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FOUR FRIENDS IN A PHAETON.



H," said Major X—, with unrepressed contempt, "there's nothing to see in Nebraska!"

"But it will be a pleasant trip. We shall at least have a novelty, and we can come back if we don't like it, you know."

"Yes"—expressively—"you can come back, and you *will* come back. How long do you plan to be gone? Three days. Well, then, I will give you just twenty-four hours of that time to return in."

We were all assembled for parade,—that pageant which we had faithfully gazed upon every night since earliest flush of summer; and, the men having gone through their manual in a manner as much resembling machinery as the strictest colonel could desire, the band having done its musical best to soothe our savage breasts, and the officers having advanced in line to bestow upon the major their simultaneous salutes, the former left the latter at his post, and came forward to join the ladies. Major X— had "gone on as officer of the day," and therefore had been at liberty to stay away from parade and criticise our simple projects.

It would have embarrassed us to calculate just how many times during the past weeks we had watched the companies march in review, comparing the manner in which each one "wheeled," and regarding with admiring awe every gesture of the magnificent Drum-major. But doubtless on this particular evening we would, from force of habit and conscientious scruples, have done the same, had not the thoughts of some of us been straying elsewhere, into "pastures new." Lulled by the monotony of garrison affairs and life in general at Fort O—, it was not often that aught so unexpected or exciting as an inspiration visited the brain of any in our coterie; but only a few days before, a decidedly brilliant one had ventured to whisper in a lady's ear, and she had passed on the whisper until a party of five were in the secret. The inspiration had said—"What a pleasant and novel way of spending a few days it would be for a *partie carrée* to take a certain roomy, comfortable carriage, and drive about through the country, discovering the beauties of the prophet who hath too little honor in his own land."

Acting on this gentle hint, the inspired one proceeded to expound the vision, which was received with flattering en-

thusiasm by the three chosen ones, and an organized plan was mapped out.

It was this plan that was touched upon in the presence of Major X—, who looked down upon it from a superior point of view, tore it apart, dissected it, and gazed at it through a sort of mental microscope.

"You won't find any 'quaint inns' or farm-houses that will accommodate you. You'll be starved, frozen, or roasted as the weather may be. You won't see anything interesting in the way of scenery or people. '*Types*,' indeed! There are no 'types' in Nebraska. No doubt though a cyclone will come up while you are out, and give you excitement enough, if that is what you want, but otherwise you will only get disgusted with yourselves and each other, and come home ignominiously the day after you start—or the same day, if you don't get too far off to return."

All this he said to us, and much more. Yet—though inwardly a little disturbed and anxious—we remained outwardly unmoved, not only setting a day on which to start but deciding what we should wear, eat, and drink during our expedition.

As the day drew near, our spirits perceptibly rose. We even felt that, once started, they might prove too buoyant for control, and positively effervesce. Therefore, to guard against the stigma which might in such a case attach to us, if we confessed to our genuine "local habitations and names," we unanimously agreed to drop our own well-won appellations, as a locust sheds his shell, adopting brand-new ones for this occasion only. Positively (as we informed each other) our first, last, and only appearance on this or any stage in the characters of Lady Lilian Stafford, Sir Gilbert de Hamilton, Lord Archibald McEastoun, and Lady Muriel Livingston.

Now Lady Muriel when in private life rejoiced in the title of "Mrs.," and Sir Gilbert had the misfortune to be her husband, but Lady Lilian and Lord Archibald were respectively spinster and bachelor—free to flirt, quarrel, or otherwise amuse themselves in whatever way they pleased. Lady Lilian, however, had just returned from Boston, where she had been studying music, and at the same time learning how wrong and undignified a pastime flirtation really is. Her

eyes, which were large and bluish gray, had a far-away look under the black lashes, and hid no *arrière pensée* of how it would be possible for her to charm Lord Archibald's heart away with her siren singing, as we drove under the sunshine and moonlight, along smooth country roads.

The two "Servants of Government" had asked for "leave," and obtained it, with the full approval of their captains and the "C. O." before we started off, early one hazy yet promising morning in June.

It was nine o'clock—guard-mounting at the post—when we bade Fort O—a three days' farewell; so we had the band-music to speed us on our way, and the guard seemed to be turned out for our especial benefit, as it stood in martial array, drawn up beside the road.

Just beyond the limits of the post stands, tumbles, and sprawls a tiny settlement—scarce meriting the name of village—ambitiously entitled "Saratoga." Perhaps it would be difficult to find its like in any State east of Nebraska. So many tiny, box-like dwellings, suggesting an interior economy of two rooms containing nothing in plenty save poverty, yet displaying a certain neatness of appointment and surroundings, in spite of the invariable proximity of remarkably numerous (and odorous) drinking "saloons."

We were, however, too familiar with the characteristics of this mushroom "Saratoga" to bestow much attention on it in its morning dress, but without turning our faces to the right hand or the left (regardless of the flaring circus posters presenting high-colored allurements on every broad fence), we pursued our way through the verdant, peaceful country between Fort O—and the village of Florence.

Far off lay the Missouri River, to which distance lent enchantment by transforming its murky waters to a gleaming white that dazzled our eyes like diamonds under the sun. Beyond rose the undulating belt of hills, all their crude and rugged outlines softened into misty grays and blues, while between us and them one or two small, irregular-shaped lakes shone brightly in their frames of vivid green. Wild flowers grew along the road—such wild flowers as deck the soil only of Kansas or Nebraska. Deep red or pink roses, forming brilliant spots of color on the brown, rain-furrowed banks at the edge of the road, bluebells and larkspur lifting dainty heads above the grass, mustard covering the fields like Danæ's shower of gold, wild sweet-william growing so luxuriantly as to make a crimson carpet for butterflies to dance on, and snowy masses of elder-flower, standing out against a background of foliage intensely green.

Lord Archibald was called into the service of the ladies, and responded so often in such a gallant manner (undaunted by thorns or covetous honey-bees), that presently roses, sketch-books, clover-blossoms, and light literature tumbled about in inextricable confusion on carriage seat and floor. Even a huge earthen bowl of jelly, which had proved the "one thing too many" for the luncheon basket (and which, through much tribulation and divers vicissitudes, passed the trip reposing on Lady Lilian's knee), was wreathed with flowers, and doubtless furnished an unwonted treat to the numerous lively little promenaders on leaf and prickly branch.

On through Florence we went, past the marvellous windows of "the store," before which lounged a village beau and belle, the latter clad in short and puffy skirts of horribly brilliant blue, a broad hat with yellow ribbons, long red mitts upon her rounded arms, and stockings to match, upon her superfluously well-

developed nether limbs. Past the deserted, melancholy brick building yclept the "Bank of Florence," whose sashless windows and boarded doors gave it an air of dropping into a dotage which, from lack of patronage and small coin, had prematurely cast a blight upon it. Past the ancient adobe hut, and more pretentious brick and frame mansion, said to have been erected and occupied by the Mormons, during their stay in the country, so long ago as 1852, before their wanderings had carried them to their present haven. Past the tall cotton-wood tree, planted when a slip by Brigham Young, to mark the site of a future temple that never was erected except in Mormon dreams; and so on into the farther country which to us was delightfully unfamiliar and untried.

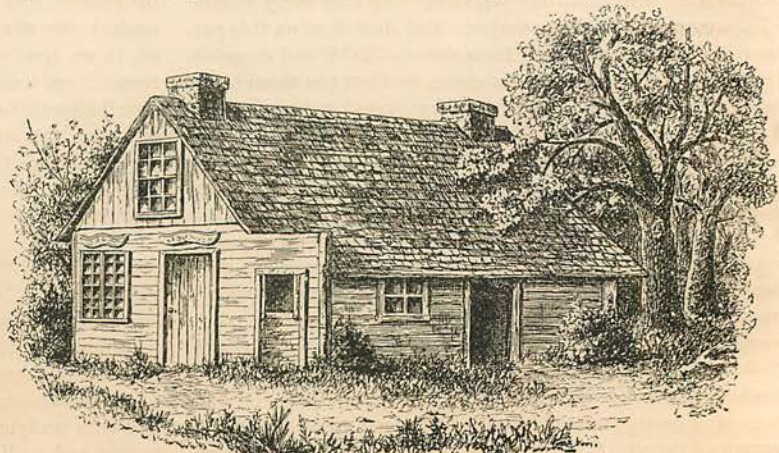
Everywhere were hills—gentle, undulating hills, like green billows, while the roads were outlined by tall, straight cotton-wood trees that circled the fields in lieu of fences, and cast the flickering shadows of leaf and branch into the tiny creeks that washed their roots. The air was full of floating particles of cotton that glistened in the sun, and looked like a snow-storm, all belated and out of season.

Such numbers of cattle as there were browsing in the fields we passed that day! We thought we never had seen so many Alderneys and Jerseys, and creatures of commoner sort, as that morning raised gentle eyes from contemplation of their pastures to gaze meditatively at us as we drove by. Each one was calmly chewing the cud of "sweet" (surely in no part "bitter!") "fancy," and we could almost have found it in our hearts to envy them such a never-failing, comforting resource. "So much better than the soldiers' tobacco!" Lady Lilian reflectively remarked.

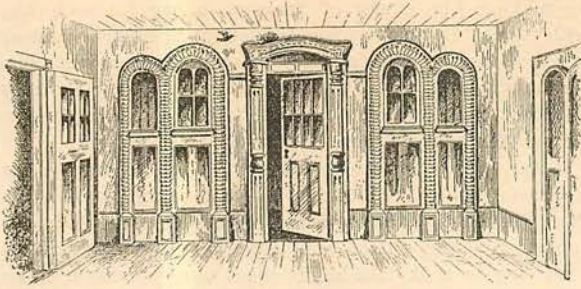
As we would ascend to the brow of one hill higher than its fellows, we would see on every side a fair stretch of rolling country, whose square, plowed fields of brown, set among alternate squares of green and palest gold, gave an odd, yet an unpleasing "patchwork" effect to the entire landscape.

"This is what Major X—called 'tame, flat, and unprofitable, I suppose!'" we said, all the more inclined to disagree with our friendly cynic, as our way led us through charming wood-roads, where the branches met above our heads, and dappled the ground with wondrous tracing of light and shadow.

Often we met queer country-folk journeying contentedly along, and sometimes they bowed to us, with as cordial a "Good-morning" as though we had been acquainted for years. The types were characteristic of Nebraska. Tall, lean men, with bare faces, shaded by broad, flapping felt hats, wearing loose trousers of some coarse material that looked as though they had been fashioned by the wife's patient but not over-skillful fingers. Large-featured women,



THE OLD HAUNTED HOUSE.



A MARINE INTERIOR.

with a facial expression either distinctly defiant or placidly resigned, showing from out the shadows of capacious sun-bonnets, and holding in their ungainly arms buxom babies, while startlingly large assortments of older children crouched in the bottom of the big lumbering wagons or odd, old-fashioned "chaises." Once in awhile we saw a pretty, giggling girl in pink or blue cambric, driving toward town with her lover; but this refreshing sight greeted us but seldom.

"Somewhere on the road between Florence and Calhoun," said Lord Archibald, looking about him, "stands a deserted house, which is said to possess the added charm of being haunted. Nobody will live in it, at any rate, and strange things are said to happen nightly within its walls."

"We might stop there to-night, and find out the truth of the story for ourselves," suggested Sir Gilbert, lightly. "We have come out in search of adventures and experiences, you know."

"What is it which proclaims the house is haunted?" cried Lady Lilian, who had been reading that from which she quoted.

"The ghost of a murdered wife," Lord Archibald replied. And then, pointing to a small one-and-a-half-story house, with paintless frame exterior, and windows innocent of glass, said "There's the place, now. Don't you think a ghost must be hard pushed, deliberately to choose such an abode as that?"

"Certainly, she could not have been a woman of æsthetic tastes," remarked Lady Muriel. "Perhaps that is the reason her husband put her out of existence, you know."

"He didn't stop to tell his motive. He fled from the wrath to come; but the ghost staid, and made herself very much at home. There is a hole in the front door, through which a bullet cut after it had tried unsuccessfully to be the fatal one; but another did the work it had failed in. And they say the sound of a pistol can be heard here at night, followed by a thrilling scream in a woman's voice. There is a stain of blood on the floor, too, and after a certain hour the ghost appears, points to it, moaning and shaking her head. Don't you ladies want to go over the place? The blood would be there, no doubt, though ghosts are said to economize their presence in the day-time, and—"

Here he was interrupted by a weird, mournful cry, which was faintly echoed by the feminine occupants of the carriage, while even Sir Gilbert and Lord Archibald stared a little and looked surprised.

"Only an owl," the former said, almost instantly, and everybody laughed, appearing a tiny bit conscious, for some reason or other. But the question of entering the haunted domicile was settled without words, and the carriage drove rapidly on.

It was nearly noon when we entered the village of Calhoun, sixteen miles or so from Omaha, and the promptings of a growing appetite suggested that we should pause at the village store and inquire what choice viands were there to be procured. To be sure, our basket was stocked with various canned

comestibles, which were to be prepared and eaten in the tin "mess-dishes" and plates we had borrowed from the "battery kitchen" with a view of enjoying camp life in a truly scientific way; but the sight of Calhoun in all its pastoral freshness called up within our minds visions of eggs, strawberries, and the like, which (*for a consideration*) the kindly villagers might be disposed to part with.

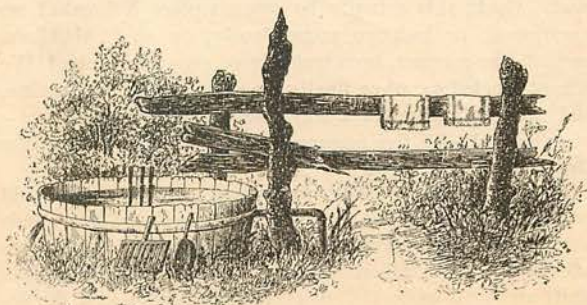
The "grocery store" was conspicuous on one side the way, the inn, ambitiously called the "Central House," upon the other, and before the latter our carriage stopped. There was a bar-room, and into the shadowy door-way of that mysterious apartment Sir Gilbert presently disappeared, while the three left outside sought amusement in speaking aloud the high-sounding titles that had usurped the place of more familiar names. Suddenly, to our dismay, our friend re-appeared in the door-way, holding forth triumphantly a mug of base, plebeian root-beer, and inviting us, by our discarded appellations, to unite with him in his libations.

It was too much, in the face of the assembled village magistrates, who stood grouped about in reverent attitudes, admiring the strangers of high rank who had flashed, meteor-like, into their midst! We wilted visibly, and our voices in reply to Sir Gilbert's cruel invitation became both "still and small," and we were glad to turn our attention exclusively to the business of the hour. In the interval, however, Lady Muriel had seized the opportunity of sketching the grocery shop, with the three choice spirits enjoying their noonday "lounge" upon its hospitable porch.

Then on we went, intent upon the selection of a spot eligible for a picnic luncheon. It was some time before we found one which entirely pleased our fastidious taste, and then it happened that another deserted house formed a feature of the chosen bit of landscape. It was a queer little building, with impossible-looking doors and windows, some of the latter being filled with tiny panes of fancy, figured glass. Tall, rank grass grew all about, and waved against the paintless walls, while a high background of dark trees towered close behind, and drooped their lowest branches over the sunken roof. Altogether, the place presented far more of the conventional "haunted" aspect than its predecessor, but as we decided upon calm reflection it would scarcely be probable that the greed for murder had become so much of an epidemic in Nebraska that two houses on the same road had become ghost-ridden and deserted through its agency, it was thought feasible to enter the mysterious precincts.

On inspection we found that "queer" was a far more appropriate adjective than mysterious, and were proportionately disappointed by the discovery. The floors were of hard wood, rotten with age; the window and door frames were fancifully decorated, and the ambitious architect had evidently spent his best endeavors upon the partition between the two larger rooms. In one of the ceilings there was an aperture, and through that aperture could be seen, hanging from the roof of an attic above, a rope with some invisible weight dragging it down.

An agreeable shudder thrilled our nerves at this unex-



OUR RURAL KITCHEN.

pected sight, which immediately suggested to our imaginations a suicide with remnants in the shape of a skeleton. But, alas! our morbid anticipations received a crushing blow from the discovery of Lord Archibald that the hoped-for suicide was but a withered pumpkin left by the former eccentric occupants of the place in its present peculiar and precarious position. Over the inner door-way in one of the lower rooms a confiding wren had built her little home, in which several dainty eggs were visible, exciting in us an admiration that was not appreciated by the mistress of what we surveyed. We finally became moved to compassion by her frenzied flutterings and chirpings, and retired to a spot just across the road where we intended to prepare and eat our luncheon.

Under the shadow of an overhanging, wooded and fern-draped bluff, we laid our table-cloth on the grass, built our fire close at hand (Lord Archibald having chopped the wood in a dainty manner without removing his gloves), and procured water from a brook that received its birth from coldly bubbling springs near by. As we rested, we talked of the deserted house which stood just opposite, silently challenging us to guess at the history of its lonely and wasted life. Afterward we learned that it had been part of a steam-boat, caught by a snag and wrecked on the Missouri River many years before. The captain, sore at heart over the loss of his boat, had had it made into a land-dwelling for his old age, where he could look from a distance upon the water that had played him false. But he had died, and strangers had occupied the place, until it had so fallen into decay that no one cared to have it for a home. Thus it had been deserted by all save the wrens, who evidently viewed it in the light of "treasure trove."

It was late when we finished the repast, so cleverly cooked by our *chef*, Sir Gilbert, and the dishes had been washed by Lord Archibald in the brook, and dried by his willing assistant, Lady Lillian. So we made haste upon our way to Blair, which was still distant some nine or ten miles from our impromptu camping-ground.

As we drove, we found the country even more charming than we had seen it yet, and it was likened over and over again (not

inappropriately) to the beautiful scenery of certain portions of the Hudson. There were the river, the highlands, a lesser edition of the Palisades, the peaceful farming lands, the clustering groves. And then, again, we would half fancy ourselves in the wooded lanes of fair New England. Could this actually be commonplace Nebraska? we questioned, or had we miraculously, in an "Aladdin's-castle"-like manner, been transported somewhere else? We almost fancied so, when finally we came upon a deep ravine, and skirted its edge in a way that strongly reminded us—view and all—of the famous "Horseshoe Bend!" of the Catskills.

As we drew near Blair, we began to meet some "odd types" in the shape of farms and villages, and our minds were filled with wondering admiration at the style of dress affected by the guileless country-folk. One small boy especially attracted us by the cut of his sun-bonnet, and the delightful way in which a couple of salt-bags had been utilized

for making him a pair of trousers—a bag for each leg, with "Salt," in conspicuous blue letters, labeling the sides! In these days when originality of costume is so desirable, why might not the salt-bag idea be found good in the eyes of fond mammas who would fain have their darling's garments different from those of everybody else?

It was with regret that we finally arrived at Blair, as the afternoon waned, and found it a village (or town, as its three thousand inhabitants ambitiously style it) dedicated apparently to the god of commonplace. The rigid, uncompromising lines of "the hotel" made our eyes water, as we reflected that probably we were destined to spend the night within its yellow brick walls. The shelter of a farmhouse, no matter how humble, would have been preferable, but that appeared to be unattainable, and we made up our minds to accept our fate at least gracefully.

First, however, before settling down into a state of resignation, we decided to delay the evil moment a little, by driving about the village streets. Somewhere within the town limits dwelt a young person who had once attended boarding-school in the East, and there had had the honor of knowing one of Lord Gilbert de Hamilton's brothers. Upon her we resolved to call, *en masse*,

provided we could discover her place of residence which without much difficulty we presently succeeded in doing. She was at home, she was pretty, she was "stylish," she looked like a French fashion-plate—in fact, she was everything which her family were not. Could it be that this delightful creature was a product of Blair, and had lived all her life among such common and dull surroundings as these? We all admired her, which fact was patent to her observation, and we were welcomed by her, her paterfamilias and materfamilias, with open arms. Presently, with oppressive cordiality, we were invited to accept our new friends' hospitality for the night, Lady Lillian and Lady Muriel in vain protesting, with nods and becks and wreathed smiles when our hosts were looking, and with frowns and emphatic gestures when they were not. The two noble lords were inflexible in their determination to take advantage of the invitation. They had seen a pretty face—the pretty face had smiled upon them, and their conquest was complete. A field for analysis and mental study was here presented to the party, which two of its members at least



A STUDY IN TROUSERS.



OTTO JAMES, THE BOY WHOSE SISTERS WERE NOT VERY PRETTY GIRLS.



THE LANDLADY.

did not intend to pass by. So in the end, as usual, the weaker vessels were vanquished in argument, and—we stayed. We also displayed very healthy appetites at the bountiful and remarkable meal yecept “supper,” were made much of, shown about among the family relatives as captive beings of a rare and previously unattainable sort, and altogether made to feel as though we had escaped from a menagerie or “dime museum.” It was amusing, but it was tiresome, and we were glad when the next morning gave us an opportunity to thank with unfeigned gratitude our kind entertainers, and bid them—as we supposed—an eternal farewell.

On this second morning of our trip, our road led us through a less attractive portion of Nebraska. We saw plain, sad-looking little farm-houses, set on hill-sides, and each provided with a species of manufactured cave, close at hand, for the family to retire into during the frequently occurring emergency of a cyclone or tornado. The slopes below the houses were protected with the characteristic lattice-work of the “snow fences” used in that section of the country to prevent the massing of immense snow-banks during the tedious winter months, but these lay so near the railroads, that we could not rely on the steadiness of our horses long enough to undertake the making of a sketch. We had lost the river view, and felt shut in by the rolling hills which surrounded us as far as we could see. At several farm-houses we ventured to stop, and foraged successfully for our luncheon, at one place being particularly favored in the matter of spring chickens and sweet cream by the “mistress of the manse,” who came to us rake in hand, like an ancient Maud Muller, and who wore, as Lord Gilbert expressed it, “only two clothes, and one of those was a hat.” Cheered by our good luck, Lord Archibald and Lady Lilian assayed the storming of another fortress, when, having passed the perils of watch-dogs and aggressively disposed pigs, they were confronted at the portal by a relentless foe, whose eye flashed fire, and whose tongue was full of stings. “Fresh eggs?” she echoed ferociously, when the first question was put. “Havn’t got any. Wouldn’t sell ’em ef I had. Honey? H’m! I should think not! Strawberries? Hev got better business to ’tend to than to pick the likes of them

fur myself, let alone strange folks thet come pryin’ around. You’d better go further on.”

And they accordingly went further on, nor did they “stand upon the order of going.” They did indeed smile full well in counterfeited glee, but inwardly they were much depressed, and Lord Archibald’s six-feet-two of goodly proportion was apparently reduced to less than the average size of man, as the guardian of farm rights gazed belligerently after him.

We did obtain the coveted dainties elsewhere, however, and as by early afternoon we came upon Elkhorn River—winding its narrow way peacefully among cultivated fields, and shaded by drooping willows—we decided to stop on its bank and feast upon those viands for which we had exerted ourselves so untiringly.

Now we met a most delightful youth, who rejoiced in the name of Otto James Hitchcock, and who (for a consideration) was induced to bring us unlimited supplies of spring water, and finally, with feigned reluctance, to pose for Lady Muriel as a model. He had a guileless but intelligent countenance, and when asked if he had any pretty sisters to whom he would like to present a sketch of himself, replied, “H’m? they ain’t very pretty girls. But”—with sudden alertness—“I know some other fellers that hev got pretty sisters. I can give it to one o’ them, I guess.”

Then, when later he had been descanting upon his fears of certain cyclones which had occasioned his ignominious retirement to the “suller,” as he called it, he was advised to begin, even at the early age of eleven, to simulate courage for his sisters’ sakes. He appeared surprised but pleased at his novel view of the subject, and when asked why it was that boys were generally so much braver than girls, answered circumspectly, but with a proudly beaming countenance, “I don’t know, marm, but—but—it’s so!” We let him go at last, with the conviction that he would return to the bosom of his family much improved in mental and moral attributes, and went our own way rejoicing at the good that we had done. Our object was now to regain Calhoun by a new route, which would not carry us back by way of Blair. By inquiring we elicited the fact that such

a route existed, and was eligible in every way. Everybody, however, appeared to derive a truly fiendish delight from advising us to go in a totally different direction from that advocated by our last informant, until finally we decided to take our own way. Information as to distances also varied, always increasing in number of miles as we progressed; and at length we found ourselves in such waste places that the world to which we were accustomed seemed far away indeed. We had been told to “take the first turnin’ arter ye



THE FEMALE INFANT, RUBENSTEIN.



LEADING NOWHERE.

pass that the big old cotton-wood tree." We had confidently taken it, and had found ourselves upon a base apology for a road, leading blindly across a wilderness of deserted fields and abandoned plowed lands, where wagon tracks ran dimly and misleadingly before us, like a species of decoy. However, we had gone too far to retreat for trifles, and with hope as our sole guide, continued to progress in a seemingly aimless manner, up and down an interminable and extraordinary series of hills, in the way in which a mimic raft will toss madly from billow to billow upon a stage sea, yet never move from a set place in its hidden mechanism.

Several of these baffling protuberances on the face of nature were so precipitous that three of the party left the carriage, for the relief of the jaded horses, and walked, while Sir Gilbert remained alone to drive.

Finally, when we were on the verge of despair, we reached the summit of the highest mountain among all the mole-hills, and found a view which repaid us for all past tribulations. One could fancy that the whole State of Nebraska was visible from that spot, so large and fair a stretch of hill and dale could we see, checkered with water, rich fields, and somber woodland. The sky above us was pink and golden, and the country, beautiful at all times, was transfigured into radiant loveliness, under the magic charm of sunset. There was a sort of "unreal" glamour floating its intangible spell in the air, and it was long before we could resolve to descend the hill, and bar so fair a panorama from our sight.

After that, however, we passed from one charming vista to another so lovely that we could not choose between. The dainty pictures of golden landscape, framed by the rounding dark-green hills, were superseded by wooded roads even more romantic than those of yesterday, which now appeared on the camera of memory faded and dimmed in beauty in comparison with these. The branches met and intertwined above our heads in a graceful arch, forming a green, mysterious, and shadowy avenue, grass-grown, starred with

blossoms that gleamed silvery in the twilight, and perfumed by the exquisite indefinable fragrances that are born in the country with the falling night.

We exchanged the hilarity which had been ours throughout the day for a quieter deportment under the influence of our poetical surroundings. Lady Lilian sang soft and tender little ballads, while Lord Archibald watched her with a growing content in his eyes. He was afterward heard to remark that if he ever married he would not be satisfied unless his wife knew how to sing.

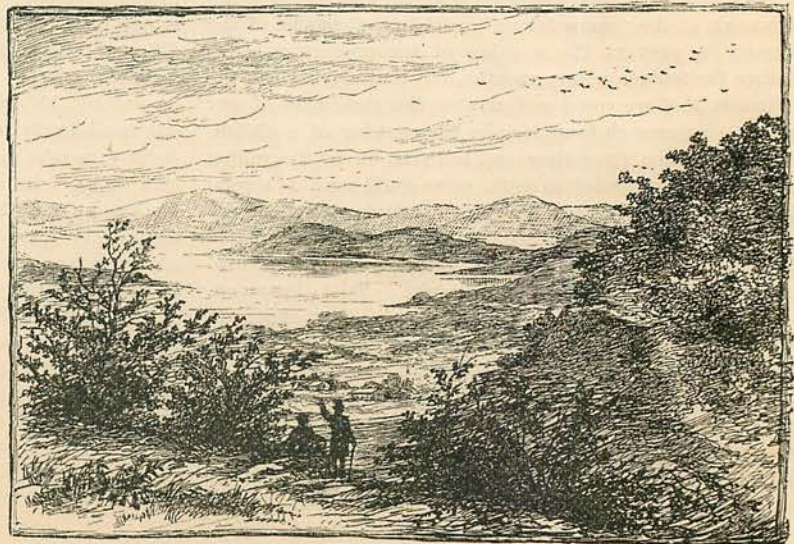
It was with regret that we finally left the faint silver of the young moonlight and the ashes-of-roses of the faded sunset for the sordid, kerosene-lit warmth of a small inn on the outskirts of a village not far from that which we had anticipated reaching much earlier in the evening. The inn was an odd looking structure, unique enough externally and internally, in a queer, German style, to please even our fastidious fancy, but even before we had "spied out the nakedness of the land" within, we decided that other attributes besides oddity were necessary, after all, to make a place attractive.

We fancied that our discovery might be a species of "half-way" house where farmers stopped on their road to the city, and where jolly sleighing parties of country girls and boys might go for supper (and perhaps be disappointed) on crisp wintry nights. To be sure, it looked rather shut up and deserted just now, but a few lights gleamed at back windows of the lower stories, so that we felt sure it must be inhabited by either "men, women, or ghosts." We took heart of grace, therefore, to inquire for a night's lodging, as it was after nine o'clock, and we feared that we should fare no better farther on. The horses were jaded, Lord Gilbert said, having traveled fully forty miles that day, and indeed one had but to look at them to see that he spoke truth.

"At least, let us see what can be had here," Lord Archibald said, descending from the carriage to knock at the tightly-closed front door.

Presently a woman, who for fatness was unequalled in our experience, opened the door just sufficiently to show a profile view of her vast face and vaster figure.

Yes, this was an inn, she informed us. Yes, there was plenty of room—good, fine room—but she must ask *him*. She could give no answer to our demand until she had spoken to *him*. Whereupon the door was summarily closed,



VIEW FROM THE HILL.

while the dutiful spouse went in search of the all-powerful him. The two eventually appeared together (he tiny as the celebrated husband "no bigger than my thumb"), and informed us that they could give us accommodation, but wilted so obviously when we also demanded supper, that our newly-born hopes changed to doubts of the gloomiest description.

"I shuppose dot you don't pe lookin' for nopody in bertickuler, pe you?" the landlord mysteriously inquired presently, as he ushered us through the dimly lighted hall. "No?" he echoed, after our surprised negative. "Dot ish all ride, den, already. Dere ish some volks here dot I tought would shust as lief nopody looked after dem, dot ish all, und ven I heard your knock und pound, I tought you might pe dese beoples vat had coom after dem." He finished his sentence, with his hand upon the door of a room labeled "Ladies' Parlor," which he immediately flung open with a flourish, and we saw before us a most unexpected sight.

Two young people had been sitting very close together by a small table, and at our entrance had sprung hastily to their feet, with a conscious and uneasy expression upon their countenances. The young woman attempted to draw down a heavy blue veil that had been turned up over her hat, but her nervous fingers were unsuccessful, and before we had fairly crossed the threshold, we had recognized her, while she, no doubt, experienced less pleasure than difficulty in remembering us. It was the pretty girl whom we had left that morning, waving us a farewell as she stood among the rose-vines wreathing the parental porch, and *now*—here she was, after dark, at an obscure little tavern many miles from home, while her sole companion was a good-looking, though at present rather shamefaced, young man.

What did it all mean? Involuntarily we paused, and gazed at her in speechless expectation. She was crimson with blushes, but bore herself with more *aplomb* than might have been anticipated. When she realized that recognition and a meeting were inevitable, she came forward very nicely, murmured our names, saying with a nervous, spasmodic little laugh, "I suppose you are ever so much surprised at seeing me here. Well! I am surprised at seeing you!"

Nobody spoke in return save Lady Muriel, who responded as nonchalantly as possible: "Not more so surely than we are at finding ourselves where we are. But it is the unexpected which arrives always, you know, and probably that theory can also explain your being here."

"This is my—my friend, Mr. A—," announced the young lady, turning at bay. We—we came here—I suppose I may as well mention it now—to get married."

"Oh!" we all murmured helplessly, while "Mr. A—" bowed and looked sheepishly about him, sighing audibly, as though with relief at having his anomalous position at length explained.

Then, the ice being fairly broken, the flood of the gentle Blairite's eloquence was let loose. "You see," she said, addressing the entire group (the landlord having departed long since, on "hospitable thoughts intent")—"you see, pa and ma didn't want we should be married, though Jim—I mean Mr. A—, and I have been going together for the last two years. He's a traveling man—he takes orders for a big Chicago house—and pa and ma had it all settled in their minds that when I married it must be to some one who would want to stay right at home in Blair, like sister Jenny did. I couldn't have liked that anyhow, and besides I wanted Jim, and no one else; so as they were not going to let us have each other, we decided we'd just take the matter into our own hands, seeing I was of age—I had my birthday yesterday. And we have taken it in our own hands. We chose this place because it was out of the way, and we happened to know about it because we stopped here on a sleigh-

ing party once a year or so ago. We'd made all our plans, and I had a note from Jim about it last night, and I just wondered what you all would think of me if you should be told that I was going to run off and get married like a girl out of a book."

"And did you really *run away*? Don't your father and mother know where you are?" cried Lady Lilian, with a certain incredulous horror, mingled with the liveliest sympathy and interest.

"No, indeed, they don't know where we are, or" (facetiously) "I guess they would be pretty apt to be here, too. Oh, I know it's horrid of me, but it couldn't be helped, and they'll be all right when they know there is no use in making a fuss over spilt milk. They really like Jim—Mr. A—, if only they weren't afraid to let it come out."

"The minister is late," suddenly remarked Mr. A—, consulting a flrid gold watch. He was, as to his clothes, a very modest looking young person, with a light colored business suit of a striking tint and cut, and a bright blue neck-tie that had a diamond pin stuck conspicuously in the center. "Won't you folks be our witnesses, now you're here?" he ventured to add, with an air of condescending courtesy, assumed to hide the agony of embarrassment he so manfully endured.

"Oh, I hardly think, thanks, that we," began Lady Lilian, with virtuous scrupulousness, when she was summarily interrupted by Lady Muriel. "Yes, we will be, of course, as many of us as you require—bridesmaids and groomsmen, too, if you like, for if there is anything that appeals to my soul, it is a *wedding*. Sir Gilbert will give you away, won't you? and then, after the ceremony, we will all have supper together, drinking the bride's health in coffee, if nothing more appropriate can be obtained."

"Thank you—thank you!" ejaculated the groom elect, quite cheering up, and looking so delightfully guileless in spite of his peculiar taste in dress and jewelry and the aroma of his unattractive profession which was perceptible in both, that we all wondered how the hard-hearted parents could possibly have refused their consent. Evidently they had not been well versed students of physiognomy!

While we were still waiting for supper, and disturbing the *tête-à-tête* of the bridal pair, the minister arrived, apologized for being late, and gazed about him, beamingly.

"Does all this company here present desire to be joined in the bonds of holy wedlock?" he unctuously inquired, smiling so as to show two rows of remarkably prominent blue teeth, and evidently congratulating himself on an "embarrassment of riches" by way of marriage fees. He was little and lean, and he evidently intended asking no embarrassing questions as to consent of parents or guardians of the contracting parties.

Our little band reluctantly disclaimed any such intention as that he had mentioned, though Lord Archibald glanced wistfully at Lady Lilian in a way which suggested that so far as he was concerned, there would be no opposition to such an arrangement—and presently, with no unnecessary delay or formality, the ceremony began.

How glibly the words rolled from between the blue, ministerial teeth, how speedily the extemporaneous service was concluded, and the triumphant runaways were pronounced to be man and wife! How little, seemingly, it took to weld their fetters; how much it would require now to sever them!—except, perhaps, in Illinois or an adjacent State!

An adequate fee was slipped into Mr. Simon's extended hand, and after bowing, shaking hands, and beaming in an azure manner upon the party generally, he joyfully melted into the depths of that obscurity from which he had temporarily emerged.

Then supper was announced, and, fired by the spirit of the occasion, we dauntlessly (albeit shuddering) partook of viands whose like we had never met with on land or sea. And it may as well be added, that it would not to us be a matter of poignant regret, if we never either looked upon, smelled, or tasted their like again. However, we had rounded up our trip delightfully by assisting in a genuine adventure, and the aroma of a love affair was about us. We had not exactly *been* the rose but we had been *near* the rose, and the whole affair had been charmingly *under* the rose, so our souls were satisfied, even if our physical requirements were not. There was a tinkling, old fashioned piano in the ladies' parlor, which looked as though it might have ornamented the cabin of the ark, and on this the landlady's little daughter played for us during the progress of our "Barmecidian" repast. Later, we amused ourselves by testing the excellence of its ancient keys, and managed to be pleased in spite of the knowledge that the entire family and the family's retainers were collected *en masse* at the cracks of the doors, drinking in our conversation, our garments, and in fact, all our "points."

It was late—*very* late—before our Teutonic hostess, with smiling mien, offered to show us our rooms! Therefore we accepted her advances with the more alacrity, going to the unknown with a childlike faith in her integrity, which, viewed by the light of future events, seemed to us pathetic in the extreme. But over those rooms, and what remained of that baneful night, we will draw a merciful veil.

* * * * *

It would scarcely be correct to state that we *awaked* at dawn, for the process of awakening was wholly unnecessary, but we descended from our rooms and attempted to partake of breakfast, in a sadder and wiser frame of mind than that we had carried up-stairs with us some hours before. The bride and groom were not visible, and we imagined that already they had departed; but at any rate, we saw them not again.

The remainder of the day was spent in anathemas, resolutions to keep our night's resting-place a secret from our friends at the garrison, and in enjoying what still remained of our trip to be enjoyed.

We traversed various discouraging bits of boggy land for the sake of seeing the ruins of old Fort Calhoun, which unfortunately were "conspicuous by their absence," when by dint of much exertion we arrived upon their site. We encountered still more treacherous sloughs of despond rather than forego the sight of Stillwater, Horseshoe, and Moore's lakes (pretty bits of shady, pond-lily embroidered water, which, however, were scarcely rare enough to repay us for our pains)—had one more jolly picnic luncheon, and returned home in the afternoon. We were rather earlier than we meant to be, but happily were just in time to escape a tremendous thunder-storm, which, if it had descended while we were still "*en voyage*," would certainly have afforded Mr. X—a delightful opportunity, after all, for saying "I told you so!"



Which Won It?

HERE was a very animated and joyous discussion going on in Mrs. Wood's cozy sitting-room, that mild September day, between her daughters May and Julia, and her orphan niece, Ruth Harrol. A most important letter had arrived that morning, and had caused great excitement and satisfaction to these three girls, for it was from Uncle Gardner, inviting them for a three months' visit to his beautiful home on Madison Avenue, New York. He wrote: "Your aunt and I will do what we can to make things pleasant for you. We have grown into quiet old fogies, and cannot promise you much in the way of ball-going, or receptions; but you can have all the riding, driving, music, and theater you want; and if May would like to go on with her painting, she shall have lessons from the best artist in the city."

"Oh, isn't he a darling?" said May. "We must write at once and thank him, and we may count on a glorious time from now until Christmas."

"Yes," answered Julia, "mother can spare us, as Kate is home now, and won't it be lovely to go to the Thomas concerts and the Philharmonics? And the theaters, and shops! Oh, girls! It's just too elegant for anything!"

Quiet little Ruth didn't say much, but at heart she indulged in as many anticipations as the others. They had all been out of school a couple of years, and had had enough of society and dancing to blunt the edge of their appetites; and being bright, intelligent girls, they all took more pleasure in exercising their brains than their heels. So this proposed visit to their rich old uncle offered to each one just such enjoyment as her heart craved, and in greater perfection than it could be obtained in their own smaller city.

The preparations did not require much time, and in a week they found themselves quite at home with their hospitable relatives.

After a few days of driving in the park, and shopping, Miss May diffidently approached the subject of the painting lessons.

"Uncle, don't you think I had better get to work at once, so as to profit as much as possible by those lessons you promised me?"

"Just what I was going to ask you, niece. You can begin to-morrow if you like. And I've been thinking," turning to the other girls, "that it's hardly fair not to give you two the same opportunity, so if you would like lessons in music or anything else, let me hear about it."

At this hint up spoke Julia in happy excitement: "Oh, uncle, if you would only let me have some lessons in art embroidery, from the Decorative Art Society, and then I could do some work for the church at home. I haven't any talent for music or painting, but I do love to embroider."

"All right, child. You can go round to the society rooms this morning and see about the lessons. And now what does little Ruthie want?"

"Well! I suppose you'll all laugh at me, but I would like, of all things, to attend Miss Parloa's Cooking Classes."

"Well said, Ruthie. Go, and who knows but we shall have a *cordon bleu* in the family?"

"Better that than a blue-stocking, uncle. At least, it's a more useful calling, and there are some young girls in my Sunday-school class who would be delighted to have some lessons in cooking to fit them for better places at service. I would gladly give them lessons if I had the requisite knowledge."

"And you *shall* have it, my good little girl. I am pleased with your happy thought."