never call me that again! The Little Red Princess died on Monday night when—when someone else died also. See, my foot is bare, and it shall stay bare until I get shoes like other people. Chummy bought me some dye to-day, and I am going to dye all my red dresses black. The Little Red Princess is dead.”

“Poor Little Red Princess!” murmured the brother, raising his hand to stroke her arm. Imogene turned her face away from him in the sheltering dimness of the starlight and her figure was tense and still.

“And that other who died on Monday night?” said the brother, starting afresh. “He was the fairy Prince, I suppose.”

“He was the King.”

“Ah, the King! And how long had you been dreaming of the King, little one?”

“When does a girl begin to dream? I cannot tell you.”

“And your King—had he a form and face before he came? In your dreams, had you been able to call him by any other name than the King?”

Imogene answered hurriedly, and she clasped her hands tightly in her lap. “My King was to be a gentleman—absurd, ridiculous though it was.”

“There is nothing absurd and ridiculous about it. My sister is a lady.”

Imogene laughed a hard little laugh, and went on in the same hurried manner:

“What business had I to dream dreams befitting a true princess in her palace or—or Cynthia Fanning over there at the Manor? What could any gentleman want with me—Mad Nancy’s granddaughter? I tell you, you were cruel, brother, when you sent me those beautiful books, when you took the greatest care in selecting my reading—when you did all you could at that distance to set my ideals high above my position. It was you who first called me the Little Red Princess. It was you who started me on my ship of dreams; and now the ship is wrecked and the cargo is lost forever, and I—I shall never go dream-sailing again.”

“Little one!” he cried. “It is true that I have done you a great wrong, and I shall move heaven and earth to right it, but the wrong did not lie in starting you on your ship of dreams. You started yourself. It did not lie in raising your ideals—you have ideals that not I or any other man could touch. It did not lie in feeding your mind with nothing more than crumbs when you hungered almost to starving. The wrong lay—” He stopped abruptly, then began again:

“Little one, if the King was to be a gentleman, who formed your idea of what a gentleman should be?”

“You—partly.”

“Tell the truth, Imogene.”

“I have never told anything but the truth all my life. Over here, we savages all tell the truth, but in your world—and his—there is nothing but lies.”

“The gentleman you took for a model,” gently persisted the Prince of Orange—“who was he?”

“I never realized it. I never owned it to myself, but he was Robert Fanning. I had never seen any other gentleman. Before he went away, ten years ago, I used to see him on the river, in Meadowneck, everywhere. He stood out clearer than any other figure outside this home of mine. I was told to hate him, together with the rest of the Fannings, but until—until lately, I have never been able to hate anybody. It has been hard for me to believe that anybody’s sins could be greater than their need of pity. I know better now. Oh yes, I know better! I am glad that justice has at last come upon

that old man, and that he is in the poor-house. I am glad Cynthia is humbled. I am glad—"

Imogene's voice died away, and the brother thought that he heard her weeping.

"Poor Little Red Princess!" he murmured, forgetting himself again. "Her world has turned itself upside down. My dear," he went on, "I want to understand your position thoroughly. Did Robert ask you to marry him before he took you off to New York?"

"He did."

"And do you think that he had no intention of so doing?"

"I thought so at first. I do not know what to think now. But it makes no difference. That does not alter his action one bit."

"It alters it very much. No one but the blackest kind of a scoundrel could have taken a girl like you off to New York to ruin you, but any man might have fallen as your King fell. The other day I gave Robert Fanning the lie direct. I asked him who could trust the word of a Fanning; but, even as I spoke, I knew that there was truth in his face. Whatever you have suffered, rest assured that he has suffered tenfold. He will be coming over to see you; what are you going to say to him?"

"He must not come!"

"Imogene, you have told the truth all your life, and you will tell the truth now. Has all the love you bore the King been turned into bitterness and hatred towards the true man?"

Imogene did not answer. In her ears were ringing the words engraved on the wedding-ring: "To my Princess! To my Princess!"

"Imogene, when Robert comes and tells you that he loves you more than ever, now that he has come so near to losing you—when he asks you to marry him, what are you going to say?"

"He must not come! He must not come!" Imogene's voice sank almost to a whisper. "The boys would kill him."

"Imogene, you love him yet."

The girl laughed, and Robert, who had called her "the gentle Imogene," would not have known the harsh laughter.

“I think all kings must die sooner or later,” she said, “but they seem to have a—a curious habit of rising again. Their — their ghosts seem to walk.”

“You need a change, poor child. This is, indeed, a place of ghosts for you, and you must come away. When your foot is well and the heat has passed, you must come to the city and stay with me. Never mind answering now. We will talk about that later. Imogene, Cynthia Fanning is willing that Robert should marry you. Have you thought of the position that the marriage would give you?”

“Do you think I would marry for position?”

“Have you thought of what people must think of your running away from home and staying four days? Do you care anything for your reputation?”

“My reputation!” cried Imogene. “Go back to your City of False Values. I have been a fool, I have been selfish and inconsiderate, but I have done nothing evil. I have lost my faith, but I have not lost my virtue. Who am I that I should care for my reputation? Will mother or father or the boys question me? Will they doubt for one minute that I am not all I should be? Do they care in the least what the folks in Meadowneck say? You care, you are the only one, and you may put your mind at rest. No one knew of my friendship for Robert Fanning; no one connects my going away with any man. They think I turned silly like poor granny.”

“Still,” persisted Prince, “you will consent to marry Robert, for the simple reason that you love him.”

“I shall do no such thing. Nothing on earth would induce me to marry Robert. I should rather marry a total stranger of whom I expected nothing than marry this man I have so idealized. I should always be comparing my husband with the King who is dead. Leave me here or take me away, I do not care what you do with me. I do not care what you say in defense of Robert’s action—even you whom I had expected to denounce him. I should never marry him—never! And if you have any feeling at all for me, you will go to him and make him understand that he must not come to the Beach: I will not see him. Nothing on earth he could say would make me change my mind. Besides—besides, if the boys once get an inkling of what had happened, they will kill him.”

“And make it somewhat uncomfortable for you as well,” added Prince. “I promise you that will go to see him to-morrow morning. Now I think it is time for a certain tired, sick little girl to go to bed, but before she goes I want to ask her to forgive me.

“Forgive you?” asked the Little Red Princess, as she started to rise. Prince jumped up quickly and placed his arms around her.

“Let me carry you—so! Now do you forgive me?”

“Brother, I have nothing to forgive. I have been very cross, very ugly to-night. I don’t see how you can love me the least little bit.”

“I love you very much, Imogene. I have said many things to-night which must have seemed hard, harsh, and worldly. But I wanted you to know your own heart, and I wanted to find out what sort of a woman my little sister had grown to be, so that I might know how to help her.”

“You came at a bad time. You should have come before I woke up, frowning and ugly, in the dreadful glare of the truth.”

“And that is why I ask you to forgive me. I might have spared you so sudden, so brutal, an awakening.”

“No one could have spared me, brother. But as you wish it so much, I will say I forgive you.”

After she had closed her door, Prince wandered down to the surf and watched the moon rise over the waters. He wondered if Cynthia was still awake and looking at the moon from her chamber window.

“Poor Imogene has lost her King,” he thought. “Yet she loves on. And I have loved for many years, yet never known my love a Queen until she brought me Imogene’s lost King.”

XXV

"Not Guilty"

IF Pepperidge Hall had been lonely and gloomy while the presence of old Barnabas pervaded the place, it was doubly lonely and gloomy now that Barnabas had gone to the poor-house. Cynthia could hear the ghosts whispering together of the new disgrace that had come upon the Manor. The portrait of Enoch Fanning, founder of the house, gathered a new frown upon its severe brow; it opened its firm, hard lips, and asked Cynthia how she could have permitted this thing. Every portrait upon the walls had something to say to Cynthia upon the subject, and she wondered that they did not seem to speak to Robert and to Mother Margaret as well. But Mother Margaret was busy watching the portraits upon the wall of memory, while Robert was engaged in trying to unroll the canvas of the future. An overwhelming sense of remorse and pity had come upon Mother Margaret. Robert was pitiful also, but his thoughts dwelt more with his lost Princess than with his crazed old uncle. Cynthia alone was bowed to the ground with shame over Curse Fanning's action.

Then something happened to level the distinctions of the sentiments that burned in the breasts of the three left at Pepperidge Manor. It was on this same Saturday evening, when they three had returned late from a futile visit to the poor-house, and were sitting down to a supper prepared by Betsy. There was no fire on the great hearth this evening, but the fireplace bloomed with the green sprays of the asparagus plant. The windows were all open, and the trees could be heard whispering to one another on the farther side of the porch. There was the same twinkling of lights in the massive silver service that there had been on that May night of Robert's return. He remembered, and thought of the changes that had come to this household since then. Cynthia was not talking now as she had been talking then, with the fire leaping into her sweet eyes, and her healthy cheeks blooming with a delicate pink; she was very quiet and very white, and she scarcely touched her food. Mother Margaret no longer seemed unreal, intangible; she no longer looked the angel placed by some mischance in this great, gloomy mansion of the living. She was simply a haggard, tired old lady, whose husband dwelt in the poor-house. As for Robert himself, he summed up in a few words the changes that two months had made in himself and in his life.

"I stumbled upon my treasure unawares: I deliberately lost it; but, though it take tears and fasting, yet will I come into my own again."

Betsy moved about, waiting upon them with unaccustomed quiet, until Robert wondered if she, too, had changed. She caught his eye bent upon her, whereupon she said:

"Mr. Robbie, did you lose somethin' down by the cannon day 'fore yis'day?"

Robert searched his memory, then slowly shook his head.

"I think not, Betsy."

"Waal, thar's been so much a-goin' on that I hain't thought to speak of it before, but I thought mebbe when you sot thar a-buried in thought so long after Mad Nancy 'd left you, you might 'a' dropped it. The beautifullest burdock on this here place grows down by that air cannon, an' I always told Mr. Barnabas that he mustn't never cut it down. An' yis'day I happened to feel like some greens fer dinner, an' I went down to git some burdock, an' gol! I see this here book a-layin'—"

"That will do, Betsy," broke in Mother Margaret, with so much decision that Betsy could hardly believe her ears. "Where is the book? Give it to me." Betsy drew a stained, old, yellow, leatherbound book from the depths of her pocket and laid it in Mother Margaret's hand.

"Have you read it through, Betsy?"

Betsy reflected that this was the first time that "Mis' Margaret" had ever insulted her. The good woman's cheeks grew red; she tossed her head like a girl as she retorted: "I wa'n't never no hand to read writin', an' gol! the divil himself couldn't make out Mr. Barnabas's hand."

"You may go, Betsy."

Betsy, still tossing her head, went out and slammed the door. Cynthia and Robert were both gazing at Mrs. Fanning in astonishment. Mother Margaret pushed back her plate, and, laying the book on the table, opened it at the first page. Then a thought struck her, and, looking up at Cynthia, she asked: "Have I a right to read my husband's diary? He gave it to Nancy Oakes, and had she not lost it the whole world would probably be reading it now."

"I see no reason why you cannot read it," answered Cynthia; "but, dearest, why should you torture yourself ?"

"I heard them in the hall the other day," murmured Mother Margaret. "I thought he had gone fully mad at last. He said such strange things to Nancy. Now let us see!" She turned again to the diary. "The date is fifty years ago in June. He heads the first page: 'Nancy's Curse. Colonel died—' Ah, let me see; nothing here that pertains—"

She paused, and for some moments went on reading silently, then of a sudden she cried out:

"Oh, of course it was all Nancy's curse! His mother's death. The law-suit lost. The fence blowing down. The cattle dying. His 'beloved Margaret's' refusing to be a wife to him. Her baby hating him. He hated him from the first to the last, when he died—my boy! Oh, children, children, I cannot read it!" Mother Margaret pushed the book across the table to Cynthia, then buried her face in her hands. Cynthia turned the pages rapidly, and as she read her brows knitted themselves into a frown and her lips grew compressed.

"He talks of hush-money; what does he mean?" Cynthia whispered, after a time. " 'Now that Jacob is dead, the secret rests with me and—Danes. Damn Danes!' " Cynthia looked up from the book at Mother Margaret's bowed head.

"Do you know what this means?" she cried.

"I have always suspected. Go on," muttered Mother Margaret. Robert got up from the table and walked over to the mantel. Cynthia began to read aloud again, selecting first one part of the diary and then another, lighting by instinct upon the parts she wanted

" 'I cannot destroy it. I have tried repeatedly. It seems so easy a thing to throw it in the fire. It burns me here against my breast, but I cannot destroy it! Suppose I should die suddenly like the Colonel and they should find it upon me. Mad Nancy—' . . . 'I know what I shall do with it: I shall watch my chance and put it among Danes's papers. Then if it is found, he will be the one to get hell.'

"Nice language my grandfather used," remarked Cynthia. "Ah! Here his son takes the daughter of the miller to wife. How he rants and tears, but I thank God that there is some honest blood in my body!"

Yes, it was Cynthia who spoke, and Robert marvelled to hear her. "Now you come in, cousin," she went on, presently. "Your mother runs off with that painter fellow. Do I blame her? Not I! She was married to a Fanning. The poor thing dies in a year. 'Nancy's curse again.' Of course, Nancy's curse!"

Cynthia grew quiet, yet kept on reading. Mother Margaret's head was still in her hands, but her figure alone would have shown that she waited shrinkingly, as one waits for the falling of a blow. Robert's hand clutched the mantel, and he looked steadily at the girl reading. At length Cynthia, with a swift, furious movement, stood up and flung the book across the room. "There! It's out!" she cried. "Now I know why he went to the poor-house. He is a beggar, with no place to lay his head. Colonel Fanning's will, which made him so, is hidden among the papers in Daddy Danes's barrels. He placed it there by stealth. Mad Nancy owns half the Manor — the Manor, my Manor!" Cynthia placed one hand across her brow and began to walk up and down the room, up and down. The savage had risen in her; she was conscious not of the

wrong that had been done to others, but of the wrong that had been done herself; yet in the midst of her passion she paused beside Robert and looked at him with a strangely tender expression in her eyes.

"Do you remember, Bobbie, how we planned so long ago to bring back the glories of the Manor He said then that one might as well try to catch and patch a falling star. But we stood before the log fire in the hall—do you remember? — and we took each other's hands — so! And we made a solemn vow, you and I, to restore the prestige of Pepperidge. Manor. You were going out into the world to make a fortune — and you did make it. Nancy's curse did not seem to fall upon you. Even now, you are no beggar, but I —"

Mother Margaret lifted her head from her hand and showed her face deadly white.

"Whose is the other half of the Manor? Mine?' she said. "What is mine is yours, Cynthia. "

Cynthia rejoined, bitterly, as she began to wall up and down again:

"And half of all I've earned is Mad Nancy's!"

Robert said nothing, leaning against the mantel but his thoughts were flying fast. His Little Red Princess was no longer a beggar; what change would this bring in their relations? What change the discovery of the secret so long kept by that criminal, Barnabas? Could he hope now that the only daughter of the Oakes family would ever consent to marry him? He was glad for Imogene's sake that she was no longer a pauper, and yet, and yet—Robert was human. Cynthia had begun to talk again, and she was laughing as well as talking. The fire burned once more in her eyes and the roses bloomed in her cheeks.

"Gentlemen of the jury," she said, turning partly to Robert and to Mother Margaret, and yet seeming in her railing humor to include the portraits of the dead-and-gone Fannings in her address: "Gentlemen of the jury, you behold the prisoner at the bar. She is young, as you count the years, only twenty-four, but twenty-four is well-nigh a quarter of a century, and, when all the days of one's life are counted therein, a quarter of a century is a long time. Listen and I will tell you how the prisoner has spent her years since first she toddled out of infancy."

Cynthia rested her hand upon the back of one of the tall chairs, and now stood gazing far beyond the room, far beyond the people and the portraits within the room, while she went on with her half-sad, half-whimsical address. Neither Robert nor Mother Margaret stirred while she was speaking, for both were spellbound by Cynthia's eloquence. Cynthia began her story of the life of the "prisoner at the bar"; she told how the prisoner had been born to an old, aristocratic name in an old-time mansion far

removed from its neighbors; told how she had been fed from infancy upon legends and traditions of the greatness of her family in the days of long ago; told how the determination to bring back that greatness had taken root in her and grown to such proportions that it choked out every other interest in her life — "even beaus and balls," said Cynthia, with a quaint smile. She told of the struggles that the prisoner had had with the study of law — the struggles of the despised pioneer; told how, after eight years of drudgery, she had come at last to be one of the first women admitted to the bar in New York State; told how she had given her time, her thought, her youth, her very heart's blood, her all-and-all, to the Manor.

"And now comes the irony of fate — now comes the little comedy for the prisoner at the bar," said Cynthia. "Half her struggles were won. She had climbed so many rounds of the ladder that she fancied she could see herself perched on the top. She had fought the whole world, the prejudices of men, the petty scorn of small women; she had fought her oldest friends and nearest neighbors; she had fought even herself. For money? Gentlemen, you greatly mistake the prisoner at the bar if you think that. She fought for a cause, a principle; she fought for a mere name — the name of her family and of Pepperidge Manor. And then, when all her struggles were about to be rewarded, what happens?

"Gentlemen of the jury, in a dusty old loft over a dingy little store in the old-fashioned hamlet of Meadowneck, a will that has been lost for fifty years is found. The will gives half the property for which this girl has been fighting all her life to a miserable, little old woman tottering on the edge of the grave — a creature so simple that she cannot tell a dime from a dollar. This woman's days are numbered; where, then, will her half of the property in question go? To a family of pirates that the prisoner has hated all her life — a lawless family, coarse, ignorant, thievish, common, and unclean. The girl is a lawyer, you remember. She knows that no power on earth can break this will if once it is brought into court. But law is not always justice. Law cries: 'Give up the will to Mad Nancy's people! Give up the labor of your years! Give up the family name to be a by-word from one end of Long Island to the other!' But Justice says—it says: 'Gentlemen of the jury, the girl stands there alone in the dusty old loft. She holds the will in her hand. One slight, single movement on her part, and the will—the will so cruelly resurrected after its burial of half a century—is buried again and lost, this time forever. Gentlemen of the jury —' "

Robert sprang to Cynthia with a cry. Cynthia smiled a bitter-sweet smile and waved him back.

Gentlemen of the jury," she repeated, "guilty or not guilty?"

Robert seized her hand and held it fast. "Not guilty!" he said, low and clear. "Not guilty!"

Mother Margaret murmured only: “Poor Cynthia!”

Cynthia brought her eyes to bear upon Robert’s. When she saw his filled with pity and pain for her she smiled again, this time without bitterness, and with the old, sweet look coming back into her own.

“I thought it. Do not despise me for saying it,” she said, simply. “ ‘Twas the Fanning in me that thought and spoke then, but the blood of that strong, simple miller—God bless him!—cries out with you: ‘Not guilty, Cynthia—no, no, not guilty!’ ”She sighed, and, stooping, picked up the diary from the floor. Then she resumed, in a tired, gentle, almost childlike way:

“I am ready to go to Meadowneck to-night, if you will.”

“No, dear child!” replied Mother Margaret. “You are all worn out. The morning will do.”

Cynthia approached Mother Margaret, half hesitatingly.

“May I kiss you good-night?” asked the girl. The tears came into the grandmother’s eyes, and she could answer only by holding out her arms.

Alter the good-nights to the living were over, Cynthia paused on the threshold and looked at the portraits hanging on the wall. To her, they all seemed to be frowning except that one of her mother.

“Good-night, mother,” murmured Cynthia; then, turning, walked out into the hall. There, as of old, the ghosts crowded around her, whispering: “Great are we! Great is the Manor!” Cynthia thought of the old man in the poor-house, she thought of her childhood lover pleading at the feet of Mad Nancy’s granddaughter, she thought of this criminal secret of the will at last come to light.

“Great are we! Great is the Manor!” She whispered to the ghosts. Cynthia shivered. She thrust out the hand that held the diary as if to push back the ghosts with that weapon, and, in thought, she addressed the spirits:

“My lords and ladies of the Manor, our creed would have been perfect had we not left out the one absolute, all-directing power, which is God himself.” The ghosts fell back, and Cynthia of the sweet, true eyes went slowly up the stairs with the diary in her hands.

XXVI

Daddy Danes's Barrels

DADDY DANES, like many another old person, could not sleep late in the morning. He could not sleep late even on Sunday mornings, when Pernelia B. insisted upon indulging in an extra nap and postponing the breakfast for two hours. Summer or winter, Daddy Danes utilized those two hours in exactly the same way. He sat down in the kitchen, tilted back the chair, raised his thin legs, and rested his heavy, shuffling old feet on the window-sill. Then he would open his bloodless lips, expand his aged lungs, and begin to sing "hymn tunes." No matter how much his voice trembled and quavered, no matter how much Pernelia B. snored in the adjacent bedroom, Daddy Danes would go on from one hymn to another, pausing only for brief intermissions of sniffling and snuffling between the verses. When the clock struck the second hour and Daddy Danes stopped, then would Pernelia B. invariably awake and remark that she certainly did enjoy that extra nap on Sunday morning. But this Sunday morning Daddy Danes stopped before the clock struck, and Pernelia B. woke with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

"I want to be an angel," Daddy Danes had been singing, with head and eyes uplifted, when there was a sound of footsteps on the back porch, and Daddy Danes brought down his feet with a thump.

"Now who fergot to git their pervisions in last night?" he thought, shuffling to the doorway, peering over the tops of his spectacles through the netting of the screen.

Outside the door stood Cynthia Fanning, her cousin Robert, and Prince Oakes.

Daddy Danes grew a shade paler, and his hand trembled when he unhooked the door and let in the three young people. "Good-mornin'," said he, smiling his toothless smile. "Hain't you all up pretty arly?"

There was a thumping sound from the bedroom, followed by a swift, rushing noise, and then the door, which had been left open, was closed by an invisible hand.

"Mr. Danes," said Cynthia—and she alone of the three spoke — "I have been thinking about, and trying to account for, your silence. No matter how much money you squeezed out of my grandfather—"

Daddy Danes backed to the window that had been receiving the full benefit of his songs of praise. A shrewd, watchful look came into the eyes peering over his bow-rimmed glasses. "No matter how much you have received from him for your silence," went on Cynthia, "it would have been far more worldly-wise of you to have made known the contents of the will." Daddy Danes opened his mouth as if to speak, but,

failing to utter a word, left his mouth hanging open. “I naturally conclude, then,” went on Cynthia, in her cool, masterful way, “that you did not know the contents of the will. You merely served as a notary, attesting that the signatures were genuine. I presume you admit this, Mr. Danes?”

Cynthia paused, with the air of one who would not go on until she was answered. She, as well as Robert and Prince Oakes, was staring at Daddy Danes. The old man ran his finger under his collar as if he felt uncomfortably warm.

“I—I—don’t know what you be a-talkin’ about,” he stammered.

“I have a due respect for age,” rejoined Cynthia, “but I must tell you Mr. Danes that you’re a liar!”

Daddy Danes gave a tremendous screw of his mouth and nose, then he looked at his wife’s tall, gentlemanly grandson.

“It’s a good thing you didn’t say that, Prince,” asserted Daddy Danes. Prince Oakes did not condescend to answer, but glanced at Cynthia.

“Admitting this,” went on Cynthia, “how do you account for having the will in your possession?”

Daddy Danes was caught; he started forward, and, with a frown and a snarl, exclaimed:

“I hain’t got it in my possession. I hain’t seen it in fifty year.” The old man, realizing at once that he had made an admission, rushed on to defend himself. “I dunno what’s in it an’ never did know. The Colonel drawed it up fer himself, a-settin’ right down to that air table thar. My sister, Lizy Jane, an’ my father was the witnesses. It was the time we had small-pox around here, an’ they took sick that very night an’ died in a week. What could I do about the will? How could any common, ordinary, poor man fight you Manor folkses? I didn’t know what was in the will. I didn’t know but what the Colonel burned it up when he sobered up the next mornin’. He had plenty aboard him that night. But I sorter felt around Barnabas an’ I made him b’lieve I knowed what was in that air will, an’ for fifty year he’s been a-pay-in’ me to keep still about somethin’ I didn’t know. He! he!” Daddy Danes laughed at his own cunning. Whatever fear he had felt was gone; who could blame him? He had only acted the part of a shrewd business man. He rubbed his hands together and laughed again, while contempt and disgust gathered upon the features of his three listeners. In Prince Oakes’s face there was more than this, there was shame also. “So,” went on the old man, “I got the will in my possession, eh? He! he! D’ you think I’m such a fool as—as—?”

“Mr. Oakes,” broke in Cynthia, turning to Prince, “will you please lead the way to the garret?”

Daddy Danes chose to laugh again. He followed in the rear of the little procession headed by Prince Oakes. He hummed the tune of “I want to be an angel” as he shuffled along. Hearing the bedroom door open, he looked back at Pernelia B., who had appeared in a green-and-yellow wrapper. He put up his hand with a gesture that said as plainly as words:

“Go back to your den, beast!” But Pernelia B. disobeyed. She deliberately followed the others through sitting-room and hall, past the post-office parlor, and up-stairs, then through her spare room, and at last through a regular little witch’s door into the dusty old loft over Daddy Danes’s store. Here Mrs. Danes’s housewifely instincts arose, and she commenced to explain why the place bore so untidy an appearance.

“He [meaning Daddy Danes] never would let me clean house in here. He says, says he, ‘I’ll have one place where women-folks can’t come a-sweepin’ an’ a-snoopin’ around.’ Lawsey me! will you look at the cobwebs? Will you look how this here place is cluttered up? I hain’t set foot in it in five year.”

“Huh!” sniffed Daddy Danes, as if to say, “You nor none of these other fools would be a-settin’ foot in here now if I could help it!”

Cynthia swept through the accumulation of lumber, boxes, newspapers, old clothes, and all the stuff that Daddy Danes had allowed to clutter up his garret. She swept straight over to where two barrels stood beside a tiny window.

“Behold the fabled gold!” she said, and, looking at the two young men, laughed.

“But the floor does sag,” rejoined Robert, and laughed with her.

Both barrels were crammed to the top and over-flowing with manuscript. Both were covered with a thick layer of dust, as if they had not been disturbed in years. Prince Oakes remembered the many times he had peeked into the room as a child, and wondered whether he should ever have the courage to run and see if there was actually gold in those barrels; and now, if what they thought was true, there was indeed gold in the barrels for his family. Yet Prince Oakes did not feel elated; he felt distinctly saddened. He knew by intuition what Cynthia had been going through for the past few days, and his heart bled for her. He had started up the river early that morning in the hope of meeting Robert, and as he neared Pepperidge Hall Cynthia and Robert had put out from the landing, and, hailing him, asked him to accompany them to Meadowneck. On the Old Neck Road, Cynthia had lost no time in making known to Prince the statements made in Barnabas Fanning’s diary.

"And now I want you to go with us to Danes's in order that you may see that there is fair play," she had added, with her head uplifted in that old, proud way he so well remembered. He had been too grieved for her to have any room for indignation, and too proud of the fearless way in which she had stated her case while there was still a possibility of the will's not being found. Except for a few words concerning Imogene that had passed between Robert and Prince, the three had made the rest of the journey in silence.

"Mr. Danes," Cynthia now began, "the will is in one of these barrels unless you yourself have removed it within the last five years."

"I hain't teched neither of 'em in twenty-five year, at any rate," vowed Daddy Danes. "Then, lemme see, who was it that died an' their folks come a-lookin' round—"

"David Hen Meeks," broke in Pernelia B., "an' it did beat all! He didn't leave 'nough prop'ty to pay for a-provin' the will."

Cynthia passed her hand wearily over her brow and looked at Robert with a smile in keeping with the tired movement, whereupon Robert went first to one and then another of the three small windows, and, after a struggle with the rusty hinges, pushed them open. The grateful air came floating in, and with it the sound of a chorus of birds.

"I am sorry to disturb your papers, Mr. Danes," went on Cynthia, "but we have got to go through those barrels."

Daddy Danes shuffled over to the barrels in question. His mouth and nose were working fast.

"I should like to know," he said, laying one hand in the dust on top of one of the barrels, "why you be so 'tarnal sartain that I got the will! These here be my private papers, an' you hain't got no right to go through 'em, if you be a woman lawyeress."

Pernelia B., holding her skirts high above the dusty floor, flounced over to join the group around the barrels, crying as she came:

"Now, Daddy, look out what you say to Cynthy. She's that high for a-lawin' it that mebbe she'll go an' sue you."

"We are wasting time," said Cynthia, with unruffled composure. "Robert—Mr. Oakes, will you please overturn this barrel?"

The two young men took hold of the barrel, and, in spite of ominous noises from Daddy Danes's cloud of dust flew up, then quietly began to settle down again. Cynthia sat flat down upon the floor and took up the first paper at hand.

"Deed for Meadowneck school-house," said she, tossing the paper aside.

"Beats anythink I ever see in the papers," vowed Pernelia B., watching the daughter of the Manor serenely sitting on the floor of Daddy Danes's loft.

"Surely we trust one another," began Prince Oakes; "you cannot get through those papers alone, Miss Fanning. Let us help you." And with that he got down on his knees beside Cynthia. Robert was already stooping and examining a paper. Then Daddy Danes, with a curious cracking of his bones, knelt also But Pernelia B., marvelling at the strange things that had come to pass outside the columns of a newspaper, sat on a pile of lumber and surveyed the scene. Daddy Danes, with his spectacles now doing good service before his eyes, threw first one paper and then another over his shoulder, until it occurred to the young people that, having a knowledge of the nature of the papers, he could work much faster than they. But could he be trusted? Cynthia, Robert, and Prince Oakes all opened their lips at once, but Prince forestalled the other two by saying:

"Grandfather, I will give you five hundred dollars if you find the will." `

Cynthia moved slightly away from Prince, and a hard look came into her eyes, whereupon Prince smiled somewhat sadly and reflected that for this girl's sake he would be glad to give Daddy Danes more not to find the will. Now, however, Daddy Danes cackled and worked hard, but a thought suddenly occurring to him, he paused with a yellow paper bound with a red string in his hand, and looking at Cynthia, he stipulated:

"No lawin' it with me, now, Cynthy?"

"No ' lawin' it' whatever," answered Cynthia.

The sorting and the discarding of the legal papers went on in silence. Pernelia B., sitting a-top the pile of lumber, grew conscious of a sensation of emptiness, due to the fact that she had not had her breakfast. She also grew weary of watching nothing happen. At last she decided to go down-stairs and get a bite, then slipped out of the garret unnoticed.

Presently she came back with a pile of bread-and-butter on a plate. She took off one immense slice for herself; then, setting the plate down beside Daddy Danes, resumed her position on top of the lumber. Daddy Danes absently took a slice of bread in one hand, and, nibbling at it automatically, went on with his search through the papers.

“First time he hain’t had no coffee fer breakfast sence I knowed him,” thought Pernelia B.

At that moment Cynthia’s pale face flushed, and she gave a little, triumphant cry, waving an out-spread paper above her head. The others stopped and stared at her.

“Hurrah!” cried Cynthia. “This is a deed I’ve been looking for for three years. Settles the question of the railroad bridge.” Her triumph was short-lived, however, for she remembered that half of all she might bring back to the Manor would go to Mad Nancy. When Daddy Danes asked to see the deed, Cynthia handed it to him without a word and took up another paper. It was Prince Oakes who, after a whispered consultation with Daddy Danes, put the deed back into Cynthia’s hand. The girl thanked him absently, and stuck the deed into Robert’s pocket.

The pile of papers to be looked over dwindled in size; the pile of discarded papers grew in like proportion. The church-bell began to ring; the voices of people passing drifted up through the windows.

Pernelia B. yawned where she sat, but determined to stand her ground lest she miss some excitement by going away. After a time the second church bell rang, and presently there came floating into the room, softened and sweetened by the distance, the sound of the processional hymn. Daddy Danes had sung that hymn alone in the kitchen while Pernelia B. snored this morning:

“Am I a soldier of the cross, A follower of the Lamb?”

But Daddy Danes did not even hear the hymn now; his mind was intent upon that five hundred dollars reward. He reflected that, although it was not according to his religious custom, yet would he take the money on this Sabbath day to make sure of it. The first barrel of papers were at last gone through, and Cynthia, allowing Robert to help her to her feet, walked around the room, while Daddy Danes hurriedly finished his bread-and-butter, then signified his willingness to go on with the other barrel. When they were fairly started on that, Pernelia B. disappeared again, and after a short absence came back with a basket of vegetables in one hand and an empty pan in the other. Resuming her seat on the lumber, she took the basket on her lap and leisurely began to shell peas.

“Ef Daddy was to go without a hot dinner, tew,” she had concluded, “I wouldn’t answer for the consequences.”

The morning wore away. Mrs. Danes wondered what the text was; while again the one pile of papers dwindled and the other grew. Cynthia worked with the line of thought coming between her brows, Robert with a sceptical look in his eye; Prince Oakes with

his heart growing lighter in defiance of his head. At last the papers were all looked over; both barrels were empty, and the will had not been found. Daddy Danes snarled now, and he began to toss the papers over and over, while the other three arose and looked at one another. Prince Oakes spoke first.

"It is the diary of a madman, Miss Fanning. Go home and burn it up."

Cynthia looked slowly around the garret—at the beams, at the dark places beneath the slope of the eaves, until her eye fell upon Daddy Danes rummaging frantically over the scattered papers. "But he says there was a will!" she cried. "My grandmother has always suspected it. I myself am convinced."

"And if there was?" rejoined Prince Oakes. "And if it has been lost or destroyed? How can you help that? How can any one prove it? What has that to do with you? If a crime was committed a long ago, we must leave the righting of the wrong to the One who permitted it to be."

"But we can help," said Cynthia, softly, and Robert, laying his hand on her arm, added: "Whatever happens, we can help." They walked together to the door, but before stooping to follow Cynthia through the low doorway, Robert turned again to Daddy Danes.

"Another five hundred dollars if you find the will," said he.

Daddy Danes did not look up, but actually sobbed as he pawed away at the useless papers.

"There won't be no livin' with him if he loses them air two five hundred dollars," Pernelia B. said, as she escorted the three young people downstairs. "Of course, I don't like to find no fault with you, Cynthy, an' you bein' a woman lawyeress, tew, but I've always said all my life: 'Now, Pernelia Betsy,' I says, 'don't you go off on no wild-goose chases; you be sure you know where a thing is before you go a-huntin' for it. It saves so much time an' frettin'.' There be tew things I've heard tell on eber since Daddy first come a-sparkin' me—an' my first husband not dead six months; I told him I shouldn't wait no less 'n a year, nohow—an' one of 'em was Danes's gold an' t'other was this here will. I hain't never seen neither of 'em an' —hy, guy, I dunno! —I hain't got no more idee of a-seein' that air will come to light than I got of a-flyin' around an' a-spendin' the gold.

"Yes, yes, you kin go right out'n the front door. Seems to me you look kinder peaked, Cynthy. Waal, it does beat anythink I ever see in the papers—the hull of it together. Folks all well, Princey? Now you tell Imogene to do be careful with that air foot o' hern. I was a-readin' only last night about a man that had to have both of hisn amtipulated. Waal, good-bye!"

Down the Old Neck Road, under the shadow of the great black oaks, they went together—Cynthia, Robert, and Prince. The Sabbath stillness of quiet Meadowneck lay all around them. One would have said: Here is a place where all is peace.

They walked in silence for a while, then Cynthia broke out, impetuously: "Have we no control over our own lives at all? Must we be made sport of at every turn? Baffled not only in doing wrong, but baffled in doing right as well? What are we, anyway? Why are we?"

With her quaint, self-mocking smile breaking over her face, she turned to her cousin. "Robert, in the light of what has happened since, didn't I make a fool of myself last night?"

"Cynthia never makes a fool of herself; she leaves that to Robert," he answered, gloomily.

Of the three, only Prince Oakes walked lightly, with his head uplifted and his dark eyes transformed by happiness, for he was rejoicing in the nobility of the woman he honored, and in the delight of being near the woman he loved.

"I also," he began, with his look resting more tenderly than he knew upon Cynthia, "used to ask those questions: What are we? Why are we? And some day, perhaps, you will let me tell you the answers I have found to them, Miss Fanning. It seems to me that there is method in the mad perversity of fate. Sometimes when fate seems to be piling one unkindness after another upon us, she is merely fighting her way to bestowing the greatest kindness we can ever hope to receive."

Cynthia glanced up at him with wonder and interest; then, quickly, those brave, steadfast gray eyes of hers stumbled and fell in confusion, while Cynthia felt herself tingling with a sensation never yet described in a law-book. Prince Oakes, his face aglow with an inward light, let his gaze wander over the rich green of the meadows; Robert's eye roamed over the meadows also, and his mind's eye went beyond the meadows, across the Bay to where his Little Red Princess was suffering and grieving.

Two robins, with their red breasts swelling, perched on top of Old Gol's fence and twittered saucily:

"We know what we are! We know why we are!" Then, mocking at the intense stupidity of man, rose with a whirring sound and flew off together.

XXVII

Bert Brown's Picture

THE summer days drifted one into another, and as there was no noticeable change in the great out-door world, so there came no telling changes into the lives of the people concerned in this story. Cynthia flew about from one professional engagement to another, and thanked Heaven that she had so little time to think; Prince Oakes delved away in New York, and longed for the cool and quiet of Meadowneck; Barnabas watched the sun rise and the sun set from the windows of the poor-house, and never noticed that each day it rose a little later, each day set a little earlier. Every morning Robert and Mother Margaret drove through the fragrant forest up to the door of the poor-house; then, after a look into the vacant eyes of old Barnabas, drove back to Pepperidge Hall. Mother Margaret would lie back in a great chair on the veranda and brood and think, think and brood, over her fifty years of widowed wifehood, while Robert would go through first one and then another part of the Hall, looking for the place where the will spoken of in the madman's diary might be secluded. Over in Meadowneck, day after day, Daddy Danes shuffled up the stairs, and in the stifling heat and dust of the garret searched for that which, if found, would take him one thousand dollars further away from the poor-house; for that which, during the greater part of his remaining days, he was to seek in vain. The more the old man searched, the more he snarled and snuffled and sniffled, until life grew into a snarling, snuffling, sniffling nightmare for Pernelia B.

Both Robert and Cynthia were too logical, too practical, to do the grandly heroic and give half the Manor to Mad Nancy, while both knew that the will might have ceased to exist in Colonel Fanning's lifetime, and that, even if now existing, the terms might not be those stated by Barnabas in his diary. Neither would Mother Margaret take from Robert or from Cynthia to give to Mad Nancy. They were determined, however, to make life easier for the family on the Beach, and to this end Bert Brown was directed to give the Oakes family free run over the lands and the waters of the Manor, while Cynthia put herself into communication with Prince Oakes, that they might together devise the best way to help Mad Nancy's half-helpless people. Pepper Oakes and his sons, quick to see that the old order might be re-established, gave up stealing from the humble men of Meadowneck, and drifted back to their old, and, in their minds, to their legitimate poaching-grounds on the Manor.

They were none of them without the power to reason, none of them without curiosity, and they often fell into speculation regarding Curse Fanning's going to the poor-house, Cynthia's ceasing to persecute them, Mad Nancy's mysterious acquisition of a wedding- ring, Imogene's running away, and the change that this running away seemed to have wrought in the girl's nature. And gradually, very gradually, they began to connect all the other changes with Imogene, and to feel that once they solved

the puzzle of Imogene, everything else would cease to be a puzzle. The girl had been wrong; she had underestimated the love her rough family bore her, and the delicacy which grew out of that love in their uncouth natures, when she thought that their silence concerning her escapade was due to the fact that they thought she had inherited some of her grandmother's simplicity of mind. They knew better; to them Imogene's mind was the greatest in the world, except the mind of Prince Orange. To them the girl was so great that she had a right to do whatever she liked, no matter how cruelly it might hurt her loyal subjects among the members of her own family. She had been away—that was her business. She had come back—that was their good fortune. If she of herself had gone, very well and good; but they refused to believe that she had done this thing of her own free will. Her love for them was too deep and considerate. Some one had carried her off. She had escaped from that some one and come home sick, changed, miserable—the joyful, sweet, gentle Little Red Princess no longer. Now let that some one who had done this cruel wrong beware. If once they found him out, his days would be numbered. They watched and waited, watched and waited, and all the while their eyes turned to the Manor, for from out of the Manor had come all the evil and all the good that had descended upon their family. Prince had not mentioned Robert's name, and of the other members of the family, excepting the mad grandmother, Chumleigh was the only one whose suspicions had any foundation in fact, and Chumleigh had ever been loath to condemn without evidence. He was content to keep still and wait, but whenever he met Robert Fanning he flashed him a look that made Robert, who was far too honest to succeed in appearing honest when he was at fault, lower his eyes and flush from his throat to his forehead. Sometimes the son of the Manor felt like saying to the son of Pepper Oakes:

"Give me a good thrashing and be done with it!"

Robert had not been to see Imogene, for the simple reason that he dared not do so for the girl's sake. He knew that once he sought her out there where she was confined at home, the whole story would be betrayed to her family, and therefore, until she gave him permission to come and woo her openly, he must stand his distance and take it all out in longing. These were hard days for Robert—far harder than for Imogene—for he loved the girl now with a love he had not dreamed of the night he took her to New York, thinking he loved her more than any man had loved woman before. He had sent her two letters by Prince, and she had deliberately taken both and torn them into pieces without reading either. Then Cynthia had bidden him wait in such patience as he could command, until Imogene should go to New York and place herself under the protection and the tutelage of Prince of Orange.

"When you come to the point of it," Cynthia had said, "forgiving you, loving you or not, you have no right to take that girl without first giving her a chance to know something of the world and of other gentlemen."

And Robert, with his heart sinking in jealous dismay, had nevertheless been obliged to admit that this was true.

It had actually been decided that Imogene should spend the winter in New York, studying under Prince Orange, with the view of fitting herself for a kindergarten teacher. The girl felt no enthusiasm over a prospect which would have filled her with wild delight two months before; but dropping her gentle, princess-like way of ruling the whole family, she had gently acceded to their wishes in this. Prince had said that it should be so. The brave, rough home-folks had said that it should be so, with heavy hearts hidden behind an armor of joking and laughing, for how bleak and dreary the home on the Beach would be without Imogene! God's Puppy had said that he and Salty could get along — "Ooh ess!" — and steadied the quivering of his little mouth most manfully. And Imogene had said, "If you can stand it, I can," and turned away to hide her tears.

Once upon a time she had made her happy little boast that she was incapable of crying; but in these days, when she sat from sunrise until sunset with her lame foot on a chair before her and with a pile of sewing in her lap, she would often let the sewing fall and gaze with unseeing eyes far ahead of her, until her eyes were actually blinded by a mist of tears. Her first feeling of bitterness and rebellion had passed, and now she was the gentle, the doubly gentle, Imogene. Missing her exercise, she grew sick and pale; missing all that goes to make up the sum of an idealizing girl's happiness, she grew to feel that the emptiness of her life was such as to be almost intolerable. And so, Imogene's being sick in both mind and body, there came moments when those anxious, silent watchers over the girl in her home felt that some day, before long, their fading Little Red Princess would go to the land where all dreams come true. Never in all their lives had they been through such torture, and still they refrained from questioning Imogene as to why this change had come upon her.

Big Mother softened her big voice and softened all her strong personality; and spent half her time in devising dainty new dishes to tempt Imogene's appetite. When Little Father and the boys came home from their water excursions they always came with a fiercely tender, questioning look in their eyes, which said as plainly as could be: "Don't tell us that she's worse!" God's Puppy talked very little, and he took to growing lengthways instead of sideways. Of all the strange things that had happened within his memory, nothing was more strange than this that his active Little Red Princess should vow that the Little Red Princess was dead, and fold away all her pretty red clothes and take to wearing garments no lovelier than Big Mother's; that she should sit all the day with one foot all swaddled and the other as destitute of shoe and stocking as were his own two little brown feet. He talked to Salty about it, and Salty very wisely, very delicately and subtly, gave him to understand that it would be kinder to take things just as he found them, and look forward to the time when the Little Red Princess would get tired of playing this wretched little game.

Mad Nancy would sit on the floor or on the sands beside Imogene's chair for hours, gazing at the girl with her wide, blue eyes from time to time, trying to reason out the cause of Imogene's sickness, and, in the mad keenness of her mind, trying to form some plan whereby a cure for Imogene might be effected. Often Imogene would look down and catch Mad Nancy fingering the wedding-ring thoughtfully, and Imogene, flushing with distress, would lay her hand over granny's lips.

"Oh, I know! l know!" the old woman would whisper. "Needn't tell Mad Nancy. She'll keep still. She knows!"

Poor Mad Nancy! This constant misery over Imogene's misery was killing her; this, together with the fact that now the desire of her life had been granted—a wedding-ring; now that she had seen her prophecy for Barnabas come true, she had little left to live for. The methodically mad creature had given up playing with her brass rings. She had pushed them aside as a little girl—some little girl—might push aside a makeshift rag-doll for a real, true doll bought in a doll-shop. And God's Puppy, who never before had dared to touch one of the rings, took to making marvellous necklaces of them for Salty to wear around his venerable white neck.

One day a momentary excitement was caused at Hurricane Hollow by the appearance of Bert Brown, with the request that he be permitted to see Imogene alone. The girl, steeling herself against some message from Robert, yet with her heart bounding fast at the possibility, received Bert where she sat outside her cabin door. Bert was a singularly straightforward fellow. He always knew what he wanted, and he had wanted one particular thing for a long time. Looking straight down into Imogene s uplifted eyes, he told her that he had loved her from the first time he saw her at Ponquos Landing, on the Old Neck Road, and that she would make him a very proud and happy man by consenting to be his wife. Imogene had not exchanged ten words with him before this; she gasped, trembled, and shrank back in her chair; for if there was one idea more intolerable to her now than the idea of marrying Robert, it was the idea of marrying any other man. But Bert's honesty and sincerity impressed her, and a fellow-feeling for all creatures that love and suffer through love made her turn her eyes more kindly to Bert Brown's.

"Poor boy!" she said. He was five years older than she, but her feeling was altogether motherly "So you think you are in love with me? Let me tell you something: you are not in love with me; you have never been in love with me. In here" — she laid her hand on her heart — "you have made a sort of a picture out of your best and highest sentiments — I hope; and underneath the picture you have written: 'This is Imogene. I —I love her.' But it is not Imogene. You do not love Imogene. If it were possible for me to marry you — and I want you to clearly understand that it is not, and can never be, though I grieve to have to tell you so — if it were possible for me to marry you, I should not talk to you as I am talking now. Instead, I should do all I could all my life long to keep your picture of me from changing — to make myself more like the

picture. But, Captain Bert, as it is, you had better tear down the picture. It is not I. Tear it down!"

Imogene sank back into her chair, exhausted by her own earnestness. Bert Brown turned slowly, until his back was to Imogene. For some moments he stood stock-still, then he turned again to Imogene and said, very softly:

"It can't hurt you. So I will keep the picture." And Bert did. He kept the picture while he courted a girl more suited to his every-day needs; he kept the picture after he married the other girl, though, truth to tell, the veil fell frequently over the picture in those days. And when he had daughters of his own, with lovers of their own, he still kept the picture, and now and then, as he sat to rest in the evening, he would draw the veil gently back from the picture and drink his fill.

"Pop's tired," his wife would say, and Pop would smile, and, with a laugh as shy as a boy's, draw the curtain over the picture again.

"I will keep the picture," Bert Brown had said this day when he and Imogene were young, and the girl, putting out her hand with a little motion of protest, had smiled sadly as she thought of her own picture of the King. She wondered why Bert did not go, and what else he could expect her to say to him. The brown young bayman stood there looking down upon the little figure and the bowed head of the girl, thinking how pitiably she had changed since he met her that lovely May-day all dressed in red. And as he looked, and as he thought, his nails pierced into the flesh of his palms.

"Say," he broke out at length, "ain't there anybody I kin lick for you?"

Imogene laughed in spite of herself at the suddenness of the proposition, but when she saw the look on Bert's face she started forward, growing grave again.

"Whom could I possibly want you to lick?" she asked, with her heart beating almost to suffocation.

"I—I dunno."

"Yes, you do know. I want to know what you mean."

Bert Brown walked a little space away from her and came back again, and now his clinched hand was raised and he spoke through his shut teeth.

"These here gentlemen," he exclaimed, "that come around a-makin' eyes at honest girls—"

“Stop right where you are, Captain Brown,” interrupted Imogene, with quiet forcefulness. “You cannot serve me by harming any gentleman you know. No gentleman — no man in this world has ever ‘made eyes at me’ in the way you mean. No one has injured me. No one has wronged me. If I have suffered it has been through my own fault.

Bert Brown gave a sound like the growl of a beast, and Imogene knew that he did not believe her. Therefore, for the sake of the man she had ceased to love, she forced herself to speak plainly. “If you mean Robert Fanning—and I know you do—let me tell you this. He would not harm a hair of my head, and he would marry me to-day if I would let him.”

She sank back into her chair and closed her eyes. Bert Brown stood looking at her for one moment; then he turned and walked rapidly away. Outside the kitchen-door he came upon Big Mother, and astonished her by the roughness with which he said:

“You better go look after Imogene. I guess she ain’t very well.”

XXVIII

Widowed

BARNABAS watched the sun rise and the sun set from the windows of the poor-house, and never noticed that each day the sun rose a little later, each day set a little earlier. Then at last there came a morning when the sun that shines upon this little world of ours failed to rise at all for Barnabas—a day when the sun looked in vain to find Barnabas at his east window; when it peeked through the uncurtained panes and found Barnabas lying fast asleep on his iron bed, with his happy poor-house smile on his lips; and, over all his face, the peaceful, marvellously pure, and innocent look which his mother must have delighted in when he slept away half his infancy at Pepperidge Hall.

So Curse Fanning died in the poor-house, and, as speedily as possible, all that remained of Curse Fanning was taken back through the great woods to Pepperidge Hall. They laid him out in the parlor under the gold-framed mirror, where his father and his mother had been laid, and a host of Fannings, young and old. Through the long hours the mirror watched him, reflecting that never among all the dead it had looked upon had it seen a face more beautiful than the face of this once accursed man. When Cynthia came she marvelled; when Robert came he marvelled also at the look on the dead man's face. When Mother Margaret came alone at twilight, with her long, trailing white gown, her pure, white face, and her soft, silver hair, she knelt beside the coffin, and, as she gazed at the man who had ruined her life fifty years ago, she wondered if this indeed could be he. Mother Margaret had thought her life bitter, but she had never known true bitterness until now.

She raised her hand and smoothed the hair back from the cold, chilling brow, and as she did so the last words that Barnabas had written in his diary came to her mind:

"Fifty years and no caress from Margaret!"

With a little catch in her breath, Margaret kissed the lips of the dead man. The last time Barnabas had kissed her he had seized her by force, and she had raised her hand passionately and struck him across the face.

"Barnabas," whispered the woman kneeling there, "forgive me! Come back to me just long enough to say you forgive me—to say you forgive me for not having forgiven you. God knows you sinned, Barnabas, but I should have left the punishment of the sin to God. I took you for better or worse till death us should part. Because it chanced to be worse, I should not have failed you.... Had I not failed you, everything would have been better for all who came into your life. . .. Forgive me, Barnabas.... Your sins of these fifty years are on my head, . . . forgive me! . . . As a wife I failed you. As a woman I failed myself, for it is a woman's part to forgive. If we do not forgive, then must you

men sink lower and lower, as you did sink, poor Barnabas . . . Never, even to my own heart, have I acknowledged it, but all these years I have longed to see you lying as you are lying now. My husband, forgive me!"

The twilight deepened, and still Margaret knelt beside the coffin, while her figure and the coffin grew more blurred in the sight of the old mirror.

"Poor Margaret!" the mirror thought, brooding in the dusk over its life of two centuries and more. "Poor Margaret! How many other good, all-suffering women have knelt here beside their dead, calling, pitifully, 'Come back and forgive!' "

XXIX

A Wise Old Woman

IF the Fannings had deliberately tried to incense all Meadowneck once again, now that the village was at last beginning to look upon the Manor with kindly sympathy, they could not have chosen a more certain way than when they chose to announce that the funeral of Barnabas should be private. And not only this, but also that the time-honored custom of placing the corpse on exhibition would not be observed. Pernelia Betsy Danes, who never missed a funeral if she could help it within a radius of five miles, could scarcely believe her ears when she heard the news. She was so astonished that she dropped into a chair on top of Daddy's Sunday hat; and when he had snarlingly urged her up, she paid no attention whatever to the crushed hat, but vowed that she would have expected to miss her own funeral before she missed Curse Fanning's.

"Why, I hain't thought of much else ever sense he went off to the poor-house an' commenced to look like a lamb. Hy, guy, I dunno! The notions them air Fannin'ses take beats anythink I ever see in the papers."

Had the minister barred the church door on Sunday and preached to himself alone, neither Pernelia B. nor her neighbors could have felt more injured and curious. Half the community went sailing down the river on the afternoon of the funeral to see the little procession march out from the house to the graveyard. So it happened that, in their rightful attempt to escape publicity, the Fannings, together with their dead, were more talked about than if they had allowed all their little world to come to the funeral.

Outside of the family, and a few old-time friends from a distance, only one came to hear the last words read over Barnabas, and that guest stole softly into the parlor when the minister was chanting:

"For when Thou art angry, all our days are gone: we bring our years to an end, as it were a tale that is told."

Every one looked up at the entrance of the uninvited guest, and there was a little stir of alarm before Robert held out his hand as if to a little child and drew Mad Nancy to a seat at his side. He held her nervous, twitching hand all through the service, and Nancy sat in perfect silence, looking with her wide, blue eyes first at the coffin, then at all the figures in the room, then back to the coffin again. Robert noticed that she looked most frequently at Margaret, and that whenever her eyes lit upon the widow they clouded over with something very like compassion. The service over, they all went forward to take a last look at the marvellously beautiful face of the old man in the coffin, and, with the others, Mad Nancy went. Then for the first time they noticed

that she held a single wild rose in her hand. This she laid timidly, reverently, upon the still bosom of Barnabas Fanning. Mother Margaret looked at her, and Robert tried to draw Mad Nancy away, but her face was bent over the pure and sinless face of the dead. Mother Margaret motioned to them to let Nancy alone, and Nancy gazed, seemingly forgetful of them all, until she lifted her head with a long-drawn sigh and whispered:

"Who be he? I dunno him."

Robert drew her into the hall and out upon the veranda. Here, Nancy laid her hand on Robert's breast and whispered:

"I want to talk to you. They mustn't hear us— mustn't hear us. "

Robert, anxious for all their sakes to avoid a scene, took Nancy to the end of the piazza.

"Now, granny, what is it?"

"Imogene. Imogene —it's Imogene. Who is that man a-layin' so still in thar? I dunno him. He hain't Barnabas. I thought I was a-comin' to see Barnabas."

Robert could hear the sound of footsteps in the hall, and he knew that they were carrying the coffin out by the other door, whereupon he breathed more freely.

"What of Imogene?" he asked. "Is she sick?"

"Sick! Oh yaas, so sick! Poor Imogene! The ring—I let her try on the ring—her face was so red—she looked inside of it, an' then she said, 'Take it away! Take it away!' An' then she did this." Mad Nancy covered her face with her hand and pretended to cry. "Oh, she did this so hard. Bad Robert! Bad Robert! He made Imogene cry."

Robert grew pale, and his hand trembled as he gently drew Mad Nancy's hand from her eyes.

"Granny, dear," he began, slowly, "I know you are a very wise woman. You will tell me what to do to make Imogene well. She sits all day with her foot up? Poor little girl!"

"Yaas!"

"And is she pale?"

"White! She's white! White as—" Nancy pointed towards the room in which Barnabas had lain.

Robert caught his breath, and his own lips grew pale.

"Her foot—her foot," he said, unconsciously adopting Nancy's habit of speech. "It's her foot that makes her pale, isn't it, granny?"

Nancy took hold of his arm and pushed him against the great white pillar.

"Bad Robert! Fool Robert! It's her heart. Poor leetle Imogene's heart. I had a heart onct. It laid in here so heavy. It hurt. Oh, you don't know how it hurt. Poor Nancy! Poor Imogene! The Leetle Red Princess is dead. Yaas, dead. She hain't buried yet, but she's dead."

Robert knew from Prince Orange that Imogene had changed her manner of dressing, and so these words did not startle him.

"Her heart, granny. You say it is her heart. Tell me, granny, do you think that if Robert went sailing over to see Imogene, perhaps he might help her poor heart?"

A keen, glad look came into Nancy's eyes; she shook her head vigorously and cried:

"Oh yaas, yaas, yaas!

Every day I look at the Leetle Red Princess what's dead, and I try so hard to think. It hurts to think. But I try. It's a-killin' me, but I try an' think what will make my Leetle Red Princess come back alive, an' then I thought: 'Robert! Robert! Yaas, Robert! She wants Robert!' "

"Robert is coming then, granny. Robert knows that you are really wise, and all the rest of us are fools. Robert is coming. Robert is coming this very night. Will you meet Robert on the shore and help him to see Imogene alone?"

"Oh, alone! Yaas, you must see Imogene alone!

Chummy kill you. Granny'll fix it. Imogene loves granny. She loves granny now so much, 'cause granny wears the weddin'-ring."

"Then, granny, dear, come let me take you to your boat. After sundown I shall row across the Narrows so no one will see me, and you will meet me opposite the Point and take me to Imogene. You are a very wise woman. I know I can trust you, granny."

Granny looked at him steadily, and as she looked Robert had no fear that Mad Nancy would fail him, either in faith or in intelligence. They walked down to the landing, and all the while Robert tried to keep Nancy's eyes from the graveyard and from the little

group gathered therein watching the remains of Barnabas going back to their place in the bosom of the earth.

XXX

The Second Coming of the King

THAT evening Nancy stood on the shore of the Bay, and, wrinkling her eyelids, peered through the shadowy dusk out upon that narrow strip of water opposite Pepperidge Point which is called the Narrows. She lifted her hand, and, forming a trumpet with it over her ear, listened intently for the sound of falling oars. Other sounds there were, the sounds so familiar on the Beach—the lisping of the waters of the Bay, the incessant pounding of the breakers, and, added to this, the rustling of a timid, mournful wind all through the rank grass. The whole sky was overcast, and there was a smell and a promise of a storm in the heavy air. "He's late," muttered Nancy—"late—late. No business to be late. Bad Robert."

But even as she spoke she heard the keel of a boat grate on the sands, then saw the dim outline of the sharpie and its occupant. Robert, who had come with muted oars, jumped out, and, scarcely waiting to draw the boat beyond the reach of the waters, sprang to where Nancy stood.

"Granny!" he whispered, and took her hands in his. "You poor, blessed old granny!"

Granny laughed her low, wild laugh.

"Oh, it's such fun," said she — "such fun! It'll be such a surprise to the Leetle Red Princess. I says to her—I whispered to her when nobody was a-lookin' — I says, 'When you hear a tappin' on your window to-night, you'll come out all dressed up in your red dress, won't you? Won't you, bad Imogene ?' I says. An' she says, 'Now go lay down, granny, you be tired!' " Nancy laughed with huge enjoyment as she drew Robert rapidly across the sands towards the house in Hurricane Hollow. "You see," went on the crazily wise creature, "she thinks that granny be dafty — yaas, dafty; but granny hain't no more dafty than you be, now she's got her weddin'-ring. Here, feel it with your hand, Robert. Don't it feel good? It hain't Nancy's, though. It's Imogene's. Nancy's jest a-borrerin' it. She knows — yaas, she knows."

Robert gently led Nancy back to the subject most important to him at this moment.

"And did she say she would come out, granny?"

"Yaas! Yass! All dressed up in her red dress, 'cause Nancy got mad—Nancy kin git mighty mad sometimes. Nancy got mad an' she said: 'Bad Imogene! She don't love nobody but herself. She cry, an' she got no business to cry. When Imogene cry, everybody else cry. Bad Imogene! She must put on her red dress an' laugh agin so everybody else kin laugh.' An' Imogene she got up from her chair all of a suddent an'

she didn't limp nor nothin', but she walked straight into her room, an' when she come out she had on her pretty red dress, an' her hair was a-flyin' all around her face agin, an' she was a-laughin', an' a-laughin', jest as ef Cuss Fannin' wa'n't dead. He died in the poor-house. Poor old Cuss! Just one rose left for em now, an' that was Mad Nancy's."

They had reached a point where they could see the lights in the little house in the Hollow—the lights of Imogene's cabin-room and the lights of the kitchen.

"Where are the men?" asked Robert. "I thought I saw the sloop to the west."

"They gone off—all gone off—all so happy 'cause the Leetle Red Princess come an' set down an' had supper along with 'em—oh, so happy!"

"Hush! What's that?" He grasped Nancy's arm, and they stood still and listened, but the sound that Robert had heard was nothing more than Big Mother's singing in the kitchen.

"She's a-kneadin' bread. She always sings when she's a-kneadin' bread. She's been a good gal, Big Mother has. You tell her so when Barnabas comes an' takes me away."

Nancy was walking slowly now, and panting as she walked. Robert suddenly realized how the events of this day must have tried the old woman's strength, and he slipped his arm around her protectingly. The touch of this strong, tender man brought a host of clouded memories to Nancy's mind. She trembled like a girl with her lover; then, swiftly, she put up her arms and clung to Robert. "You will be good to Imogene?" Mad Nancy asked. "You won't fergit the ring?"

"My God, no! Never again!" And Robert kissed the withered cheek of Imogene's poor grandmother. All the remorse that Barnabas should have felt in the past was sweeping over Robert now, as if he had betrayed Nancy afresh that night when he lost his reason, alone in his chamber with Imogene. Nancy drew herself away, and they walked for a space over the heavy sands in silence. As they neared the house they saw the kitchen light go out, but Imogene's light still burned brightly in her small windows. "I will wait here," whispered Robert, "while you go and call her out." He waited on the shadowy sands outside the range of Imogene's lights, while Mad Nancy, laughing at her own cleverness, went up to one of the windows and knocked. The next moment Imogene's door had opened and the girl appeared on the threshold, framed in the light from the lamp within. Her hair hung in the old loose curls over her shoulders; her figure was clothed in red, with an artistic little bit of her white neck showing, and her arms bare below the elbow. Her white feet were bare also, and one she held up carefully while she leaned against the jamb of the door for support.

Granny!" she called, softly. "Granny!"

Granny's low, wild laugh came to her, but Imogene could see no one. The girl stepped out upon the sand, and, still in the full glare of the light, came limpingly forward.

"Granny! Granny, where are you?" Her voice was full of sweet patience with the old woman's madness. Granny did not appear; then Imogene went back and closed the door so that God's Puppy might not be awakened. Again Robert heard the dearest voice in the world, calling:

"Granny! You are not playing fair. Here is your Little Red Princess."

Granny had stolen away with her hand over her mouth to shut in her glad, mad laughter. Robert came forward as if on wings, and, before Imogene knew of this strange presence here in the darkness, she felt her hand seized and heard Robert calling, in an entreating whisper:

"My Little Red Princess!"

The shock of his coming was too much for Imogene's nerves; she gave a little scream that carried far through the quietness of the night. Mad Nancy, now outside the kitchen door, laughed loudly to cover up the scream lest Big Mother should have heard; but another than Big Mother had heard, and already there were steps hastening up the path that led from the shore of the Bay. Robert, still holding fast to Imogene's rebellious hand with both of his own, and now kneeling at her feet, began to speak hurriedly, incoherently, but with all his words freighted with the one cry: "Forgive me and love me again!"

Imogene never afterwards could recall what he said; he could not remember. He had never before spoken so tenderly, so passionately, so insistently, to any human being; she had never listened to such pleading. Yet to both of them the words were old, old words; for over and over again Robert had said to himself, "When I meet the Little Red Princess, I will say this and this and this." And Imogene, waiting in somewhat stubborn silence, had said to herself, "When he comes, he will say this and this and this." But Robert had added in his thoughts, "I will make her yield," while Imogene had been equally determined that she should not yield.

The new old words rushed forth from Robert's lips, while Imogene trembled and tried in vain to snatch her hands away—tried in her dismay to keep Robert from snatching back her heart as he had snatched her hand. What she would have answered is uncertain, if Robert, in his intense desire to be frank and honest with Imogene this time, had not accused himself of the treachery of having concealed his betrothal to Cynthia.

"What!" cried Imogene, finding her voice of a sudden, and the strength wherewith to free herself from Robert's hold. "How dare you kneel to me?

"Get up this instant! How dare you come like a thief in the night? How dare you talk of love and forgiveness to me?" In her excitement she forgot to keep her voice low; in her excitement failed to notice that there were sounds not far away other than the sound of softly sighing wind and sobbing sea. She groped her way to the door as she spoke, then, as she reached the step, opened the door of the cabin and once more stood in the flooding light, with her hand resting for support against the jamb of the door. Robert came forward, and as the light fell upon his face she noted, even in the midst of her anger, how gray and haggard he looked, how much thinner he had grown.

"I hate you!" said Imogene. "Go!"

Robert, unable to speak, looked into her face with a world of appeal in his eyes, and stretched out his arms with a gesture more eloquent than any speech could have been. The Little Red Princess caught her breath quickly; then, because she could not trust herself to speak another word, because she could not trust herself to linger a moment longer, she slipped within the room and closed the door, and a blackness like the blackness of the night fell upon Robert's soul. He stood for a moment looking at the closed door; then, even in his anguish remembering that it would not be well for Imogene were he found lingering outside her bedroom, he moved away, staggering as he walked.

On the other side of the door Imogene waited, her ear against the crack. Would he knock? Would he come to plead again? Should she open the door and call him back before it was too late?

Did she hate him as she had said, or did she love him with a love too great for comprehension? The Little Red Princess leaned against the door, with her hair falling over her face. She could hear the regular breathing of the little child in bed. She could hear the surf mourning and mourning. She could hear her clock tick, tick, tick. She could hear even the beating of her own heart, but the sounds that she yearned above all others to hear did not come—the sound of Robert's hand knocking on the panels of her door—the sound of his love-charged voice calling once again for his Little Red Princess.

At length she became conscious of a movement from the bed, and looked to see God's Puppy raising himself on the pillows, rubbing his eyes and stretching wide his little mouth. He smiled as Imogene came running across the room to him; then, sinking back sleepily, he said:

"Yittle Wed P'incess, what does oo fink? I was a-d'eamin' dat the Ting had tome."

The Little Red Princess knelt down by the bed and hid her face in the covers.

“Dear heart,” she murmured, brokenly, “the King has come—and gone.”

XXXI

Cain

THE Seven Sons and One Daughter had sailed out from Pepper Oakes's little dock that night, as Nancy had said, with a crew of lighter hearts than it had carried for many a day or night, just because the Little Red Princess had come to life again, had sat down at the table and smiled around the family board with a merrier smile than any she had worn even before the night of her running away. But the sloop had not gone far when Chumleigh began to grow uneasy, for some unaccountable reason, about the Little Red Princess.

In vain he tried to reason with himself, in vain he tried to forget his sister for this one night. But, at last, that power within himself which he could not understand made him take hold of the painter of the sharpie, made him draw the boat up to the side of the sloop, and before any of the others knew what he was about Chumleigh was standing in the sharpie, slipping away from *The Seven Sons and One Daughter.*

"Chummy!" the others called after him. "What's up now?"

"G'on! G'on!" he called back, in his soft, strong voice. "I know what I'm a-doin'. G'on!"

So they had sailed on, scarcely stopping to wonder what ailed Chumleigh, for, united in interest though they were and a distinct clan by themselves, yet each member of the family was allowed to go his individual way and do whatever he chose without question. Chumleigh dipped his oars into the water and shot across the dusky waves through the dimness of the night to Hurricane Hollow and to the Little Red Princess. Had he heard her voice calling he could not have gone faster, could not have gone with more certainty that she was in need of him. Just as the prow of the sharpie touched upon the home sands that startled little cry of Imogene's had come piercing through the still air, and Chumleigh, with that old, old cry of the brute-mother, had leaped out of the boat and gone bounding up the sands with one oar held like a gun over his broad shoulder. He rushed up the path, and went by the kitchen without noticing Nancy shrinking back against the side of the house, and so he went furiously on until he came within the sound of voices. Then he stopped and waited, listening. There was the voice of a man, low, broken, talking of love and forgiveness, but talking in such beautiful, poetic language, with such truth, force, and earnestness, that Chumleigh stood bewildered and puzzled, knowing not what to do. Then the man's voice spoke the name of Cynthia. Then Imogene's voice called out, wrathfully:

"What! How dare you kneel to me? . . . How dare you come like a thief in the night?"

Chumleigh started forward, grasping the oar with both hands, then paused and waited again, listening to the angry words of the gentle Little Red Princess. He saw

her push her door open and let out the flood of light; he saw her standing there, swaying as she stood. He saw Robert Fanning come forward until the light fell full upon his face and figure; he saw the man hold out his arms to Imogene. He heard Imogene say, "I hate you! Go!" Then he saw the door shut and Robert's dim figure standing in the darkness outside.

Still Chumleigh did not approach Robert; still Chumleigh held the long oar in both hands and waited. Robert left the door of the Little Red Princess and came slowly towards Chumleigh. Chumleigh stood stock-still, and Robert passed him without knowing of his presence. Then Robert began the way over the dunes to where his sharpie lay across from Pepperidge Point, and Chumleigh followed with his slender weapon in his hands, with his bare feet moving silently over the sands. Through the darkness, under the clouded sky, over the gray sands, went Robert, with his heart and his head bowed low; behind him, Chumleigh came softly stealing, and not far behind Chumleigh came the mad grandmother, with steps unsteady and faltering, with low voice mourning softIy, and sobbing now and then as she came. Robert, all unconscious of the man who followed him and of the woman who followed that man, went on until he came to the spot on the shore where he had dragged up his sharpie. He stooped over and took hold of the side of the boat. As he did so he whispered: "Good-bye, my Little Red Princess!"

Then, without warning, a blow descended upon Robert's head and across his shoulders. The law of self-preservation came to his aid, and instinctively he straightened himself, trying to turn about, but without uttering a sound. He turned sufficiently to see a great, dark, silent, terrible figure with a long weapon raised in its hands, and then a blow fell again, and then another blow, and still another. The blows fell thick and fast on Robert's head, his face, his neck, his breast.

He fell to the ground. Then there was the stamping of a hard, callous, bare foot upon his face, and all the while that terrible silence. He struggled to cry out, then, thickly, brokenly, sobbingly, he whispered: "Good-bye, my Little—Red—Princess."

XXXII

"Vengeance is Mine"

CHUMLEIGH stamped his foot upon Robert's face with all the hatred of all Mad Nancy's people for the Manor—with the hatred which had had its birth more than fifty years ago. He stamped his foot upon Robert's face with all the fury and the sense of terrible wrong that Nancy had felt when she knelt at the bridal feast and cursed the Fannings for all time to come. He was not only avenging Imogene, but he was also avenging his brothers, his Little Father, his poor, mad grandmother. And just as his passion was at its height he heard Mad Nancy cry out forbiddingly, felt her hand seize hold of his arm, felt the feeble old woman dragging him away from Robert with the strength of a giant.

"It's Rob Fannin', I tell you!" Chumleigh cried out, as if that would explain all.

"He give me my ring—he give me my ring!" wailed Nancy. "He give me my ring an' you be a-killin' him—a-killin' him. Bad, bad Chummy!"

Falling down upon her knees, Nancy laid her ear against Robert's heart and listened for its beating. Chumleigh's mind moved slowly to grasp Nancy's unexpected view of the question, as he, too, fell down beside Robert, and, gently pushing Nancy aside, laid his own ear against the heart of Imogene's lover. Nancy began hurriedly to unfasten Robert's collar and shirt.

"Bad Imogene! Bad Chummy! Robert's a-dyin' an' he give me my ring."

"He hain't dead yet," said Chumleigh, his old, soft manner coming back, yet not without meeting in battle the murderous Chumleigh of two moments ago. "He ought to die, though. He all but killed Imogene."

"He hain't dead! He hain't dead!" Nancy was crying, joyfully. "Git him home! Git him home, bad Chummy! Don't tell Imogene. She's bad. She won't take his ring. She won't marry him. Git him away from Imogene. Take him home!"

Chumleigh put his great arms under Robert's body, and, lifting him up, carried him to the sharpie and laid him in the bottom of the boat.

"Are you sure he wanted to marry Imogene?" asked Chumleigh, hoarsely.

"Yaas! Ah, yaas, sure! He hain't no Barnabas. Thar hain't no cuss on him. He's Robert an' he give me my ring."

Nancy stepped into the boat as she spoke, and, sitting down in the stern, lifted Robert's head into her lap. Now she felt for the beating of his heart with her shaky, nervous hand. Chumleigh pushed off the boat, then leaped in and took up the oars. The troubled frown on his face, the perplexed look in his eyes, did not show in the darkness, but his voice was soft whenever he asked, as he did ask from time to time:

"Heart still a-beatin', granny?"

Chumleigh did not row straight across to the Point, which was a full two miles from Pepperidge Hall, nor did he attempt to row to the Hall itself. Instead, he made his way to where the skiff lay moored to the dock near by; then, transferring Mad Nancy and the still form of Robert from one boat to the other, Chumleigh raised the sail and made for the landing at Pepperidge Hall. Nancy said little, but the little that she said told Imogene's story to Chumleigh. The man at the tiller did not speak at all, except to ask the same question over and over:

"Heart still a-beatin', granny?"

They both heard the surf moaning on the farther side of the strip of Beach, both heard the weary voice of wind and waves; and to both all nature was calling out the same unalterable decree, which Nancy managed to grasp from the depths of her memory at length and to speak aloud in the given words:

"'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

Chumleigh gazed down at the prostrate form in the bottom of the boat, at the slender hand stealing into Robert's bosom.

"Heart still a-beatin'?" he whispered, huskily.

XXXIII

The Crown

ROBERT lay between life and death for many days in his room at Pepperidge Manor, while soft-footed, trained nurses and doctors from a distance ruled absolute in the old home of Enoch Fanning; while Cynthia and Mother Margaret held close to each other day after day and night after night, asking, "Will he die?"—while Chumleigh Oakes took upon himself the running of a sort of ferry between Pepperidge Hall and Meadowneck, that he might fetch and carry for his old enemies, the Fannings; while other people who had never set foot in Pepperidge Hall came to beg that they might be allowed to do something for Robert.

And Robert, lying so near death, lived in a curious world of his own—a world full of fantastic dreams. Through all the dreams, however, there ran one persistent thought—that he must get to a certain place—he must get to a certain place. Where it was he knew not; sometimes he thought it was the poor-house; sometimes he thought it was his apartment in New York; sometimes he thought it was in the bottom of Daddy Danes's barrel beneath the collection of old wills. Wherever it was, he felt that he must go, and, all through his sickness, his one cry was: "Let me go!"

There was the knob of a door within reach of his bed, and again and again he would turn this and shake it and cry: "Let me go! Let me go!"

Then, at other times, they knew from his calling that he was trying to go to this mysterious place by boat, and some one would not let him have the tiller; then, again, he was going on the train, and some one forbade his coming up the steps of the car. One day when, in this persistent dream of his, he was in agony over his inability to get away, there came another dream, which calmed him so that his fever went down and the nurses smiled and said, "He is better."

He dreamed—yet was it a dream?—that the Little Red Princess came to him, and, taking his hand in hers, said: "Why, surely, dear, we will go together."

Then they went, he and she in the dream, through the door that had been closed so long; through the great, cool halls, down the winding staircase, and out into the gardens. Where did they not go?—just they two together. Through the deep woods, along the brook-sides, a-sailing over the Bay, a-rowing up the Ponsopogue. They went together everywhere, he and she, until there came a day when Robert's delirium passed, and he awoke to see his old room stripped almost entirely of its furnishings and a strange young woman in a blue gown and a white cap bending over him. He turned his head slowly and looked around—around and around the familiar room; then, in his physical weakness unable to keep back the tears, he whispered:

“It was only a dream, after all.”

He dreamed no more day-dreams after that; he lay on his bed and smiled gratefully at his nurses, at Mother Margaret, and at Cynthia; but he never opened his lips to ask for the Little Red Princess Once on the road to recovery, however, he mended rapidly, and soon they allowed him to sit in a chair by the window, where he could look out upon the Bay and the winding Ponsopogue, and watch for the Little Red Princess. At last there came one perfect, warm, and lovely day, when the two doctors carried him down- stairs and out into a luxurious seat in the garden.

It was an old-fashioned garden, with thick, green hedges and spreading fruit-trees; stately dahlias bent their heads to nod to Robert; purple asters lifted their faces in peaceful greeting; the feathery, white clematis waved to him from the hedge-rows; the flushing old-fashioned rose-pink artemesias called out to him: “How pale you’ve grown!”

Cynthia plucked some of the last of the monthly roses and laid them in Robert’s listless hand. They were red, and as he saw this Robert s hand lost its lifelessness, and, raising a rose to his lips, he crushed it there and kissed it passionately. Beyond the hedge-rows of the garden the tops of the forest trees showed, with the deep, dark hue of their pines sprinkled here and there with the flaming red beacon of autumn.

“It is very beautiful,” sighed Robert, and closed his eyes. A tiny smile curved around the corners of Cynthia’s mouth. Well she knew the thought that was in his mind:

“It is very beautiful but the Little Red Princess is not here.”

She turned and looked in the direction of the landing, then bent her ear and listened intently. Then she laughed in a teasing, mocking, inexplicable way, and, to Robert’s grieved surprise, went off and left him alone. He opened his eyes, frowning, then closed them again. The moments passed; then he heard the pattering of little feet coming down the walk. Again his eyes opened, and now his weak arms opened also, for God’s Puppy was trotting towards his chair. They kissed each other, both with tears in their eyes, for his sickness had made the man as weak as the child.

“Where’s Imogene?” asked Robert, speaking first.

God’s Puppy wriggled out of Robert’s arms and shook his head waggishly. “Dod’s Puppy nebber tells nuf’n,” he avowed. Then, raising his little hands, he passed them lovingly over the King’s head. “Oor hair is gway. Is oo a-dettin’ old?”

“You rogue, you! Where’s Imogene?”

God’s Puppy, almost bursting with joy over the secret he had inside, laughed and said:

“What does oo fink? P’ince Awhwinge kissed Miss Cynfy; I seed him behind the hedge.”

In spite of himself, Robert gave a little moan. He had known that, sooner or later, the time would come for Cynthia’s surrender of her strong, sweet self to Prince Oakes, but the thought of their happiness made him yearn more than ever for the one woman in all his world—the Little Red Princess.

“Bye-bye!” called God’s Puppy, suddenly slipping away and crowing out that delightful little laugh of his. “I’m a-doin’ to pick some goldingwod way ober dere.” Still chuckling and crowing, the child ran off to the fields, and once more Robert was left alone.

The invalid began to feel very much like a martyr. Then, of a sudden, a great light broke over his face. Hurriedly he passed his hand over his eyes to make sure that this was no vision. He leaned forward, then sank back, grasping hard to the arms of his chair. Very timidly, very softly, with a blushing, curiously becoming self-consciousness, the Little Red Princess was coming up the garden-walk. She was dressed in red to the very tips of her toes; her reddish-black hair hung in a fluffy cape of curls over her shoulders; her neck rose free from out of the soft folds of her crimson gown. She came stealing down the walk, and as she came nearer to Robert her eyelids fell bashfully He did not stir; he did not raise his hand; he felt that if he made one movement she might vanish. She came closer and closer; then, as she reached his chair, she knelt and flung her arms around him. At the touch of her body his arms gained life and wound themselves around her, and so they clung together—no dream-king and dream-princess now, but man and woman, as were those first two, man and woman in the Garden of Eden.

“Forgive me,” whispered Imogene, when Robert gave her lips a chance for words. “Cruel, selfish, wicked, narrow, blind, ignorant, I have been. Forgive me!”

“Sweetheart, tell me: did I dream, or were you with me through the sickness?”

Imogene rose and took her seat on the arm of his chair as she answered:

“I was there all through your delirium. I came and said that if they would not let me in I would lie down outside your door, but—” Imogene’s lashes fell over her eyes again in the sweetness of her confusion, and Robert finished the sentence for her.

“But as soon as I was myself you ran away. Why, my dear one?”

Imogene hid her face against Robert’s soft, gray hair as she faltered: “I do not know. I was afraid. I had grown to—to love you so.” She could say no more, but her face slipped down until her lips touched Robert’s.

After a while God's Puppy came pattering down the path, with his face all dimpled into smiles, his hands carrying a curiously contrived chaplet of golden-rod.

"Here's oor c'own!" he called, holding out the wreath to Robert. Robert looked up at Imogene as if to say:

"Little Red Princess, am I fit to wear his crown?"

For answer, Imogene took the golden chaplet from God's Puppy and placed it upon Robert's head.

Then, with her hands still lingering around Robert's temples, she murmured:

"Here is your crown, my King—my King!"

THE END